

Working with Fashion: The Role of Art, Taste, and Consumerism in Women's Professional Culture, 1920-1940

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We have a profession. Let us make it a serious and dignified one at which no one will dare throw mud.

— Marion Taylor, President of the Fashion Group, 1931¹

In 1923, Estelle Hamburger, upon assuming her duties as the head of promotions and advertising at Bonwit Teller's, enthusiastically set out to create a new look for the Manhattan department store. As she explained in her memoirs, she wanted to transform the store from a mere commercial space into an ongoing cultural extravaganza devoted to the celebration of both fashion and art. Noting the increasingly blurred line between department stores and art museums, she imagined herself orchestrating a new approach to art consumption. "[W]e can leave the Greeks to Franklin Simon's," she declared "but let's claim the rest of art history for Bonwit Teller."² Most famously, Hamburger collaborated with the Brooklyn Museum to devise advertisements and show windows in which "the history of art and decorative design was made to live again in current fashion." To add to the effect, the window displays were arranged like compartments in a museum installation, complete with explanatory placards³

(figures 1-2). Indeed, while the ostensible purpose of these displays was to sell fashionable goods, Hamburger likened her commercial venture to a museum's educational mission:

Over a period of two years, we explored the art resources of the world to give color and background to the advertising and display of Bonwit Teller clothes. We made it appear as if the flame of the world's cultural heritage was kept bright in our time by Bonwit Teller & Co. So sincere was my fervor in recording these links between past and present that I believed we were writing a new chapter in the history of art.⁴

The Brooklyn Museum's director, Stewart Culin, agreed with Hamburger's assessment, complimenting her work as "the most important, the most generous, the most practical and the most useful exhibition to the cause of artistic industrial education that has ever come under my observation."⁵

By contrast, Hamburger's better-known colleague, Dorothy Shaver, was entirely devoted to the embrace of modernism, adopting the credo, "Who cares about the past?"⁶ On the occasion of her promotion to president of Lord and Taylor in 1946, a *Vogue* profile championed Shaver as one of only a few women to rise to executive status, crediting her success to her artful manipulation of new trends in modern taste. Shaver had made her mark in 1925 as the director of the Bureau of Fashion and Decoration (a loftier title for home furnishings) at Lord and Taylor. Here she began to display fashionable merchandise alongside modern art, suggesting that the latter provided the cultural rationale to appraise the former. In 1928 she engineered what turned out to be a career-making event, "a grand coup," according to *Vogue*. Using the store as an exhibition venue, Shaver mounted a display of French art and design with all the advance publicity and fanfare usually reserved for an art opening. Presented to the public as "French Decorative Art and Painting," nine model rooms were outfitted with chic consumer goods, and, to complete the ensemble, sported paintings by such Parisian modernists as Juan Gris, Pablo Picasso, Raoul Dufy, and Georges Braque. Like Hamburger's efforts at Bonwit Teller's, Shaver strove to redefine the role of her store as a cultural outfit. The show was remembered as the moment when "Lord and Taylor arrived as part of New York's social life, a mover in the arts, and a battler for the improvement of taste."⁷

While almost entirely forgotten today, in the 1920s and 1930s Hamburger and Shaver stood out as role models for women's career success, no doubt providing encouragement for hundreds of similarly minded women. Their names, advice, and the stories of their professional lives were evoked in innumerable women's career manuals throughout the 1930s. In this way, the two professionals were representative of a large number of middle-class women who, in the era between the wars, used terms from the realms of art and fashion interchangeably

to articulate and fortify their career ambitions. Recent studies about early-twentieth-century female entrepreneurs recognize the importance of “feminine” fields like fashion as enabling spaces for women to build careers, but most concentrate on a select group of successful “enterprising women,” overlooking the dozens more who populated more middle-management occupations.⁸ In 1931 Hamburger and Shaver were instrumental in establishing an organization, the Fashion Group, dedicated to advancing the interests of precisely this class of worker—a professional community whose history has yet to be written.

Both Hamburger and Shaver certainly understood that the design of their commercial venues was ultimately geared toward the sale of goods and services. Nonetheless, in press interviews, publicity statements, and in their later recollections, Hamburger and Shaver resolutely claimed credit for modifying these fashion spaces into outlets for art historical and modernist exhibitions equal to any museum or gallery. Indeed, they enhanced their professional reputations by publicizing themselves as intermediaries between high and commercial culture.

Women’s social and cultural association with matters of taste became a chief justification, in their own eyes, for their employment in careers like fashion that supposedly required a “special insight” into femininity. In the words of Frances Maule, the author of best-selling advice books, women could carve out a place in the business arena by “cashing in on woman’s sphere.”⁹ On the one hand, these women extended gendered models of cultural production inherited from the Gilded Age and Progressive Era into the marketplace. Women’s idealized roles as guardians of good taste acquired exchange value as a marketable skill. But on the other hand, the very concept of “good taste”—once a standard of common values and beliefs that, at least in principle, unified the middle class—had become hotly contested and unstable, as multiple interests struggled to define modernism and understand its implications. Ironically, one result of this confusion was a reigning presumption that women harbored the “secret” to understanding how modern art and fashion worked in commercially viable form, especially as taste became primarily associated with female purchase of mass-produced goods. Fashion and art at once provided a pre-established conceptual language to articulate “womanly” business acumen while remaining dynamic enough to adapt to rapidly shifting tastes in a consumer-driven marketplace.

Studies about the relations between art and business between the wars tend to concentrate on industrial design, or on corporate sponsorship of art through advertisements, contests, and exhibitions.¹⁰ While the power and influence of large corporations on cultural production is undeniable, I would argue that other interwar approaches to modern art and business not only exerted considerable influence on American culture, but also played an essential role in testing, and assessing how modernism played out in the consumer marketplace. Women in the fashion world were viewed by certain business people as occupying the

BONWIT TELLER & CO.

The Specialty Shop of Originations

FIFTH AVENUE AT 38TH STREET, NEW YORK



HO/TE/LL GOWN/ AFTER FORTI NY

*Body of cream silk, long sleeves, and skirt
of dark silk, with a wide panel of
an intricate pattern of gold and
black on the front. Price \$1500*

Figure 1: Advertisement for Bonwit Teller & Co. *Arts and Decoration* 17 (October 1922); 435. Photo credit: Ruty Wherland.

