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## DRESS AND CULTURE IN GREENWICH VILLAGE

Deborah Saville

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*Editors' Introduction: When the Gilded Age ended on the eve of the First World War, some Americans expressed dissatisfaction with the conventional life. Intellectuals in Greenwich Village in New York City began to practice alternative lifestyles based on radical feminism and new psychological thought. As discussed by Deborah Saville, their style, identifiable as American bohemian, signified their ideological leanings. Young Greenwich Village women's style included artists' smocks, peasant blouses, sandals and bobbed hair. While most women did not yet customarily wear these avant garde styles, the emerging mainstream look of the period did have a shorter skirt and looser silhouette. The bohemians' artistic tendencies may be related to designers and artists within modern design movements who presented new, uncorseted garments at exhibitions throughout Europe. Liberty of London and designers such as Paul Poiret and Mariano Fortuny became well-known creators of comfortable, exotic gowns. These efforts created a trend for more comfortable, if not exotic, clothing. Therefore it is not surprising to learn that clothing manufacturers soon adapted village styles and offered them to the American public. Saville argues that these Greenwich Village bohemians were precursors to the free-living flappers who appeared all over America in the 1920s.*

Women's mainstream fashion in the early twentieth century changed from an S-curved corseted silhouette at the turn of the century to the straight, slim, short-skirted look of the flapper in the 1920s. This change in fashion occurred not simply from the expected influence of European designers – Poiret, Chanel, Lucile – or from the necessities of the First World War that put women in comfortable work clothes. Rather, the change involved social and artistic movements at a grass-roots level.

The study of dress in Greenwich Village, a small area below 14th Street in lower Manhattan, shows that distinct clothing styles developed from 1910 to 1923 that influenced American fashion. The bohemians in the Village experimented with dress in a highly politicized, cultural and artistic environment permeated with feminist, socialist and Freudian thought. The study of this subculture reveals how cultural meanings of fashion change and the process by which these changes took place. Indeed, it can be argued that Greenwich Village dress and behavioral trends in the 1910s originated some of the fashion and social norms typically associated with the flappers of the 1920s.

A confluence of cultural and political factors in Greenwich Village in the 1910s generated a bohemian enclave where alternative lifestyles and trends flourished. The development of Greenwich Village as 'America's Bohemia' was due largely to its geography and history. In contrast to the orderly grid of uptown Manhattan, the tangled web of Greenwich Village streets allowed the area to retain its quaint atmosphere well into the twentieth century. Its small artist colony blossomed circa 1910 as landlords and real estate agents transformed the once-fashionable homes and stables of the Knickerbocker aristocracy around Washington Square into artist's studios and small, affordable rented rooms ([Watson 1991](#)).

Attracted by the cheap rents and pleasant surroundings, artists and intellectuals moved in, creating a vibrant bohemian subculture during the period 1912–18. The initial group, who were engaged in radical politics, included feminists, writers, publishers, theatrical troupes, artisans and educators. As developers simultaneously sought to market the charm of the Village's developing art community, 'shops dealing in antiques, hand-wrought jewelry, and peasant wear moved into the locality' ([Ware 1935](#): 94–5).

Joseph Freeman, the editor of the *Liberator*, described this middle-class rebellion of feminists and male intellectuals:

Whatever individual differences the [Greenwich] Villagers had, their common bond was a hatred for the environment from which they came. They did not want to attend the Methodist church, the synagogue, the confessional; to enter business or the professions, to settle down to marriage and babies. They were ... young people in their early twenties who wanted to love, to create beauty, to have friendships, to talk, all without the crushing responsibilities which they had escaped. (1938: 233)

Personal liberation from convention became political for these highly ideological radicals as they sought to revolutionize society through their avant-garde lifestyle.

This bohemian group wrote and thought about the time in which they lived, leaving extensive evidence that serves as a record of their lives. Several bohemians wrote memoirs and fictional accounts of their experiences. Others documented their observations and philosophy in poetry and art. Residents published articles in Greenwich Village periodicals, socialist publications and newspapers; vice investigator reports reflect the activities within the community. They kept scrapbooks and memorabilia of the Provincetown Players, as well as letters, diaries, and feminist club notes. Visual records of their lives appeared in magazine articles. These as well as photographs and other artifacts remain in private and public collections in the United States. All of these provided a plethora of documentary evidence to investigate this bohemian era.

In this chapter, I will provide background on the cultural climate in Greenwich Village from 1910 to 1923, trace the fashion and appearance of bohemians in the Village, and finally interpret the meaning of their dress both within the Village milieu and for the larger culture. Furthermore, I will examine how bohemian dress influenced the fashions worn by 1920s flappers.

## The Cultural Climate of Greenwich Village

Greenwich Village became a center for feminism, radical politics, examination of Freudian psychology, and experimentation with new social mores. Village inhabitants were committed to freedom and equality. Social life in the Village supported the liberal ideals of the new bohemians. They discussed and presented ideas in salons and clubs, and through theatrical performances. Bohemian ideas began to filter into the mainstream culture by the middle of the 1910s.

Understanding the transformations within the women's movement is critical to an examination of the cultural changes, including dress, that took place in Greenwich Village in the 1910s. The women's movement split into factions. The genteel National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) split from the more confrontational and militant Congressional Union (later called the National Women's Party [NWP]). The

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During the 1910s, feminists in Greenwich Village engaged in personal history talks at their women's special interest discussion groups, becoming even more aware that feminist work entailed a change in psychological consciousness beyond suffrage and legal equality (Anthony 1915: 231; Wittenstein 1998). The radical feminists of the NWP argued that birth control, motherhood endowment and notions of heterosexual liberation would transform the inequities found in the workplace, politics and home.

Greenwich Village radicals viewed sexuality as a free speech issue. Feminists theorized that claiming the freedom to take and dismiss lovers and engage in meaningful dialogue with men would provide a chance to make the household a democracy rather than a patriarchy, and in turn democratize the culture. They aimed for full expression of the individual by going beyond conventional gendered behavior. Marie Jenny Howe stated that it was critical for females to be more than their 'little female selves' and to develop their 'big, whole human selves' at a meeting of feminists at the Cooper Union (*New York Times*, February 21, 1914: 18).