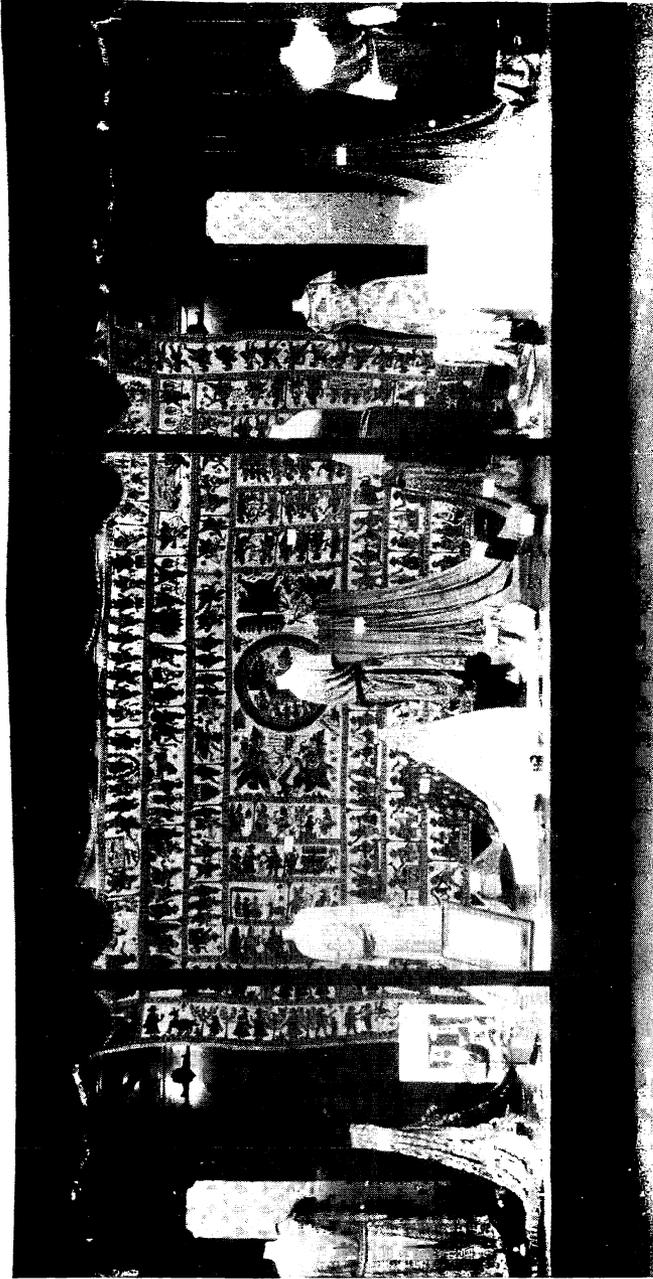


Figure 2: Window display, Bonwit Teller & Co., July 1922. Courtesy of Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives, Culin Archival Collection. General correspondence [1/4/035]. Image #336.

front lines of this process of trial and error. Conversely, women working in fashion careers understood that part of their job was to forge common ground between commercial and art cultures.

Accordingly, my approach to the history of modernism in the United States departs substantially from most art historical narratives. Instead of evoking, for instance, a history of American-bred versus European modernism, or realism versus abstraction, I take up an unexplored aspect of a problem identified by James Sloan Allen: “the assimilation of artistic modernism . . . into the common tastes and temper of the twentieth century.”¹¹ In terms of specific styles and objects, I refer primarily to “decorative moderne,” a label usually affixed to industrial design, home furnishings, textiles, and interior design. During this period the “decorative moderne” helped translate difficult modernist aesthetics into the more accessible, marketable forms found in consumer products and spaces.

Closely linked with the objectification of the female body, fashion and its attendant images and texts may at first glance appear an inherently contradictory and limiting choice around which to construct empowering professional identities. I want to suggest that historically women have negotiated a special role for themselves *within* the ideologies of femininity and consumerism articulated in fashion images, displays, and texts. Precisely because of its association with the feminine, women identified the fashion arena as an enabling space for self-representation and for signifying new identities as career professionals. Indeed, as cultural theorists Kaja Silverman and Dick Hebdige have persuasively argued, fashion can provide the tools of social critique by allowing for imaginative alternatives to dominant forms of representation, and hence it facilitates “a way of challenging not only dominant values, but traditional class and gender demarcations.”¹² Nonetheless, the literature that examines fashion as an oppositional stance tends to valorize either subcultures or the vanguard, overlooking more provisional representational strategies and mainstream inflections.

Historians such as Angel Kwolek-Folland have convincingly demonstrated that changes in business ideologies from 1900 to 1930 underwrote new understandings of masculinity and femininity. As women entered the middle-class workforce in unprecedented numbers, normative concepts of gender increasingly became oriented around professional occupations for both men and women, making “the needs of the workplace mesh with attitudes about appropriate womanhood and manhood.”¹³ By 1940, women constituted 26 percent of the entire U.S. workforce, a number that had risen dramatically after World War I.¹⁴ Victoria Billings has estimated that the number of women who actually acquired executive positions during this era was tiny, about 260. But significantly, 218 of these women worked in some profession related to the fashion industry.¹⁵

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, female leaders in the fashion field and in related work in advertising and merchandising regarded themselves to be uniquely

positioned as spokespeople for both art and modern femininity, poised as they were at the intersection between the realms of high art, good taste, and commerce. Contributing to this belief was the fact that “stylish” art, especially French modernism, was best known to the American viewing public in the pages of fashion magazines like *Vogue*, advertisements for consumer products, and department store displays and exhibitions. In reference to the displays of art in such venues, one journalist in 1930 called the department store women’s “university.”¹⁶ Hence, as conventionally “feminine” sites—home, stores, and fashion—were reorganized as exhibiting venues in which women’s “natural” taste played no small part, so too were certain female career identities underwritten by art and culture.

In 1938, Dorothy Shaver reassured aspiring career women that success was only a matter of crafting taste to the demands of the market place: “Good Taste is a commodity that is sold by practically every forward-looking merchant today.”¹⁷ What Shaver didn’t say, however, was that a number of these “forward-looking” merchants had been struggling for years to apprehend the nature of modern consumer tastes, so that they could indeed more effectively sell it. If certain women saw fashion as the ticket to rewarding and self-directed careers, certain business people viewed fashion as the key to profits and market stability. Because fashion was so closely affiliated with the realm of art it seemed to defy any workable definition as an industry. It is no coincidence that this perceived need to clarify the machinations of the fashion world also served to vitalize women’s career ambitions.

The American business world’s first sustained interest in fashion dates to the mid-nineteenth century. Through the development of mass production, merchandising, and promotional techniques, a new class of middle-class consumers became accustomed to thinking of fashion as a natural part of their social universe, rather than belonging exclusively to aristocratic elites.¹⁸ The new century witnessed an even greater expansion of consumer culture, fueled by appetites for brand names easily purchased and available nationwide at chain and department stores. Indeed, the richly spectacular promotional schemes devised for fashion merchandising in the 1900s and 1910s had changed the meaning of the term “fashion” from select *haute couture* to a broader catch-all for a variety of consumer goods. Earnest Elmo Calkins’s ode to modern styling gives an indication about the broad array of items defined as fashion products: “Until recently style was confined to strictly fashion goods, things to wear mostly, ‘ruffs and cuffs and fardingales and things.’ Now the idea of style is extended to include nearly every article of human use, towels, telephones, typewriters, fountain pens, bathrooms and refrigerators, as well as furniture, draperies, motor cars and radios.”¹⁹ By the 1920s, business people experienced the dawning realization that “fashion” had outstripped the business community’s ability to satisfactorily define the term and its modern nuances.

In a series of meetings held in 1929, the assembled members of the American Management Association (A.M.A.)—manufacturing and retail executives,

advertisers and academics—set out to unlock the “secrets” of fashion, to resolve what was repeatedly referred to as the “fashion, art, and style problem.” The businessmen intoned that the time was ripe to submit fashion to vigorous and methodical study through the techniques of scientific management. It was imperative to “demystify” a trade long credited, as William Leach has put it, to “indispensable abracadabra.”²⁰ Initially energized by the products and design featured in the Parisian 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, by the end of the decade American businessmen had grown frustrated with a perceived reliance on Parisian “*modernique*.”

While the success of these very selling techniques fascinated American business, executives remained vexed. Unable to say with any degree of certainty what actually appealed to consumers about fashion, they sought to distance the industry from spectacle and theater in order to make their enterprise more systematic, controllable, and “scientific”—in short, to define it *as* an industry. “I believe it is our purpose to get together to study style and fashion very closely and very deeply, so that we may go back to the mills or to the shops of the merchants and start grinding out and passing on this big productive capacity that we have today,” noted one manager for Cheney Brothers Silk. Yet he added: “I do not know of any authentic panaceas, no open sesames, which will unlock all of the secret doors, and enable you to go back and sell unlimited quantities of merchandise.”²¹ Another frustrated executive asked: “Why are we interested in discussing style from the point of view of the consumer, the retailer, the manufacturer? Why so much comment, why so much disturbance? Nobody seems to know.”²²

Nonetheless, even if “nobody knew” how fashion was intertwined with style and art, this did not impede the executives of the A.M.A. from proffering explanations. Significantly, the executives identified “decorative moderne” as the linchpin of their enterprise. In fact, the discussions so overwhelmingly grappled with the question of modernism, that these meetings became a miniature colloquium about modern art. For instance, A.M.A. executives worried that modern art, anchored in the domain of bohemians, would remain forever elusive to “straight-thinking” businessmen:

Another phase of this style problem which causes a great deal of difficulty and commotion, is that we become confused by the subject of art. Everyone who is styling imagines that he or she is thinking in terms of art. We discuss modern art. We try to codify modern art, to make a concrete thing of it, to crystallize it, to freeze it into formula. When we hold it up, everyone must recognize it as modern art. . . . Our self-conscious thinking on the subject of art is probably befogging our brains more than any other element of this style age in which we are living. . . . [M]y whole plea is let's be natural

about it; let's not strut and become little groups of parlor Bolsheviks or serious thinkers and discuss art, modern art, and whether we react to it . . . or do you like it . . . I don't like it . . . I do, do you? Let's forget all about it.²³

The majority of A.M.A. members, however, accepted the importance of modernism; it was now simply a matter of evaluating how modern art could work to business' advantage. Ralph Abercrombie, another Cheney Brothers manager, warned that American business ignored modernism at its peril. Making the conclusion that "our art success will be the measure of our business success," Ambercrombie made a case for embracing "decorative moderne," noting that potential consumers already possessed "trained" taste through their very familiarity with a broad range of mass-produced goods, advertisements, and department store displays. "American business men must reckon with this fast developing art interest," Abercrombie cautioned. "If we do not we may lose our market to those who are equipped to meet this new interest. This is not a sudden flare that has resulted from a studied propaganda favoring the so-called modern Art. It is something that we can hardly believe to be modern, and hardly believe to be art. The 'modern' in art is never anything but sensible and attractive."²⁴ In a talk entitled "What is the Significance of Modernism?" Austin Purves, who worked for Macy's, queried "is modernism a style that we can look at and identify as such, or is a conscious style difficult to identify in this age with our mode of living?"²⁵ Judging from the response of the assembled members of the A.M.A., the answer was the latter. Modernism indeed could exist as an identifiable style in Europe, but in America, according to Paul Bonner, it was a matter of "universality of taste" for any modern looking thing: "All this, that common universality of taste, is modern art, if you wish to call it that. The Cadillac automobile, the Crane bathroom fixture, the Bendel dress—are expressions of modern art. . . . [Modern art] does not mean anything else."²⁶

By comparison, figures in the art world worried about how women in fashion affected the health of American art. The right-wing art critic, Thomas Craven, asserted that the alliance between fashion and modernism had transformed a whole generation of male artists into decorators and stylists—in essence, into female impersonators:

The artist is losing his masculinity. The tendency of the Parisian system is to disestablish sexual characteristics, to merge the two sexes in an androgynous third containing all that is offensive in both. If you doubt the growing effeminacy of the artist, you have only to examine the performances of the modern Ecole de Paris. The school is fundamentally sexless, from Picasso to [Marie] Laurencin and [Raoul] Dufy. In exteriors, it often appears harsh and brutal, but the harshness is factitious—the acid face and *dominating toughness of the*

professional woman. In essence, it is an emasculated art, an art of fashions, styles, and ambiguous patterns. [my italics]²⁷

Obviously, Craven's text points to patriarchal anxieties about the career-oriented New Woman and the impact of her tastes on cultural production.

When Abercrombie of Cheney Brothers sprightly announced that "Woman has her place in this art revival," he articulated precisely whom the executives had in mind when they spoke of the consumer. To the A.M.A. executives with their urgent entreaties to solve the "fashion, art, and style problem," fashionable femininity was important in terms of women's roles as arbiters of taste, but only from the point of consumption. "Ninety-eight percent of all goods purchased in the United States are bought by Women," Abercrombie continued. "She is the great national purchasing agent. Every woman's club has its art committee. It is this committee that stages fashion shows, interests itself in beautifying the home and urges politicians to greater seriousness in the work of civic betterment."²⁸

As can be expected, countless fashion and advertising images framed women's modernity in terms of their participation in consumer culture. A panoply of commercial values were ascribed to women's post-suffrage social roles by drawing seemingly straightforward equivalencies between self-definition through the consumption of goods and self-determination in the realms of business and politics. A 1930 advertisement for the *Chicago Tribune*, for instance, proclaimed that "Today's woman gets what she wants": the vote and a career, but also up-to-date clothes, glassware in varying hues, and "soap to match her bathroom's color scheme."²⁹ Similarly, another newspaper advertiser intoned "New York women do take their shopping seriously. They take their jobs seriously. . . ."³⁰ Various images and texts, therefore, figured and sold women's career ambitions as a form of consumer desire, consolidating a new market for commercial products by translating feminine gains into consumer narratives.