Intrigued with working-class mores, Greenwich Village artists and intellectuals 'learned of new sexual possibilities not only from the "highbrow" writings of the sexologists but also from the "lowbrow" behavior of their less intellectual neighbors' (Meyerowitz 1993: 51). Choice and personal independence without regard for middle-class societal expectation informed the 'free' heterosexual unions.

Freudian theory was first used to explore socialistic forms of liberation (e.g., how to improve society). As leftist politics collapsed under an increasingly skittish conservative political climate, the bohemian fad for psychoanalysis instead became the method for resolving personal problems and adapting oneself to society (e.g., how to improve oneself). Psychoanalysis fit well with doctrines that stressed self-realization through personal expression.

The vogue for Freudian psychology justified the radical repudiation of artistic and sexual inhibitions and further provided the basis for the ideology of 'free love' in Greenwich Village. A sizable exodus of middle-class young adults from midwestern and north-eastern states descended upon Greenwich Village by 1914. Freudian psychology was a hot topic for them: 'Everyone at that time who knew about psychoanalysis was a sort of missionary on the subject, and nobody could be around Greenwich Village without hearing a lot about it' (Dell 1969: 294).

Villagers learned of new ideas and the latest movements through social venues – at clubs, eating houses, bars and theater groups. Ideologies were generated through talk, plays, politics and sexual experimentation, particularly as bohemians negotiated notions of liberation. This psychological transformation involved intellectualizing ideas about sexual mores. Former Villagers credit feminist high school teacher Henrietta Rodman as the original driving spirit behind bohemian Greenwich Village.

In 1913, Rodman organized Greenwich Village's Liberal Club, a coffee house where intellectuals and bohemians convened to discuss current topics including politics, Eastern religions, artistic expression and sexuality. Carl Jung was a guest lecturer. Club members staged plays, often satires on romantic themes in their own lives. Through the Liberal Club, an adjacent book shop and a restaurant (named Polly's), Rodman's coterie – her friends from social settlement houses, socialist journalists, 'students and professors' – became acquainted with newly-arriving bohemians and 'artist folk' in the Village (Dell 1926: 20).

Another such club was Heterodoxy, a luncheon club for 'unorthodox women' that met in Greenwich Village from 1912 to 1940. Comparable to a women's support group, the participants – professionals and a smattering of female labor leaders – included heterosexuals, lesbians, married and single women.

The wealthy art patron and activist Mabel Dodge hosted a salon from 1913 to 1915 which brought together 'Socialists, Trade-Unionists, Anarchists, Suffragists, Poets ... Psychoanalysts ... Birth Controlists, Newspapermen, Artists, Modern-Artists ...' for an unprecedented 'coalition politics of the left' (Luhan 1936: 83; Stansell 2000: 118). The salon was held weekly in her Village home.

Probably the best known of the Village-based clubs was the Provincetown Players theater group. In the summer of 1916, while vacationing in Provincetown, Massachusetts, a group of Villagers staged several personal plays including Susan Glaspell's *Suppressed Desires*, a spoof on the psychoanalysis craze, and those of the neophyte playwright Eugene O'Neill. Frustrated with commercial theater in New York, the group started their own experimental theater in Greenwich Village from which the genre of American realism developed (Watson 1991: 213–22).

## Bohemian Ideas Go Mainstream

Beginning in the 1910s, Freudian concepts filtered through Greenwich Village into mainstream culture, continuing throughout the 1920s. Articles written by Greenwich Village intellectuals for popular magazines and plays provided a basic understanding of psychoanalysis for the public while linking its more faddish aspects to Village culture. Pop psychology in the Village – the parlor games of dream analysis and the radical practices of 'free-love' and birth control – was linked to Freudian doctrine in the popular press which tended to exaggerate sexual content, neglecting the political aspects of these practices.

These ideas filled the pages of the skillfully edited Greenwich Village political magazine, the *Masses*, published from 1912 to 1917. Renderings of bohemian females in 'pagan' paraphernalia on its covers, and the proliferation of advertisements for books related to psychology and women's sexuality, reflected the attitudes towards sexuality gaining currency around the later 1910s.

As more Americans learned about Greenwich Village through popular magazines and newspapers, they became intrigued with the liberal ideas and lifestyles of the bohemians. It was not long before enterprising marketers began to 'sell' the Village. The notions of greater personal freedom and expression were exciting and attractive to the public. The revolution in manners and morals sought by the intelligentsia did not evolve as they had envisioned. But some loosening of old restraints resulted (even if only in a commercialized, cheapened form) as the wider culture picked up on the bohemian idea of greater personal freedom and expression. Madison Avenue and Hollywood used the Village ethos to generate a new ideology based on 'sex appeal' and personal gratification (Cowley 1934: 64).

Poet Malcolm Cowley described how marketers employed the middle-class bohemian revolt in the 1920s to sell products: 'Prohibition [and "prosperity"] surrounded the new customs with illicit glamour ... Freudian psychology provided a philosophical justification and made it unfashionable to be repressed ... American business was quick to use the bohemian ideal and exploit the new markets for cigarettes and cosmetics. Wherever one turned the Greenwich Village ideas were making their way' (1934: 62–4). An ethos of personal satisfaction via psychology, sex and self-expression spread through the culture. Cowley explained that 'conversations ran from mother fixations to birth control while they smoked cigarettes (1934: 62–4). As he observed, the Village revolt of the 1910s gave form to the social revolution of the 1920s, thereby setting a precedent for cultural alternatives to a Protestant work ethic that delayed gratification.

## Dress in Greenwich Village 1910–23

In 1910, American women wore shirtwaists with flared black skirts, tailor-mades, lingerie dresses, Poiret-inspired tunic dresses and hobble skirts. Most women wore corsets. The 'spiritual haven' found in Greenwich Village allowed the new youth culture to develop their ideologies in conjunction with new modes of behavior, socialization and dress (Scherman 1964: 60). By 1914, feminist dress was clearly evident. The *Masses* illustrated rebellious women smoking cigarettes in loose-fitting tunic dresses with bobbed hair held in place by headbands to accompany articles on controversial feminist causes.