Concurrently, in a number of best-selling advice books, style manuals, and other similar publications, female professionals insistently and resolutely claimed the fashion arena as a space amicable to women's career ambitions. However, they did not necessarily have the same understanding of the fashion industry as their male counterparts, who imagined "fashion" in terms of a broad class of consumers across the national marketplace. The two groups had different issues at stake, particularly as related to modern consumer tastes. Drawing more on class distinctions and exclusivity, career women attempted to set up a hierarchy where middle-class professionals could not be mistaken for trade workers. For instance, Edna Woolman Chase, editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, stressed the significance of taste in forging these new identities in a 1932 address delivered at the Metropolitan Museum of Art:

As a business for women the fashion field is surely one of the most lucrative and also one of the most difficult. Difficult,

because in addition to the usual equipment which would fit her for an ordinary business career, a woman, to make a success in the fashion world, should have one qualification plus—and, above all others, she should have trained and distinguished taste. . . . In short, if you can have the sophisticated viewpoint of a woman of the smart world, the sensitive perception of an artist, the clarity of thinking of a Walter Lippman, the common sense of a hard-boiled businessman and the flawless taste of a perfect lady, you'll be an ace in the fashion game!³¹

Chase's words carried weight; established professionals to general readers of *Vogue* would have interpreted her remarks as proscriptive and instructional. The fashion editor presented "trained and distinguished taste" not only as a marketable asset, but also as difficult work unto itself. Although Chase did ascribe "flawless taste" as an attribute of a "perfect lady," she did so to illustrate its status as an essential instrument for career advancement, the most important item within a crowded "toolbox" composed of artistic insight, intellectual prowess, and pragmatic know-how. By identifying good taste as the key to upward mobility in fashion careers, Chase was also establishing a social boundary that distinguished fashion as a valuable occupation for the middle class separate from "demeaning" working-class laborers like textile workers and seamstresses. Therefore, in identifying taste as a prerequisite for success in fashion work, women like Chase employed coded references to class distinctions to consolidate the defining characteristics of a gender-specific professional community.

However much definitions of taste were tied to consumerism, good taste retained its associations with non-commercial values. Businesswomen, unlike their male colleagues, tended to envision fashion as both a business and a form of high culture. Several female authors of career advice manuals, for instance, downplayed women's commercial interests and instead stressed the cultivation of a refined sense of taste to social and professional advancement. For instance, one writer asserted that "[e]ducation and culture are not commodities to be bought and sold in the labor market at so much per dose," yet she still maintained that women should "never underrate the advantages to be found in breadth of culture.... These are features which add to your value...."³² Similarly, another author emphasized that "the average woman worker must have [a] broader outlook. While that culture which makes a person a connoisseur of art and literature may not bring the possessor as much return as specialized knowledge, it will be of inestimable value socially."³³ In 1938, Elizabeth D. Adams advised women embarking on a fashion career to attend art exhibitions. Arguing that visiting art shows was good business sense, she noted that "Designers now flock to these shows for something new and stimulating. Everyone, for instance, capitalized on the [Museum of Modern Art's 1935-36] Van Gogh exhibit."³⁴

Similarly, Maud P. Scholle recommended that aspiring fabric stylists get an art education: “A study of the history of art, a knowledge of the principles and development of good taste designs, will both broaden and refine the talent in good taste and sound color sense, which the stylist must possess in order to contemplate such a career.”³⁵ Suggesting the extent to which certain women’s viewing practices were intertwined with their career aspirations, Catharine Ogelsby informed her readers that in a fashion career, “You will eagerly expose your mind and imagination to the art treasures of the past as you walk miles and miles through museums.”³⁶

Fashion and good taste, as defined by these writers, retained an older, Gilded Age function to consolidate class values around notions of womanly accomplishment. But at the same time, these exclusionary concepts of discriminating taste, with their class-biased concepts of cultural acumen, remained in tension with other women’s success guides, where newer constructions of women’s taste were premised on a supply and demand model. Frances Maule, for instance, ridiculed the presumption that an upper-class woman was suited for a fashion career by virtue of her social position. Instead, she argued, because the field had grown so closely linked to the business arena, a woman could no longer rely on her class connections and familiarity with couture through her own wardrobe to advance in fashion work:

There was a period when styling was the impoverished society woman’s sure road to fortune—or at least to a congenial and well-paying job. But not today. Now the stylist is not only required to have native good taste and be able to recognize good things when she sees them, but also to be conversant with a great many prosaic commercial matters—such as the cost of materials and manufacture and distribution, where to get what, the length of time it takes to secure delivery after an order has been placed, and what level of taste and purchasing power of the particular public she is serving.³⁷

In fact, Maule’s equation of taste with good business judgment was designed to create parity between female fashion workers and certain male executives, because the matter of good taste could be used as a metaphor for managerial savvy. “Taste,” exhorted an advertisement for office furniture “[is] the new ingredient in business.”³⁸ Another advertisement claimed that “good taste is now recognized as a sound investment, capable of producing large dividends in better individual work, better representation of one’s company or position and better impression on one’s visitors.”³⁹ Although a comparison between the discerning art connoisseur and the incisive business executive was not a new phenomenon, it is interesting to note that, when it came to selling office décor at least, male decision-making and supervisory skills both depended on well-applied taste

and actively generated new standards of what was tasteful. If indeed taste was the “new ingredient in business,” it is not difficult to understand why the matter played such a prominent part in women’s business discourses.

In her 1932 advice book outlining business opportunities for women, Catharine Oglesby observed that whenever women congregate the topic of conversation often drifted towards clothes. “But today,” she noted, “these discussions have acquired quite a new twist. No longer is the viewpoint that of *fashion* but *careers*.”⁴⁰ Obviously, Oglesby was identifying a shift in women’s self-presentation through fashion, suggesting a move from outmoded, leisurely self-adornment to modern self-marketing in the workforce. But she was also alluding to a key problem women faced in their efforts to construct and signify professional identities, implying that strategic self-presentation operated as a covert vocabulary of career ambition.

Why women’s career ambition needed to be understated—rather than explicitly articulated—involves a contradictory tension between the gender hierarchies women encountered in the fashion workforce, and the mythic construction of fashionable femininity as idealized consumption. Wendy Gamber has argued that the interwar years marked the decline of a visible “female economy,” where women in the nineteenth century controlled millinery and dressmaking work. While women’s association with fashion was never in doubt, thanks to modern retailing, the decision-makers were overwhelmingly male.⁴¹ At the same time, the image of fashionable femininity had assumed such an iconic status that Earnest Elmo Calkins, to use just one example, equated demand for new consumer products with protean changes in women’s hem lengths: “These articles are redesigned and colored in the modern spirit . . . to make them markedly new, and encourage new buying, exactly as the fashion designers make skirts longer so you can no longer be happy with your short ones.”⁴² To stretch such metaphors a bit, it is possible to perceive how the body of the woman of fashion was imagined as analogous to an economic chart, “read” as directive or guide about the state of the consumer market.⁴³

These ideas informed actual business practices. For instance, when Hortense Odlum assumed the presidency of Bonwit Teller in 1934, the store began a publicity campaign that appealed directly to female consumers on the basis of its special “woman’s angle.”⁴⁴ In 1938, Adam Gimbel of Saks Fifth Avenue dealt with this competitive campaign by installing Mary Lewis, a former vice president of Best & Company, as head of the establishment’s promotion department (placing her third in the organization’s executive hierarchy), a move that *Fortune* heralded as “bright.”⁴⁵ The assumption that a female vice-president could generate profits is subtly suggested in a publicity photograph that appeared in *Fortune* (figure 3). The image implies that Lewis’ business savvy is seen in her self-presentation as an exemplar of fashionable femininity. Lewis’ patterned cravat mirrors the blurred lights in the background, creating a glittering halo that arcs around her dress. Such visual conventions follow the dictates of



Figure 3: Photograph of Mary Lewis, Vice President of Saks Fifth Avenue in *Fortune* (November 1938): 130. Photo credit: © Acme.

contemporary fashion photography, especially modernist photographs (typified in the work of Edward Steichen) in which models appear to blend with abstract settings. Needless to say, photographs of her male colleagues uniformly presented their subject in sober suits and ties, seated at their desks.

Importantly, interest in fashion as a business actually increased at the outset of the Great Depression, because it was believed that this industry was impervious to economic downturns. Because fashion was viewed as a template for a broad range of consumer goods, business people endorsed the notion that the study of fashion trends could predict what would be successful on the consumer market, and hence insure against potential financial loss. *Fortune* magazine declared: “The couturiers of Paris preceded even the stockbrokers of Manhattan as harbingers of the new economic order.”⁴⁶ Echoing these sentiments, the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Richard Bach told a 1932 meeting of the Fashion Group that they possessed the “only ‘futures’ ticker in New York that seems to be working. . . .”⁴⁷ Certainly fashionable femininity worked to sell the modern, either as an idea or more literally in terms of new styles for mass-produced goods. Accordingly, it is not difficult to understand how women of fashion translated such widespread impressions about their worth in consumer culture into concrete career aspirations and systematic plans to advance in a male-dominated professional world.

The 1931 formation of the Fashion Group best demonstrates the emerging sense of professional community among women working in fashion. The genesis of the organization came about in 1928, when female leaders in fashion publishing, design, and retail suggested forming a club exclusively for women working in the business. Over the course of the next two years these women—who included Dorothy Shaver, Helena Rubinstein, Elizabeth Arden, and Edna Woolman Chase—cultivated plans to distinguish the club as a professional group, toying first with the idea of becoming an affiliate of the National Retail Dry Goods Association, a prospect that was quickly rejected, and later, a fashion guild.⁴⁸ Headquartered in New York, the organization was a loose alliance of merchandisers, advertisers, stylists, designers, and other fashion specialists. Although its members included Eleanor Roosevelt, and well-known entrepreneurs such as Hattie Carnegie (a fashion retailer), and Lily Daché (couture designer), the bulk of the organization’s active membership consisted of women in middle management. Moreover, since the Fashion Group had taken pains to incorporate itself as an independent body, its founders clearly envisioned an organization for which reigning models were inadequate. The Group essentially amalgamated the conventions of women’s social clubs with trade-specific business groups dominated by men. In fact, preliminary meetings took place at the Women’s City Club, an elite philanthropic society geared to professional women. It was a logical move. By the late 1920s, women’s clubs in general were no longer associated with avocations. As a writer for the former women’s suffrage publication, *Woman Citizen*, noted, “The new conception of a

clubwoman as a competent business woman who has learned to manage her affairs with an efficiency born of her contact with the business world . . . is rapidly impressing itself, the country over."⁴⁹ Recalling Abercrombie's argument to retailers and merchandisers that women's clubs were points where activity in art intersected with interest in fashion, it was no stretch for women to restructure their club network to suit new circumstances. Accordingly, the Group self-consciously projected a uniquely modern identity for women in fashion careers. By the time the Fashion Group established its headquarters at the upscale address of 30 Rockefeller Center in the summer of 1933, the organization had successfully become the nerve center for women in the profession, providing a crucial forum for fashion publicity, employment news, and career networking.

Marion Taylor, the Fashion Group's first president, announced at its inaugural meeting in 1931 that the primary aim of the Group was "to dignify and clarify the position of women whose business it is to interpret and promote good taste and good fashion."⁵⁰ If Taylor's mission statement alludes to a degree of social ambivalence about the status of women in fashion careers, it also suggests that good taste exercised as a professional skill held the promise of defining women's contributions to the field. Unlike trade organizations, the Fashion Group deliberately embraced a broad range of fashion-related occupations. Membership, for instance, was divided into five major categories, Department Store and Merchandising, Home Furnishing, Textiles, Sales Promotion, and Merchandise Designers.⁵¹ Because the notion of trained taste provided a point of intersection between such incongruent careers as public relations and department store buyer, the term operated as a unifying principle for a sense of common purpose and shared identity. Such "professionalization" of good taste was not in itself new. In the nineteenth century, figures like Candace Wheeler and Ellen Demorest made their taste an earmark of their work. What distinguished the Fashion Group was its assumption that taste itself provided agency—to fortify bonds between career women who otherwise may have had no connection. This might explain why the Group only admitted women who had a record of success in the marketplace (with the notable exception of Eleanor Roosevelt, whose membership was honorary). Verifiable career achievement became the basis of the group's exclusivity. Requirements for membership included three (later five) years of professional work for "established firms of standing," sponsorship by an active member, and a "cultural and educational background to fit her for a position of responsibility in directing public taste." However, once voted into the organization, the only stated duty a member was expected to perform was to pledge "herself to promote in every way the standards of commercial good taste."⁵²

With its emphasis on establishing a professional community, the Fashion Group's objectives resonated with the business world's efforts to define and clarify the industry. Indeed, the organization's activities were part of this growing sense of urgency to delineate fashion's place in the economy. In the pages of *Fortune* and at the A.M.A. meetings, fashion's links to art and culture were a

constant source of concern and anxiety. Businessmen expressed a sense of urgency to “properly” assimilate the lessons of the art world into marketable, rationalized forms, the better to suit the needs of managerial science. By contrast, members of the Fashion Group confidently played up fashion’s cultural attributes and deliberately sought the converse: to clearly align commercial ventures with the standards of consumption reserved for art.

Women working in fashion were no less interested in modern art than their male colleagues. Yet, when addressing the role of modernism in the industry, very few made any direct reference to the “fashion, art, and style problem.” Although women in the Fashion Group worked side by side with the male merchandisers and retailers who labored to crack modernism’s “code,” the meaning of new trends in art did not trouble them. Instead, they took the smartness of modern styles for granted. As evidenced in writings, professional activities, and lectures, female fashion workers saw a greater challenge in convincingly packaging, publicizing, and selling the “decorative moderne.” Grace Alexandra Young, editor of *Creative Design*, published a call “To Modernists!” in the December 1935 issue of the *Bulletin*, advising fellow members of the Fashion Group to educate their colleagues about modern art. “It is simply impossible,” she reported “to separate the literature of contemporary styles in home furnishings from the literature of modern art and architecture.”⁵³ Throughout the 1930s, Dorothy Shaver actively arranged shows of modern art and design in commercial venues, even as she joined the board of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.⁵⁴ Estelle Hamburger routinely spoke to the Fashion Group on activities in department stores and other shops, sizing up the artistic merit of their displays and advertisements. For instance, upon viewing a 1935 window at Saks Fifth Avenue designed around Van Gogh paintings (itself a reference to a recent showing of Van Gogh at the Museum of Modern Art), Hamburger could hardly contain her enthusiasm for the ingenious promotion.⁵⁵ Marjorie Holligan, a stylist for Celanese (a company responsible for launching a line of products inspired by “Van Gogh colors”) likewise saw modern art’s value in terms of promotional success, observing “it is the news of interest in a specific exhibition of paintings rather than a particular individual painting that we follow.”⁵⁶

Further, success in popularizing modernism became a sign of career achievement. Members of the Fashion Group often described their accomplishments in terms of outfitting a business with “modernistic decorations,” or publicizing a line of new clothing utilizing abstract paintings. The success of these endeavors can be seen in the conclusions of a senior male retail executive, who asked in 1938 “Are Women Stealing the Field from Men in Fashion Promotion?” and answered, “Yes!” After pointing out that only a decade ago women were “tolerated in minor activities,” he conceded that they now “dominate many aspects of the business.”⁵⁷

Attention to upscale commercial exhibitions was an expedient means to publicize the Group’s collective interests and to underscore female fashion workers’ contributions to work that shaped public taste in consumer goods.