Women in the Village who considered themselves bohemians wore clothing that separated them from the mainstream. They first donned loose tunics that they either designed themselves, or purchased from purveyors of 'artistic' or 'reform' dress. Later, the artist's smock became almost a uniform. Clothing that incorporated artistic surface design techniques, such as embroidery or batik, also found favor among Villagers as did bobbed hair and sandals. Village styles may be divided into three phases: 1910–15, 1915–20, and 1920–23.

### 1910–15

Cultural revolutionaries – designers, artists and dancers, such as Isadora Duncan – influenced attitudes about the body and dress from the early years of the twentieth century. These women of Greenwich Village adopted aesthetic and couture fashion in relation to their developing views of the body. By 1912, the fashion of modern women in Greenwich Village indicated knowledge of avant-garde and couture designs and the assimilation of such designs into their own wardrobes.

Accounts describing women in 'classical dress' and 'floating tunic[s] of [their] own design' reflect exposure to 'artistic' dress and the work of Poiret and Fortuny (Van Vechten 1922: 129). Classical designs that were conducive to movement and aesthetic interpretation may have been more prevalent in the Village repertoire than Poiret's more narrow and restrictive empire designs. The interest in Fortuny's designs is evidenced in several sources including one memoir that described 'the uniform of the New Freedom ... bobbed hair, cigarettes, sandals, batik blouses and Fortuni [sic] gowns' (Freeman 1938: 230).

Graphic artist Clara Tice embodied the new Greenwich Village style. Photographs of Tice reflect her awareness of forward-thinking designers, including Fortuny. For a *Vanity Fair* 1915 photo shoot, Tice wore a revealing avant-garde ensemble with no corset – sleeveless, low décolleté, straps off the shoulder tied in large bows (Figure 3.1). Described by a Dada publication as the 'artist of undressing par excellence' (Rogue 1915), Tice set and personified radical Greenwich Village style trends throughout the 1910s and 1920s, including her hair which she claimed to have bobbed in 1914 before the popular dancer Irene Castle (Tice 1921).

Henrietta Rodman is credited by several Villagers with inspiring fashion change in the early period. Rodman worked as an English teacher in some of New York's best girls' schools. In her social life she 'wore sandals and a loose-flowing gown exactly like a meal sack ... And her hair was bobbed in a day when bobbed hair, far from being the fashion, brought street notoriety to its possessor' (Kemp 1926: 85–6).

Figure 3.1



Clara Tice, *Vanity Fair* 5(1), September 1915: 60.

Greenwich Village's Liberal Club, Polly's, and the offices of the *Masses* served as the political and social epicenter in the first days of radical Greenwich Village. The Village took on a 'new character' when the literary and artist crowd and the social settlement crowd began to mix (Dell 1969: 247). In 1913–14, one Village poet recalled meeting Peggy Baird, an artist who wore 'Russian blouses,' and was the 'first girl [he] had seen with bobbed hair' at the Liberal Club (Johns 1937: 218).

Villagers distinguished between reform dress and artistic dress; the latter included long robes of silk and Chinese sandals. But evidence points to a confluence of feminist ideals and aesthetics associated with artists. Although the '[V]illage sacks' (Van Vechten 1922: 134), the crude brown or gray linen tunics worn by Rodman and her feminist following, were highly political, artistic trends in dress (e.g., peasant embroideries) met the needs of radical feminist politics. The dress worn by feminist actress Ida Rauh (Figure 3.2) is similar to descriptions of the dress of women artists involved with alternative education in 1913. Years earlier Rauh had 'renounced so hotly all the frills and luxuries of bourgeois life' and adopted an 'informal garment, a simple, self-made, unobtrusively becoming garment' for indoor wear (Eastman 1948: 266–7). Like Rauh, Montessori teachers wore 'voluminous dress [es] of silk ... clothes that [gave] the body freedom of motion' (Kemp 1926: 199, 222).

Rodman's peasant dresses and embroidered garments were a style viewed by contemporaries as feminist garb. Malcolm Cowley observed the omnipresence of Rodman and her feminist contingency as they continued to affect Village dress around 1918:

The women had evolved a regional costume, then widely cartooned in the magazines: hair cut in a Dutch bob, hat carried in the hand, a smock of some bright fabric (often embroidered Russian linen), a skirt rather shorter than the fashion of the day, gray cotton stockings and sandals. With heels set firmly on the ground and abdomens protruding a little – since they wore no corsets and dieting hadn't become popular – they had a look of unexampled solidity. (1934: 70)

Village memoirs and news stories of the period attest to the influence of the early artist colony on radical fashion and ideology. Nina Wilcox Putnam, a writer and Heterodoxy member, claimed credit for a self-designed, 'one-piece' style (Putnam 1930: 236), noting that her artist friends approved 'because of its beauty – never as a reform measure' (Tarbell 1913: 36). Putnam's loosely fitting kimono-style dress, photographed in the New York periodical *American Magazine* in May 1913, shocked the public, especially when worn without a corset and with colored Moroccan sandals. Putnam likely drew inspiration from the 'artist-folk' in Greenwich Village for her dress design. She was a member of a Greenwich Village-based social and artist's club around 1910–12 prior to the relocation of the Liberal Club to the Village and to her becoming a member of Heterodoxy.

Figure 3.2



Ida Rau, c. 1916. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

Denizens of Mabel Dodge's Greenwich Village salon distinguished between emancipated dress and artistic dress that included batiks, floating tunics and Fortuny fashions – 'a purple velvet dress with long tight sleeves ending in points which reached her knuckles.' One woman who was 'dressed with some attempt at stylization ... [wore] a robe of batik, iridescent in the shades of the black opal, with a belt of moonstones set in copper, and huge ear-rings fashioned of human hair. On her feet were copper-coloured sandals.' Bobbed-hair girls wore '[V]illage sacks' ([Van Vechten 1922](#): 129, 134, 142–3). Batik artists had been working at their craft for a few years, creating a market in Manhattan by 1912 ([Lillethun 2002](#): 142).

One fictional account, set in the years 1913–15, described a Montessori school teacher 'noted as almost the sole member among the group [of feminists] who advocated dress-reform, who possessed any proper understanding of the aesthetics of dress ... The first thing I noted about her, this tall handsome rather than beautiful woman – was how well her clinging gown fitted her slim, elegant body.' Reminiscent of Fortuny styles, the dress was described as 'medieval ... caught ... by a depending rope, silken-tasseled' ([Kemp 1926](#): 199–200).