Through activities that blended commercial tastes with high culture's standards of consumption, the Group could distinguish themselves from competing (but male-dominated) merchandising and retailing associations. It was able to bring the two arenas together by presenting its members as consumers of modern style and agents for modern taste.

While this tactic may ultimately have reinforced reigning gender ideologies that privileged the "natural" masculine prerogative to hold managerial and executive positions, it should be viewed in the context of Depression-era debates about women's place in the workforce. Women's professional organizations not only had to forge credible communities, but it was also imperative that they generate counter-discourses to combat vitriolic condemnations of women's very presence in the workforce (particularly in any position with power) at a time of economic emergency, when it was widely assumed that any form of employment should be reserved for men. A significant number of people shared the opinion of one man, who in 1933 argued that "homes are being wrecked daily due to the fact that married women are permitted to work in factories and offices. . . . You and we all know that the place for a wife and mother is at home. . . . These same women's husbands would naturally be paid a higher salary, inasmuch as male employees demand a higher salary than females."⁵⁸ One author condemned women as innately unsuited for work: "Women . . . fail to go after the baffling problems of our age because they fail to direct their . . . urges toward socially worthy goals. They are gripped so tightly by their evasion habits of cattiness, self-adornment, sickness, blaming others for their own errors, or self-abnegation as to be blind to the opportunities around them."⁵⁹

Accordingly, even as the business world took notice of women working in fashion, there were limits to its praise. The enormous financial success and irrefutable business acumen demonstrated by female beauty entrepreneurs like Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden challenged gendered assumptions about the "innate" masculinity of executive authority and the corporate arena itself.⁶⁰ At the same time, their successes provided credibility to cherished myths about the business world's "natural" meritocracy—a notion that obviously was under siege in the context of the Great Depression. Indeed, *Fortune* magazine indulged in some particularly limber contortions to celebrate simultaneously women's business achievements but also to obviate their threat to patriarchal authority and sense of male entitlement. In a three-part 1935 series profiling women in American business, *Fortune* bestowed adulatory praise on female office workers, yet found female entrepreneurial success troubling. Accompanied by the caption, "Sixteen exceptions to prove the rule that woman's place is not the executive's chair," Part Three of the series presented biographical profiles of sixteen female executives that pointedly excluded any figure from the beauty or fashion world. The magazine justified its omission as "not merely arbitrary":

The basic, brass-tack proof of feminine success in industry is feminine success in those industries historically dominated



Figure 4: Window display in the Lion Store, Toledo, Ohio, March 1933 in *Independent Woman* 12 (May 1933): 181.

by men. There are two reasons. The first is simply that the industries historically dominated by men are the vital industries—manufacturing, banking, railroads, and the like. The second is that feminine success in the exploitation of women proves nothing but the fact that women are by nature feminine.⁶¹

The article further implied that women selling idealized images of femininity were not far removed from prostitutes: “Elizabeth Arden and her kind . . . are not professional women. They are women by profession.”⁶² Women’s fashion enterprise is thus unrecognizable as authentic business work precisely because of its associations with femininity. Arden and Rubinstein were cheaters, manufacturing and selling the kind of products in which women had a “natural” but “unfair” advantage over their male counterparts. Yet it was precisely this association with femininity that enabled women like Rubinstein and Arden to ascend to their prominent standing in the ordinarily male-dominated business world.

For these reasons, career women, who did not have the power and influence of Arden and Rubinstein, needed to devise strategies that legitimated their



Figure 5: Photograph of Helen Cole, Display Manager at Bonwit Teller & Co., *Fortune* 15 (January 1937): 94. Photo credit: © Remie Lohse.

presence in the professional world. They were not just marketing themselves to get jobs; they were also struggling to validate their professional identities. Indeed, The National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs made the depiction of the career woman a central theme in its publicity campaigns of the early 1930s. Utilizing techniques of modern public relations, the organization invented a "National Business Woman's Week" that served to promote and legitimate the cause of female workers in middle-class occupations and enlisted fashion venues to aid in the cause. For example, a series of show windows stood out among the promotional schemes of the 1933 event. Gimbel's of Philadelphia sported a window designed to resemble an office that included two "modishly garbed" female mannequins set up to represent office workers.⁶³ Similarly, a display mounted for a store in Toledo combined fashion merchandising with imagery associated with the public pageantry of the woman's suffrage movement. Quite literally "selling" the notion of career-oriented femininity, the window was built around a central image of a female professional superimposed over a silhouette of an ancient Greek warrior (figure 4). The woman's pen mirrors the warrior's spear; her neat coiffure echoes the helmet. Dresses, hats, purses, and shoes—presumably attire suitable for work—surround this central poster. One large sign announces the motto "We give service to the community," while the other smaller sign reminds viewers that the dresses are available in navy and white for the price of \$16.75.⁶⁴ (In 1933 this was no small sum.)

A photograph depicting Helen Cole, Bonwit Teller's head display manager, additionally demonstrates the melding between fashionable self-presentation, taste, and women's careers (figure 5). Published in *Fortune* in 1937, the picture is accompanied by the caption, "Bonwit's Helen Cole Goes Window-Shopping," punning on Cole's occupation as "the only woman display manager at pace-setting stores."⁶⁵ The image highlights Cole's careful concentration on boxes of accessories as she selects merchandise to place in the store's windows. A portion of a formal gown to the left visually frames her, while a mannequin, placed in the lower right foreground, seems to watch the activity. Contrasting with her female assistant, Cole is attired in a stylish quill cap, suit, and three-string pearls. Cole's chic presentation conceptually mirrors the work with which she is charged. As she hovers over the assembled merchandise of gloves, scarves, and handbags, we are enlisted to see her both as a consumer of fashion and a mediator of fashionable taste.

To the minds of women in fashion, such images constituted evidence of professional success. By early 1935 one member of the Fashion Group felt suitably inspired by the organization's activities to write a letter for publication in the *Bulletin*. Maud Cummings (identified as a worker for Boggs and Buhl) pointed to the career of fashion photographer Wynn Richards as exemplary, announcing that "[She] made me glad to be a hard-working business woman, glad I had responsibilities. . . ."⁶⁶ Three years later, Margaretta Stevenson projected similar sentiments: "The Fashion Group is a unique organization in that it is the first and only professional association of women in the fashion

business. Approximately a thousand women now belong to the Group, women in every phase of fashion work, in most of the large cities of the country, and in London and Paris.” Fashion, she added, was the choice career for modern women: “While fashion as a personal art is as ancient as Eve, the fashion field as a business career for women is recent enough to be history making. And its pioneers are still the leaders today. . . . In less than a score of years business has become fashion conscious. In fact, the last ten years have registered particularly the inroads women have made in this field.” Finally, she stressed that the profession was one of the few where women could rise to executive positions, because “[b]usinesses have found that the merchandising of fashion is more successful if women are in key positions where their judgments have some weight in important decisions. Consequently, the pattern of the girl who rises from a minor job in a store to a vice-presidency, is beginning to be repeated.”⁶⁷

Although Stevenson was mythologizing and idealizing women’s recent history in retail work, her words found a receptive audience. Clearly, a large number of middle to upper-class women shared her faith in the ameliorating potential of fashion. Crucially, professional women in careers unrelated to fashion mined the language and images ascribed to fashionable femininity to voice and legitimate career ambitions. What is most interesting about the association between fashionable femininity and women’s job aspirations is that fashion was nearly synonymous with mutability and transformation; it efficiently and succinctly conveyed the desirability of the “quick change.” In this sense, the exact same qualities that led many cultural thinkers to dismiss fashion as shallow, narcissistic, and transitory, also gave women license to invent and shape new identities. Further, precisely because of the ideological fissures that cut through interwar beliefs about business, fashion, and art, women were able to exploit a variety of “loose” or unsettled fashion “diction” to construct these new, marketable personae. While it is tempting to interpret such tactics in self-presentation as postmodern play with multiple identities, it is better to understand them as efforts to align career aspirations with the fluctuating state of interwar consumer culture.

Women of fashion altered the male-dominated business world’s effort to rationalize modern styles in art and consumer products into a call for professional communities in which female workers had a unique ability to “help make ‘art’ fashionable as well as popular.”⁶⁸ Like Estelle Hamburger’s joint ventures with the Brooklyn Museum in the 1920s, these women were pivotal forces in building an alliance between art and fashion that became a staple of American popular culture throughout the twentieth century. In this sense, they were innovators in defining “commercial good taste” and establishing a new rationale for conjoining the realms of art and the fashion business. Art historians often note the influence of women—Abbey Rockefeller and the Museum of Modern Art, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney’s Whitney Museum—who at this time founded museums for contemporary art, yet women of fashion’s role in the history of changing

tastes in American culture has gone unnoticed. The years between the wars marked a transition from the Armory Show's spectacle of European vanguard paintings and sculpture, to the gradual acceptance of certain forms of modern art, and, finally, to the consolidation of modernist theory as endorsed by the Museum of Modern Art. It was a unique historical moment in which different groups offered a variety of explanations for how the new visual vocabularies could affect American popular and artistic culture, even as disparate forces struggled to make a bid for leadership roles in domesticating modernism. Hence, women, precisely because of their traditional associations with issues of taste and consumerism, were enlisted to lend a hand in deciphering modernism's meanings and to adjudicate its worth: Was modern art pure spectacle? Or was it tasteful? What was the best way to consume it, in commercial or museum venues?

Yet women's taste as a type of enabling symbolic capital was limited to the moment when American understandings of modernism were unsettled. By the end of the 1930s, critics and institutions like the Museum of Modern Art worked overtime to distance modern art from its links to fashion and, in particular, women's "capricious" taste in the "decorative moderne." A modernist hierarchy premised on "heroic" avant-garde ideals took root, with key movements ascribed to "hard" concerns of, say, formal experimentation while others were "soft"—tied to commercial interests and fashion. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the Director for the Museum of Modern Art, devised a famous chart that pictured vanguard art as a historical advance to either "geometric" or "non-geometric" abstraction.⁶⁹ Needless to say, such a linear formula cannot incorporate issues of gender, fashion, and commercial spaces. As scholars critically rethink the historical circumstances in which consumerism, the "decorative moderne," and fashion were "feminized," we can begin to recognize how career women interjected new meanings into the discourses that bestowed gendered overtones on cultural production.

Notes

1. Typescript of inaugural speech delivered to April 7, 1931 meeting of the Fashion Group, Papers of the Fashion Group International, Inc. New York Public Library, Department of Special Collections, Manuscripts and Archives Division (hereafter cited as FGI), Box 74, Folder one.

2. Estelle Hamburger, *It's a Woman's Business* (New York: Vanguard, 1939): 124.

3. *Ibid.*, 131; 134.

4. *Ibid.*, 142. For one of the few scholarly discussions about the relationship between American museums and the department store in the early twentieth century, see Carol Duncan, "Museums and Department Stores: Close Encounters," *High Pop: Making Culture into Popular Entertainment*, ed. Jim Collins (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002). See also Neil Harris, "Museums, Merchandising, and Popular Taste: The Struggle for Influence," in *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*, ed. M.G. Quimby (New York: Norton, 1978): 140-170. For a study about the range of women who worked in department stores, see Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

5. Letter dated October 30, 1925, in Culin Archival Collection, General Correspondence [1.4.099], Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives. The exhibition was entitled "The Philosophy of Dress."

6. Allene Talmey, "'No Progress, No Fun': Dorothy Shaver of Lord and Taylor—Unorthodox Store Strategist," *Vogue* 107 (February 1946): 198.

7. *Ibid.*, 196.

8. For a recent survey of American female entrepreneurs see Virginia G. Drachman, *Enterprising Women: 250 Years of American Business* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

9. Frances Maule, *She Strives to Conquer: Business Opportunities and Job Requirements for Women* (New York and London: Funk & Wagnall's, 1935): 248. It should be noted that Maule, a copywriter for J. Walter Thompson Agency, was one of the decade's most prolific writers about women's careers. A representative list of her publications includes: *Women at Work: A Tour Among Careers* (New York: New York Career Tours, 1939); *The Girl with the Paycheck* (New York: Harper's, 1941); and *Careers for the Home Economist* (New York and London: Funk & Wagnall's, 1943).

10. See, for instance, analyses of the Container Corporation of America and its use of art in its promotional campaigns in James Sloan Allen, *The Romance of Commerce and Culture: Capitalism, Modernism, and the Chicago-Aspen Crusade for Cultural Reform* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983); and Michele H. Bogart, *Advertising, Artists, and the Borders of Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 259-269. I.B.M.'s art acquisitions are discussed in A. Deirdre Robson, *Prestige, Profit and Pleasure: The Market for Modern Art in New York in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York and London: Garland, 1995); and in Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, *Art Inc.: American Paintings from Corporate Collections* (Montgomery: Museum of Fine Arts, 1979). For analyses of corporate representations, see Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998); Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Jeffrey L. Meikle, *Twentieth Century Limited: Industrial Design in America, 1925-1939* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1993); David Nye, *Image Worlds: Corporate Identities at General Electric, 1890-1930* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985); Martha Banta, *Taylored Lives: Narrative Productions in the Age of Taylor, Veblen, and Ford* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and Terry Smith, *Making the Modern* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

11. James Sloan Allen, *Romance of Commerce*, 4.

12. Kaja Silverman, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse," *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture* ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986): 139-152. See also Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

13. Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994): 182.