The newly inspired dress practices of wearing rolled hose and going without a corset, advocated by Putnam in 1913, also appeared in Harry Kemp's autobiographical novel in which he described artists' fashion in the Village. Kemp's character, who engages in a brief romantic interlude with a woman artist he previously observed meditating (apparently Buddhist style), 'felt only a brassiere' under her 'long robe of silk' and also noted the 'lemon-colored hose to the knee' ([Kemp 1926](#): 223–5).

Changes in group-related activity also influenced Villagers to adopt casual, less restrictive clothing. Heterosexual dialogue, eating and drinking, and dancing took the place of activities that involved social decorum and propriety such as church-going and chaperoned dances. Exposure to working-class segments of the population influenced social rules. Villagers ventured uptown to dance halls to observe new dance forms and, while shocked at first, subsequently found themselves 'tugging and joggling over the floor in the thick of the sweaty, head-bobbing mob' ([Kemp 1926](#): 141). Women at Village dances wore simple dress including comfortable, calf-length skirts, jumpers, and tunic tops, with low sandal-type shoes. Women even danced by themselves. Through experimentation in socialization, radicals set a liberal tone for the evolving Village culture.

Dress trends set in feminist Greenwich Village during the 1910–15 period evolved into ubiquitous Greenwich Village fashions in the later years of the decade: 'sack' dresses worn with socks and sandals, loose flowing artistic dresses, smocks, peasant blouses and batik garments.

## 1915–20

As rents tripled around Washington Square, America's Bohemia spread to Sheridan Square beginning in 1915. The Village became a tourist attraction and a haven for uptown visitors. With the advent of tearooms, the Village provided business opportunities for single women who ran successful restaurants, hat and batik shops, and tour guide companies.

Photographs of tearoom hostesses, restaurant proprietors, Village guides, and shop managers all provide evidence of Village dress forms that became popularized through commercialization in the tearoom phase of Greenwich Village from 1915 to 1920. Artistic Village fashions in the tearoom/bohemian phase, however, derived from earlier feminist and artists' fashions. Caftan-style and simple smock dresses worn by tearoom hostesses originated with women on the scene in Greenwich Village, such as restaurant owner Polly Holladay, who 'in the early days ... usually wore long, unbelted sack-like dresses' ([Conklin 1958](#)).

Tour guide Adele Kennedy wore a casual, calf-length skirt, smock, and sandals with no stockings to conduct tours, according to a report in the (first) Sunday *New York Times* in October 1918. Personal dress and modern textile designs of leading textile artists like Ilonka Karasz helped to promote bohemian art trends to the tourist market and Village clientele (Saville 2003).

Greenwich Village shops sold smocks, sacks, and Russian blouses. Simple tie-dyed, caftan-style sack dresses and hand-printed tunic blouses sold in several Village shops around 1918. Flambeau Weavers' Shop sold authentic peasant fashions from 1916 on. M.D.C. Crawford, art editor for *Women's Wear*, promoted artistic dress from Greenwich Village boutiques to textile manufacturers and retailers. Sketches of Russian blouses designed for the department store Wanamaker's demonstrate the intermediary stage of adapting original styles of subcultural dress for a larger, more mainstream market. Retailers jumped on the market potential in Greenwich Village fashions. On April 11, 1917 Bonwit Teller advertised in *Women's Wear* 'Greenwich Village Art In Bonwit Teller Costumes.' These were negligee dresses and fashionable peasant smocks. By 1916, Florence Gough, owner of The Paint-Box Gallery, specialized in sportswear, including trendy hand-dyed tunic tops, scarves, and floppy hats. Anna Alice Chapin, author of a guidebook, declared, 'Do you think all the artistic costume-creating is done in the Rue de la Paix? Try the Village!' (1917 253).

Jessie Tarbox Beals, a photojournalist, sold souvenir picture postcards through a gallery and tearoom she managed from 1917. A photograph of Beals at the time of her gallery opening (Figure 3.3) reflects changes in Greenwich Village fashion from perhaps just a few years earlier. Beals, a shrewd businesswoman in her forties, likely saw the need to be stylish and bohemian in her dress. She wore a tunic blouse, a novel adaptation of peasant dress with a beaded design on the front. Her large beaded sash is another trend seen among Village women, worn either belted or around the neck. Similar dress items found in several shops, especially items that could be mass manufactured in home industries, suggest increasing commercialization. Beal's tunic and belt are trendy rather than highly artistic or indigenous and demonstrate how women in the Village evolved idiosyncratic fashions.

Figure 3.3



Jessie Tarbox Beals at The Village Art Gallery. Museum of the City of New York, 95.127.19.

The smock was the dress item most associated with Greenwich Village. A protest garment, the comfortable, inexpensive smock signified ideological arguments surrounding sexuality and capitalist-oriented social norms, particularly for radical women in the first part of the 1910s. As the Village commercialized in the bohemian/tearoom years, Alice Chapin, author of a 1917 guidebook titled *Greenwich Village*, noted, 'the crowd is younger, poorer, more strikingly bizarre – immeasurably more interesting' and identified Village girls 'in smocks of "artistic" shades – bilious yellow-green, or magenta-tending violet' (212). Newly arriving young women quickly became a part of the bohemian scene by donning this wardrobe staple. The new-found popularity of the Village within a youth culture drew criticism from some conservatives who complained about the 'pseudobohemians' who try to prove their status by 'the garments that they wear – Hazel bobs her hair short and favors a loose smock' (Cobb 1917: n.p.). Greenwich Village dress prompted ambivalence within the culture.

## 1920–23

By the early 1920s, variations of styles first seen in the Village trickled across to the larger culture. Fashionable hem lengths rose to below the knee in late 1920. This knee length prevailed in the Village and among groups including retail workers and working-class women, college and high school girls, through the first half of the 1920s, despite the best efforts of the fashion industry to drop hem lengths to the ankles (Milbank 1989;

'Battle of the skirts', *The Outlook*, October 18, 1922). On June 11, 1921, the highly respected Greenwich Village artist Clara Tice depicted herself and her friends wearing knee-length dresses and rolled hose in an illustration for the *St. Louis Star*. Tice defended the fashion in a July 2, 1921 *Star* interview – 'I think short dresses and rolled stockings are ideal for women and girls.'