14. Figure cited in *Ibid.*, 136

15. Victoria Billings, "Altered Forever: A Women's Elite and the Transformation of American Fashion Work and Culture, 1930-1955," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1990). Billings presents a sociological analysis of women working in fashion as an example of a gender-based elite social group. Like me, she uses the Fashion Group as a case study. However, our analyses are significantly different in methodological approach and scope. Billings emphasizes the dynamics of social factions and concentrates on the years after World War II.

16. Zelda Popkin cited in Duncan, "Museums and Department Stores," 142.

17. Dorothy Shaver, "Foreword," in Margaretta Stevenson ed. *How the Fashion World Works: Fit Yourself for a Fashion Future* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1938): ix.

18. See Wendy Gamber's excellent study of the nineteenth century fashion industry, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

19. Earnest Elmo Calkins, "Advertising, Builder of Taste," *The American Magazine of Art* 21 (September 1930): 498.

20. Leach, *Land of Desire*, 94.

21. Paul Thomas, "Scientific Textile Styling," in Paul Bonner et. al. *How the Manufacturer Copes with the Fashion, Style, and Art Problem* (New York: American Management Association, 1929): 6.

22. Paul Bonner, "The Fashion, Style, and Art Problem," *Ibid.*, 3.

23. Thomas, "Scientific Textile Styling," 10. The ellipses in the second to last sentence are in the original text.

24. Ralph Abercrombie, *The Renaissance of Art in American Business* (New York: American Management Association, 1929): 8; 3.

25. Austin Purves, "What is the Significance of Modernism?" in Wolf and Purves, 10.

26. Bonner, "The Fashion Art and Style Problem," in Bonner et.al., 5.

27. Thomas Craven, *Modern Art: The Men, The Monuments, The Meaning* (New York: Halcyon House, 1934; 1950): 29.

28. Abercrombie, *Penaissance of Art*, 6.

29. Cited in Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985): 186.
30. Advertisement for the *New York News*, *Time* 29 (February 8 1937): 45.
31. As quoted in Catharine Oglesby, *Fashion Careers American Style* (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1936): 81; 85.
32. Miriam Simons Leuck, *Fields of Work for Women* (New York and London: D. Appleton, 1938): 26.
33. Loire Brophy, *If Women Must Work* (New York and London: D. Appleton, 1936): 54-55.
34. Elizabeth D. Adams, "How to Look for and Use Fashion Sources," in ed., Stevenson, 2-3.
35. Maud P. Scholle, "The Duties of a Fabric Stylist for a Manufacturer," *Ibid.*, 31.
36. Catherine Oglesby, *Fashion Careers, American Style*, 25.
37. Maule, *She Strives to Conquer*, 238-239.
38. Advertisement for Wholey Office Planning in *Fortune* 5 (January 1932): 8.
39. Advertisement for Wood Office Furniture in *Fortune* 2 (July 1930): 25.
40. Catharine Oglesby, *Business Opportunities for Women* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1932): 28. Emphasis in the original.
41. Gamber, *Female Economy*, 190-228.
42. Calkins, "Advertising," 498.
43. Susan Buck-Morss argues that the way an economy—a conceptual abstraction—is rendered into visual form (such as chart or graph) has the tautological effect of "shaping" that economy, providing a means to legitimate the vicissitudes of capitalism by recourse to "objective" visual imagery. Susan Buck-Morss, "Envisioning Capital: Political Economy on Display," *Critical Inquiry* 21 (Winter 1995): 434-467.
44. Hortense Odlum, *A Woman's Place: The Autobiography of Hortense Odlum* (London: Scribner's, 1942): 6-7.
45. "Saks is Very . . .," *Fortune* 18 (November 1938): 64; 133.
46. "The Dressmakers of France," *Fortune* 6 (August 1932): 81.
47. Typescript of address delivered to the monthly meeting of the Fashion Group, January 20, 1932, FGI, Box 72.
48. Chronology in FGI Finding Aid, 4. The original founders of the association also included: Carmel Snow, Virginia Pope, Alice Hughes, Claire McCardell, Lily Daché, Edith Head, Julia Coburn, Tobé Collier Davis, and Elaine de Maire (FGI Finding Aid, 11).
49. Ramona Herdman, "Clubhouse de Luxe," *Woman Citizen* 11 (April 1927): 25.
50. Typescript of 1931 inaugural luncheon meeting, FGI, Box 72.
51. Typescript of Bulletin of the Fashion Group, March 1933, FGI, Box 144, Folder three.
52. Typescript of the Bulletin of the Fashion Group, May 1933, FGI, Box 144, Folder three.
53. "To Modernists!" *Bulletin of the Fashion Group* (December 1935): 4, FGI, Box 144, Folder seven.
54. See for example *Ibid.*, 3.
55. "Shifting the Spotlight in Store Advertising," *Bulletin of the Fashion Group* (June/July 1935): 5, FGI, Box 144, Folder seven.
56. "Report on Exterior and Interior Decoration," *Bulletin of the Fashion Group* (March 1938): 5, FGI, Box 144, Folder ten.
57. The speaker was Kenneth Collins of Saks Fifth Avenue. "Women's Increasing Importance in Fashion Fields," *Bulletin of the Fashion Group* (January 1937): 5, FGI, Box 144, Folder nine.
58. See also Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman's Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences* (Louisville: University Press of Kentucky, 1990); Nancy Cott, *The Groundings of Modern Feminism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987); and Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women: A History of Women and Business in the United States* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998). The quotation comes from a letter sent to President Roosevelt, cited in Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women*, 145.
59. Harry Walker Hepner, *Finding Yourself in Your Work: A Guide for Career and Personality* (New York and London: D. Appleton, 1937): 150-151.
60. While Arden and Rubinstein technically worked in the cosmetics industry, both were strongly identified with the field of fashion. For an analysis about women's career objectives and the Pre-World War II beauty profession see Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998). For an extended discussion of Rubinstein's involvement with art and fashion, see Marie Clifford, "Brand Name Modernism: Helena Rubinstein's Art Collection, Femininity, and the Marketing of Modern Style," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1999).
61. "Women in Business III," *Fortune* 12 (October 1935): 81.
62. *Ibid.*
63. "National Business Woman's Week," *Independent Woman* 7 (May 1933): 182.

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64. The show windows are reproduced in *Ibid.*, 181.
65. "Window Display" *Fortune* 15 (January 1937): 94; 96.
66. Letter dated March 1935, in FGI, Box 144, Folder 7.
67. Stevenson, ed., xi-xii.
68. *Bulletin of the Fashion Group* (February 1934): 5, FGI, Box 144, Folder 5.
69. The chart is reproduced in *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936).