Other renderings, including one in a 1922 Greenwich Village community magazine called the *Quill*, suggest that short pleated and fringed skirts, rolled stockings, and jaunty hats worn over one eye were the defining fashions among Greenwich Village young women. These trends among others, including open coats and long scarves, brightly hued woolen stockings, and 'Betty Beads,' are described by commentators of the same period as the fashion among high school girls (Hall 1922: 771–80). The cover of the July 27, 1922 issue of *Life* magazine depicts a college-age woman with an open knee-length coat, long scarf, white stockings, flat oxford shoes, cropped hair and soft cloche hat. Variations of such garb can be found in renderings in many Greenwich Village periodicals and photographs from 1918 to 1923. (See Saville 2003.)

## Cultural Meanings of Bohemian Dress

In this section, cultural meanings of bohemian dress are explored at length. Dress is interpreted within the context of the social and cultural dynamics of the Village. As personal, social and political change occurred, personal and cultural identity evolved into that generally associated with the culture of the 1920s. Dress is analyzed from its inception as political expression to its trajectory as a pretentious expression of a growing commercialized and socially trendy culture and finally to its adoption by the wider youth culture. Decisions to change one's dress and hair were part of the social experimentation prevalent in the Village. Dress, and other aspects of the culture, expressed aversion to outdated standards.

As we have seen, dress in Greenwich Village differed from mainstream fashion for cultural reasons, yet in the end it influenced the larger culture. As the culture explored various schools of thought, bohemians created and assimilated new approaches to the body. Small groups of artists wore peasant dress, batiks and Fortuny designs in the first half of the 1910s. These and other feminist fashions including bobbed hair and sandals were worn and used to express the changing dynamics of the community.

The political objective of artists/bohemians and political radicals – a more equal and harmonizing society – was expressed through paradigms that included their activities, philosophies and dress. Feminists demonstrated their repudiation of standards related to sex, gender, and socialization politically and intellectually, in terms of dress. Rodman's 'mealsack' dress, brown socks, and sandals subverted any notion of traditional standards related to the female sex. By doing as she wished in her personal life while continuing to battle for teachers' rights, Rodman made political statements about the capabilities of women. Rodman lived a very unconventional life for 1913 and yet influenced important legislation.

Rodman's so-called Group 'in a real sense invented Greenwich Village as a sanctuary for bohemian life off the job' (Richwine 1968: 150). Rodman's feminist garb, bobbed hair and public cigarette smoking set a precedent for not following conventional rules and for having a comfortable environment in which to relax and live one's ideals. Polly Holladay's smocks and unbelted sack dresses likewise expressed her anarchist tendencies and disinterest in a lifestyle compounded with standards.

The confluence of feminist sexual politics and art as philosophy can be viewed through the lens of dress. Feminists redefined political and social paradigms for modern women. In the new modernism, art provided the justification for revolution and liberty. Art and sex were philosophies unto themselves, the expression of which would lead to personal and spiritual fulfillment, and ultimately social balance. Nina Wilcox Putnam was careful to stress the aesthetic qualities and revolutionary nature of her 'one-piece' dress and sandals. An updated feminist ideology was part of Putnam's 'revolt': 'I had abandoned all the nonsensical claptrap of dress with which women unconsciously symbolized their bondage' (Putnam 1930: 237). Feminists viewed artistic expression in dress and sex as one more way in which to refute gender norms and negate the perennial matronly stereotype of old-wave feminists. Putnam related the new ideal through her dress: 'I was ... not unbeautiful, for these new clothes were full of color ... no corset is necessary with this form of garment' (Tarbell 1913: 34).

Accounts often portray Henrietta Rodman and young feminist 'Village girls' wearing sacks, batik dresses and bobbed hair. They are often distinguished from seemingly more cultured women in fashionable robes and footwear. Such differences probably demonstrate degrees of financial means and aesthetic savvy as well as personal social expression.

Dress signified free speech in early radical Greenwich Village. Dress as heterosexual liberation was very much about finding ways to arrive at equality, a new orientation to the world. Just as sexuality was a philosophy unto itself and sexual expression without social rules was considered to be a right of women, dress signified personal freedom. The women of Heterodoxy who engaged in personal disclosure viewed the experience as integral to changes in their consciousness. Many discussed their lives in terms of 'before and after Heterodoxy' and some alluded to the changes in their physical appearance. A 1920 scrapbook dedicated to the originator of the club is representative of how these women viewed their dress as an extension of personal development. The 'Heterodoxy to Marie' photo album included photos of women in their Gibson Girl personae around 1900 and their very different appearance in 1920 with bobbed hair and large artistic earrings (Irwin Papers).

Mabel Dodge, who used her salon as a vehicle for free speech, and introduced psychoanalysis in a social forum in 1913, remarked of the new psychology: 'it was thought to be just as queer as all other attempts people were making to achieve some kind of social adaptation' (Luhan 1936: 142). Dodge's comment, eclectic venue, and the variety of dress found there constitute cultural indicators of the period. People longed for social and personal change; the salon became a hub for sharing ideas and social experimentation. Avant-garde artist and reputed playwright Djuna Barnes' first years in Greenwich Village, when she attended the Dodge salon, 'seemed to her some years later to be a kind of transitional phase in her life when she stood poised between her old manner and a new personality that was about to unfold' (Field 1985: 48). Barnes' self-portraits of the later 1910s depict a bohemian appearance.

The rebellious climate of Greenwich Village permeated the culture and found expression in dress. Brenda Ueland, an aspiring writer and sister of a settlement house supervisor, proudly related her encounters with the revolutionary John Reed. Ueland bobbed her hair, wore a tam-o'-shanter, and took up smoking shortly after her arrival in Greenwich Village from Minnesota. Such symbols of freedom and chic were simple enough to do quickly and on a limited budget. An element of daring (being a 'little tough') achieved by this dress allowed young women to be a part of the rebellion and excitement in Greenwich Village. Ueland, in her book *Me*, contrasts short-haired Village girls who were dashing, bold, and modern in their views and appearance with Myrtle, a plain uptown conventional girl (1983: 130).

Exposure to trends in downtown Manhattan and exchanges of information among young women of various groups and classes inspired young women to change their appearance. Brenda Ueland, while still in the Midwest, first learned of the new trends in hair through a 1913 visit from her bobbed-hair factory worker friend who resided in a settlement house in New York. Students exposed to Henrietta Rodman (in her English classes) cut their hair.

Dodge intermittently sought psychoanalysis during her years in Greenwich Village and circa 1913–16 discussed with her analyst her desire to cut her hair short. Mabel recalled, 'I confided to him my curious hankering to cut off my hair. No women cut their hair in those days ... Yes, for a long time, now, I had wanted to cut my hair off, and I knew I'd be doing it one of these days.' Dodge bobbed her hair upon relocating to New Mexico in 1917–18 (Luhan 1936: 444).

During a nationwide speaking tour in 1919, Louise Bryant had her hair bobbed in a straight, glossy cut referred to by one newspaper as a 'George Sand' haircut (Dearborn 1996: 113). Bryant, who covered the Russian Revolution with her famous journalist husband, John Reed, created an exotic look, particularly with the use of make-up, that expressed her new-found sense of independence and vitality.

Feminist philosophies about sexuality and the body – largely derived from Swedish feminist ideology – translated into fashionable pagan notions in bohemian Greenwich Village towards the second half of the 1910s. Serious radical sexuality grounded in ideology had a freewheeling edge found among the drinking and theater crowd who socialized at popular spots like the Hell Hole. Radicals used psychology to explain their behavior to themselves and others. In reality liberation was well under way by virtue of the eclectic mix of men and women from all walks of life in the Village. Single, independent women casually interacted with men at favorite hangouts, drank, smoked, took lovers, and wore tight sweaters and chic berets. The 'loose draperies that fell off the shoulders' (Werner, 1958–1960) of one restaurant owner, a member of the Provincetown Players theater crowd, had a grass-roots panache that became part of the trendy, exotic look, viewed by original Villagers as pretentious.

Stereotypical and outlandish bohemian dress was strongly lampooned in Greenwich Village publications. Cartoons depicted 'Radicals': women in hand-printed dresses and striped rolled socks with long cigarette holders and overdone artistic jewelry, and men in baggy and striped suits, and Villagers reading Freud (*Quill*, April 1923).

But Villagers believed themselves to be distinct in their attitudes and dress from the more frivolous uptown Broadway culture. Bohemians did not wear lingerie dresses popular in the later 1910s. Radicals' ideals, however, became construed within the commercial Village culture. One vice reporter observed Villagers at a Pagan Rout costume ball: 'All are close students of sex psychology and read every book on sex that can be found' (*Reports of the Committee of Fourteen*, 1916/17). Political ideas surrounding sexuality and personal ideology developed into faddish paradigms of sexuality commonly discussed at recreational venues such as dances.

*Hobohemia*, a play set and staged in 1919, reflected the trends in Village pop culture: modern art on the walls, batik dress, bobbed hair, a vamp look in make-up, women smoking, interest in primitive art and esoteric religions, and alternative forms of dress for both men and women. The main female character clearly appeared to emulate serious Village artists like Clara Tice, whose exotic persona New York newspapers and magazines captured (Saville 2003). One Village author stated 'The brooding and oddities of bohemia led to poses, theatricalism, pretense' (Freeman 1938: 247).

In her 1920 play, *Chains of Dew*, Pulitzer prize playwright Susan Glaspell captured the notion of creating identity through dress: 'You are starting anew. You can be anything you like – according to the kind of bob you have.' While Glaspell satirized the pretense of Greenwich Village, she also emphasized the bohemian view of dress as a cultural indicator. One character explained 'The people I know don't wear clothes – that is – not what you would call clothes. They wear ideas.'

Figure 3.4



Edna St. Vincent Millay, c. 1920. Library of Congress. Courtesy of the Edna St. Vincent Millay Society.

Edna St. Vincent Millay transformed herself from a precocious and provincial young woman into the embodiment of liberated sexuality and personal independence through her poetry, attitudes, and dress developed while living in Greenwich Village. Millay represented through her poetry a bold and brash idealism for young women in the 1920s. In one c. 1920 photograph (Figure 3.4), Millay expressed her bohemianism through artistic dress that included a peasant blouse, a scrimshaw necklace, and bobbed hair. Not keen on social movements such as psychoanalysis but rather driven to subvert outworn familial and social boundaries, Millay epitomized the adventure and spontaneous spirit of the 1920s (Epstein 2001).

Movements such as psychoanalysis that had a profound influence on the art and writing of such bohemians as Eugene O'Neill, did not in and of themselves change people or dress. Most people (including Villagers) were only superficially aware of the meaning of Freudian theory. The subject and its paradigms, however, were an important component of the mutable ideology that shaped the evolving bohemian culture through the 1910s and in the 1920s, eventually impacting the larger culture.

Dress signified changes in cultural mores, not only through the expression of dress in Greenwich Village, but through what dress represented to the wider culture. Pop psychology in the Village that included the parlor game of dream analysis infiltrated the wider culture through connotations to Village dress. *Vanity Fair*, in December 1916, satirically captured the Greenwich Village artist/poet who has 'renounced hair dressers, given up stays, and entered a smock for life. She inhabits Washington Square and lives on ... the Freudian theory of dreams' (76).

Dress in the Village transcended conventional norms. Techniques in textile crafts were used to manufacture artistic dress styles for the popular market, often with hemlines and silhouettes of mainstream dress. But many dress trends unique to the Village did not follow popular lengths or silhouettes. Exotic garb, such as batik caftans, artistic dress, tunics and peasant blouses, were often designed and cut according to ethnic models or aesthetic dress. Shorter skirts and rolled stockings popular towards 1920–2 were worn within the bohemian culture prior to their adoption in the dominant culture. Mainstream women learned of bobbed hair to a large extent through references to Village women. Thus, the dress of the 1920s flapper period followed a course set by the dress and culture of the 1910s.

Changes in fashion and social mores through the 1920s are related to various social and cultural factors specific to that era. Feminist historians contend that the flapper iconography towards the mid 1920s manifested itself in response to the feminist movement. The late 1910s and early 1920s bohemian literature portrays the victimization of the emotionally available bohemian male archetype by the suddenly polarized bitter feminist. Simmons (1993: 17–42) suggests that the continuation of feminist paradigms into the 1920s was a threat to the very basis of culture. The adolescent and less threatening flapper replaced the bohemian feminist as the cultural archetype.

Social accounts portray adolescent girls in middle-class neighborhoods dressing and acting in the same nonchalant manner as 'flappers' and bohemians in the Village in 1922. Village fashions such as scarves, hats without brims pulled over the eyes, and bobbed hair are condescendingly described in conservative commentary of the period. By the early 1920s, Village girls wore knee-length skirts with socks and sandals, a variation of the feminist garb initiated in 1913. Bohemian Greenwich Village supported and widened the parameters for acceptable dress and behavior in the 1920s.

## Conclusion

Dress in Greenwich Village of the 1910s was imbued with cultural significance. Feminist ideology combined with art and social movements resulting in far-reaching cultural change. Dress and philosophy in the Village were shaped through experimentation with political and psychological models that stressed free speech and social and sexual equality. Feminists adopted artistic dress while shaping their sexual paradigms and philosophies. Peasant dress of simpler societies, aesthetic dress styles and emancipated garb, including uncorseted sack dresses and sandals and socks, expressed the liberated ethos of the Village.

As Greenwich Village commercialized, political and artistic dress developed into faddish dress. Artistic robes, tie-dyed caftans, tunics and smocks and peasant blouses became chic styles worn by tearoom hostesses and tour guides, and sold widely in bohemian shops. Smocks and bobbed hair became the means by which an increasingly young population assimilated into the community. The idea of the body as a shrine and expressing oneself through art, dance, movement, and sensuality facilitated the use of scarves, beads, robes, cropped hair and cosmetics. Exotic themes in dress and culture occurred in conjunction with fashionable views on sexuality and psychology.

The traditional image of the flapper evolved over a period of time. However, several elements of dress and behavior associated with the American flappers stemmed from reforms first seen in Greenwich Village. Bobbed hair, loose-fitting dresses with short skirts, rolled hose, beaded necklaces and slouchy hats with brims pulled down on the forehead were the hallmarks of bohemian dress in Greenwich Village prior to the roaring twenties.

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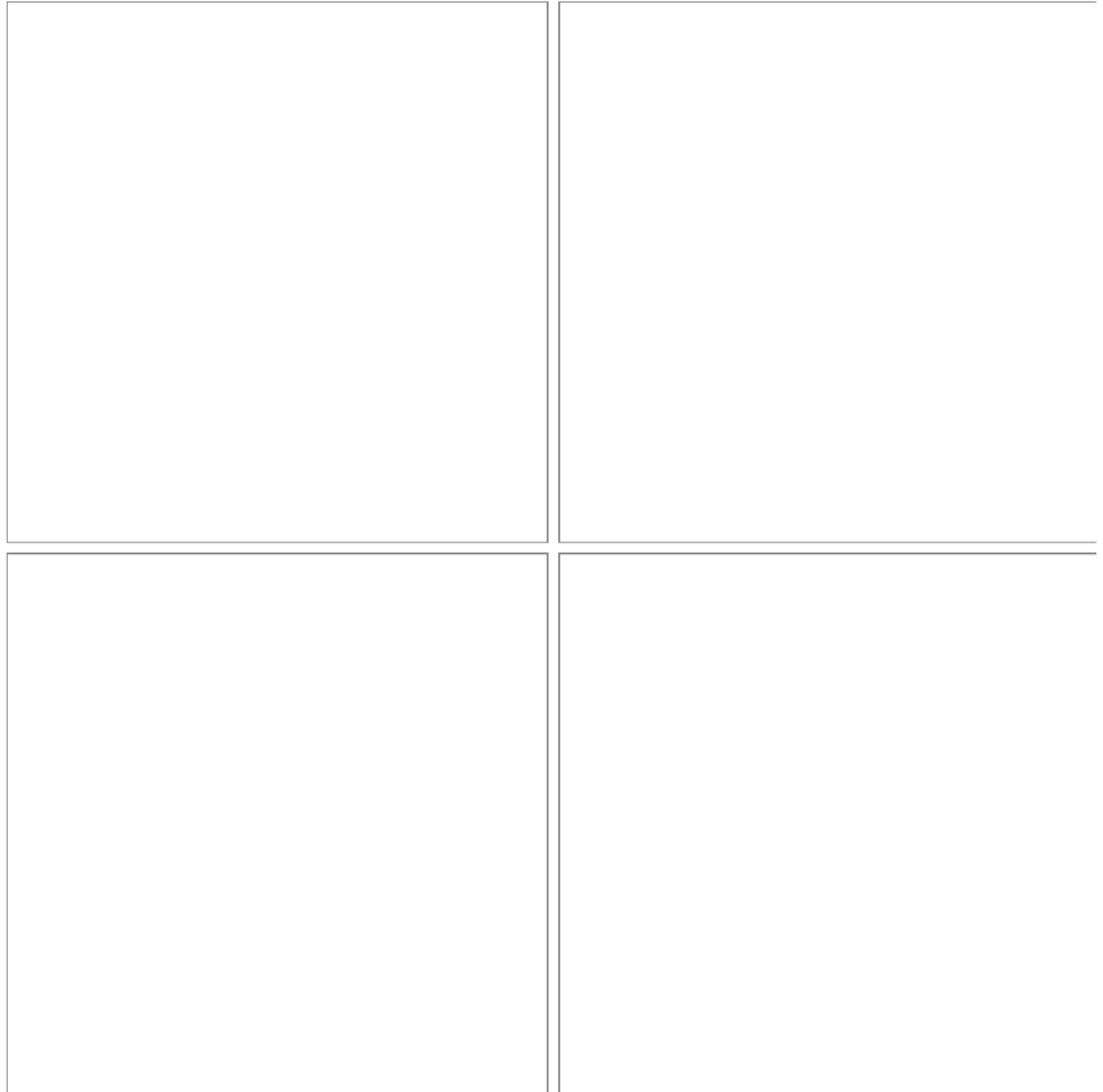
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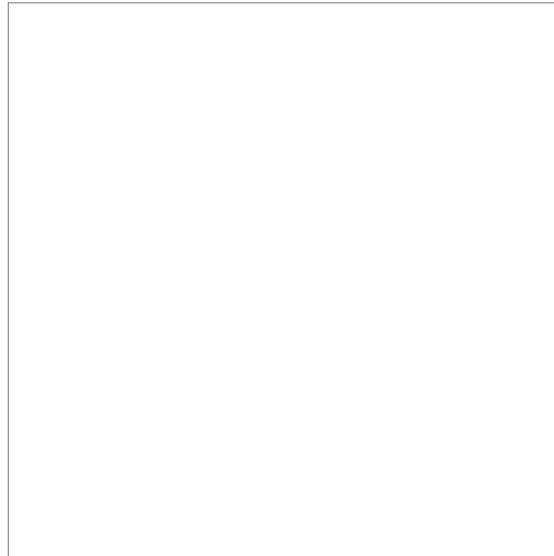
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### Street Walking

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**Cheryl Buckley and Hazel Clark**

**Source:** *Fashion and Everyday Life. London and New York*, 2018, Berg Fashion Library

home dressmaking London and modernity street walking Recognizing the old alongside the new, this chapter focuses on modernity but it does this through the lens of the everyday and within a context of emerging metropolitan identities in London and New York. By examining these two major cities that were both growing in importance as fashion centres and also pivotal spaces in the articulation of what constituted modernity, we concentrate on key shopping districts and routes, retailing strategies and pra

### Elsa Schiaparelli: Glamour, Privacy and Timelessness

■ Book chapter

**Ilya Parkins**

**Source:** *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli. Fashion, Femininity and Modernity*, 2012, Berg Fashion Library

The opening lines of Schiaparelli's 1954 autobiography, *Shocking Life*, are curious. Referring to herself in the third person, as she does intermittently throughout the text, Schiaparelli writes, 'I merely know Schiap by hearsay. I have only seen her in a mirror.' Elsa Schiaparelli, *Shocking Life* (1954; reprint, V&A Publications, 2007), p. vii. Here, with surprising bluntness, she sets herself up as someone who is 'split', having a rich inner life characterized by multiple visions of self. For a tho

### Vionnet ... Classicism

■ Book chapter

**Rebecca Arnold**

**Source:** *Classic and Modern Writings on Fashion*, 2nd Edition, 2009, Berg Fashion Library

'The nude body and draped cloth became essential elements of idealised vision; they came to seem correct for conveying the most valid truths of life, entirely through the persuasive force of their appearance in works of art rather than through the original significance attached to them in real life. The "natural" beauty of cloth and the "natural" beauty of bodies have been taught to the eye by art, and the same has been the case with the natural beauty of clothes.' Hollander A., *Seeing through Cloth*

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**Adam Geczy**

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Civilization! Read: 'the era that has lost almost all its creative power...in jewellery as in furniture'; and in one or the other we are compelled to exhume or import. Import what? Indian bracelets of glass filament and Chinese earrings of cut paper? No. But more often the naive taste that underlies their making.

### The Equalizing Shoe: Shoes as a Symbol of Equality in the Jewish Society in Palestine During the First Half of the Twentieth Century

■ Book chapter

**Ayala Raz**

**Source:** *Jews and Shoes*, 2008, Berg Fashion Library

Socialist Zionism was a revolutionary ideology that merged national and cosmopolitan left-wing ideals. It wished to create not merely a new Jewish nation in the Jewish ancestral homeland, but a model society organized along principles of equality and social justice. Seeking to revolutionize Jewish life, it embraced the stereotypical ideal of the "New Jew" as the antithesis of the exilic "Old Jew," who was disparaged for excessive intellectualism and physical weakness. The new Zionist Jew was defi

### Gilding the Lily: Dress and Women's Reproductive Role in the Greek Village, 1850–1950

■ Book chapter

**Linda Welters**

**Source:** *Folk Dress in Europe and Anatolia. Beliefs about Protection and Fertility*, 1999, Berg Fashion Library

Three studies in the anthropology of modern Greece are useful in examining women's roles for the regions studied, because they focus on villages I visited during fieldwork for this project. Ernestine Friedl's *Vasilika* (1965) described the social structure and way of life in a village on the Boeotian plains. Juliet du Boulay's *Portrait of a Greek Mountain Village* (1974) examined life in a remote village in northern Euboea she called Ambéli, a pseudonym. In 1990, one interviewee in a remote Euboean

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**Clothes Make The Empire: British Dress in India**

■ Book chapter

**Donald Clay**

**Source:** *Dress Sense. Emotional and Sensory Experiences of the Body and Clothes*, 2007, Berg Fashion Library

Imagine to yourself the lovely object of your affections ready to expire with heat, every limb trembling and every feature distorted with fatigue, and her partner with a muslin handkerchief in each hand employed in the delightful office of wiping down her face, while the big drops stand imperaled upon her forehead.

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**Paul Poirret: Classic and New in the Struggle for Designer Mastery**

■ Book chapter

**Ilya Parkins**

**Source:** *Poirret, Dior and Schiaparelli. Fashion, Femininity and Modernity*, 2012, Berg Fashion Library

In a meditation on the accumulation of symbolic capital in the fields of cultural production, Bourdieu, who views fashion as one among many such fields, explains that the production of time is central to the work of distinguishing the artists: 'To "make one's name" (*faire date*) means making one's mark, achieving recognition (in both senses) of one's difference from other producers; at the same time, it means creating a new position beyond the positions presently occupied, ahead of them, in the av

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**Class and Gender in A Museum Collection: Female Skiwear**

■ Book chapter

**Marianne Larsson**

**Source:** *Fashion and Museums. Theory and Practice*, 2014, Berg Fashion Library

Urban middle-class women have been active in open-air activities and sports since the end of the nineteenth century. When men could easily wear a used woolen suit, women had to challenge the fashion of corseted waists and full-length skirts, as well as the conventions that excluded them from physical exercise in public and outside. In this study, I want to show how women's desire for outdoor life has influenced their ski clothing according to new social and cultural patterns. With a focus on fema

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**Patriotism and Couture: Fashion Journalism between the Wars**

■ Book chapter

**Kate Nelson Best**

**Source:** *The History of Fashion Journalism*, 2018, Berg Fashion Library

It would be a mistake to think that this horrible war had paralysed the creativity of French fashion [...] In America, in England, in Spain and in Italy we have continued to make our voice heard.

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