

Appearance, Citizenship and Clothing Controls in Britain, 1939-1951

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Abstract

Appearance was central to the cultural construction and the social interpretation of citizenship in mid-twentieth-century Britain. It played a vital role in judging the traits that characterized the good citizen – decency, respectability and adherence to the law – traits that made citizens who possessed them into desirable members of the national community. Citizens who had a respectable appearance were deemed to hold certain moral values and were judged to be good citizens. Historiographical discussions of citizenship in twentieth-century Britain have thus far overlooked the part that dress and appearance played in its construction, largely due to the immediacy of judgements of appearance, which make them difficult to observe in historical records of everyday life. The Second World War and the reconstruction period that followed it, particularly during the decade between 1939 and 1949, provide a unique opportunity to examine the role appearances played in understandings of citizenship. During this period, the introduction of clothing controls temporarily imposed new meaning on appearance, bringing to the fore existing social, cultural and political interpretations of it. Examining the ways citizens discussed the relationship between citizenship, appearances and the state during this time illuminates the ways appearances were used to judge civic conduct during, before and after the period of controls and opens up new avenues for understanding the ways citizens thought about citizenship in relation to themselves and others. This thesis takes a case study approach, focusing on civic interpretations of appearance in three specific populations and analyzing the ways they negotiated new and old meanings of appearance in the context of their relationship with society and the state.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author.
This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University.
All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction

In austerity Britain, the battle between social and national pressures on dress threatened to fray the social fabric. The cause of this instability was an unusual instance in the history of the modern British state, in which it was in the national interest to encourage citizens to buy fewer clothes. During the Second World War and in the reconstruction period that followed it, limited material resources meant that the British home market could only obtain a limited amount of clothes, and the British government was anxious to keep a balance between existing supplies and the essential requirements of consumers. This need gave birth to policies that offered a definition of what a good, law-abiding citizen should look like, and in doing so, exposed existing assumptions about the appearance of the good citizen. During a decade of tight government regulation over the clothing market, this new national dress code had to compete for legitimacy with older social norms that constructed the way Britons understood their appearance in relation to their civic duties. As government agents and entities attempted to establish new norms of sartorial civic practice, the place of older norms in the social structure was re-examined and reassessed, exposing existing social tensions and creating new tensions between citizens and the state. This thesis will discuss this relationship between citizens, the state and social norms through the revealing lens of clothing controls.

Before the war, respectable law-abiding citizens could be recognised by their neat, clean and tidy well-made clothes, which were moderately within fashion, and which wholly conformed to what the other members of their class, gender and those in their immediate environment tended to wear. In other words – clothes which were consistent with the norms of the various communities to which they belonged. Their appearance was appreciated not

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only for its unchallenging effect and its respect for established norms, but for the characteristics it represented. It connoted that the men and women who presented themselves correctly were esteemed members of society, who on the one hand were entirely able to support themselves without depending on their fellow citizens, but on the other, did not feel the need to advertise their success in a way that attracted undue attention. They did not pull resources away from the national or local community either by relying on charity or by accumulating too much wealth. Their clothes also stood for certain character traits – morality, industriousness, cleanliness and efficiency – all of which commanded them as useful members of society. These norms were class-specific. They belonged to the middle-class, and to the members of the working-class who aspired to middle-class respectability. Importantly, however, those who adhered to these norms and understandings of proper sartorial behaviour applied them to anyone they encountered. It was their most immediate way of judging a stranger, and contemporary social surveys show that it was often used to assess behaviour, character and social status. Into these readings of appearances were folded ideas about respectability, community and class, and about the relationship between individual Britons and British society at large.

These norms and connotations were rarely questioned or discussed. Although in the 1930s there were some attempts to change dress codes, social pressures to adhere to established norms were stronger.¹ Few Britons openly discussed the way they constructed their appearance or what role they believed clothes played in their interaction with others. There was certainly no explicit link between a person's appearance and the way others perceived him or her as a citizen and a member of the national community. But appearance

¹ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain 1880-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 232-5, 337.

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was intricately connected to respectability, and respectability indicated a person's status, morality and level of inclusion within the community. As I will discuss below, both citizenship and appearance were closely connected to morality.

Historiography

There are some indications in existing historiography that appearance played a part in the performance of citizenship in modern Britain. In his study of queer life in London in the middle of the twentieth century, Matt Houlbrook suggests that certain items of clothing were used by men to reveal or hide sexual identity at a time when same-sex sexual encounters were against the law.² In her research about men's relationship with their clothes, covering an earlier period, Laura Ugolini similarly discusses the wearing of a collar-and-tie as an indicator of a person's law-abiding tendencies.³ In both cases, sartorial conformity indicated moral conformity. Ugolini's observation is a part of a discussion of respectability in men's dress that suggests that these items of clothing indicated moral tendencies that carried implications for interactions with the state. Unlike Houlbrook's observation, Ugolini's discussion of this issue is mostly grounded in nineteenth-century understandings of respectability. Studies of twentieth-century Britain, aside from Houlbrook, offer very little insight into the relationship between citizenship and appearance, especially when modes of appearance are not linked explicitly to illegal acts. The purpose of this thesis is to offer a more thorough discussion of this relationship, and explore the ways appearance and citizenship were linked.

² Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 144-7.

³ Laura Ugolini, *Men and Menswear: Sartorial Consumption in Britain 1880-1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 30.

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I use the term “citizen” broadly to refer to members of the national community, who were seen as having duties and rights within that community. This status therefore includes a broad range of individuals, whose duties towards the national community and whose rights within it, changed according to age, gender, class and other variables. Citizens may have gained the right to vote at 21, but once they had left school they had a role in the national community, as well as in the other communities of which they were members, a role which entailed certain duties. Although citizens were members of the national community, their membership in certain other communities was significant to their membership in the national community, whether those were local communities, or communities based on class, politics or other forms of value systems. As Sonya Rose shows, value systems, and in particular, moral value systems, are significant in the formation of collective identities.⁴ Yet, while the value systems that helped form national identities may seem coherent on the level of discourse, which is the focus of Rose’s study, citizens were not passive receptors of these values. One of the implications of Mark Roodhouse’s study of popular understandings of the Black Market is that ground level agreement on moral values and their effects on everyday practices is more likely to be found in smaller, more coherent communities than the national community, like communities based on class, profession or locality.⁵

The status of citizenship should be understood in the legal sense of adhering to the laws enacted by the state and being entitled to certain rights and social benefits the state

⁴ Sonya O. Rose, “Cultural Analysis and Moral Discourses: Episodes, Continuity, and Transformation,” in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, eds. Victoria E. Bonnell, Lynn Avery Hunt and Richard Biernacki (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 231.

⁵ Mark Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain, 1939-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 195-210, 211-221.

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offered, as well as in the social sense, in which members of the national community were expected to conform to certain norms and perform certain duties within that community. As Rose demonstrates in her study of citizenship and national identity in the Second World War, these two meanings were related, although the relationship between them, especially as it pertained to duties, was not straightforward. Citizens' duties toward the state could contradict their duties as members of the national community – as Rose shows was the case when women were asked to prioritise the national need for working hands over their roles in the national community as home makers.⁶ These duties could also overlap – as was the case for young men, who, both in the context of the national community and in their legal capacity as citizens had a duty to fight for their country.⁷ It is this relationship between citizens' duties towards the state and citizens' duties towards their communities that is at the heart of this thesis.

Before the war, dress and appearance were mostly dictated by the social norms of various groups within the national community, which corresponded with certain value systems. These communities – local communities or communities based on class, occupation, political persuasion or other group-defining identities – had competing ways of understanding belonging to the national community, based on their internal value systems. As Rose suggests, the values that define the national community are not a stable set of moral rules, but are the result of continuous struggles between different groups within the national community to gain moral authority in public debates and define the boundaries of national morality.⁸ While different groups had different moral views, disagreement about

⁶ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 107-50.

⁷ Rose, *Which People's War?* 151-96.

⁸ Rose, "Cultural Analysis and Moral Discourses," 230.

moral values took place within an agreed range of ideas about morality – a kind of a moral Overton window. This basic agreement about what is included in the scope of moral discourse meant that despite differences in moral values among different groups, the shared foundation was large enough for their members to be included in the same national community.

When considering experiences of citizenship, we need to consider how people engaged with dominant ideas about what it meant to belong to the national community. As studies about individual engagement with the ideologies circulating in public debates have shown, even when certain ideas dominate public debates, people engage with them on their own terms.⁹ In post-war Britain, for instance, working-class women were aware of feminist discourses, but interpreted ideas about feminism and equality through the gender relations they experienced in their private lives.¹⁰ Similarly, people in interwar and austerity Britain understood what the national community stood for through the value systems of the various small-scale communities to which they belonged, even if they were incompatible with the ideas that dominated public debates about citizenship. Within each of these communities dress and appearance had a certain role in social interaction, which, to a greater or lesser extent, defined morality and belonging. Their citizenship – their belonging to the national community – was seen through that lens.

During the period of austerity, the legal intervention of the state in matters of dress and appearance meant that the state inserted itself into the relationship between citizens and their communities. By intervening in matters of appearance, the state did not *make* clothing

⁹ Emily Robinson et al., “Telling Stories about Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the ‘Crisis’ of the 1970s,” *Twentieth Century British History* 28, no. 2 (2017): 268–304, <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwx006>.

¹⁰ Robinson et al., “Telling Stories about Post-War Britain,” 289-96.

practices into forms of civic practice, but rather tried to transform the way clothing practices, dress and appearance signified “good” or “bad” citizenship. It is a central argument of this thesis that dress and appearance were aspects of civic practice during, as well as before and after the period of austerity.

The historiography of mid-twentieth-century Britain does not usually include dress or clothing practices as part of the performance of citizenship. It is perhaps easier to see how clothes formed an aspect of civic practice under austerity than at any other time in the twentieth century. In his mapping of the historiography of citizenship in Britain, Matthew Grant discusses citizenship as “both a status and a practice.”¹¹ Although Grant focuses on the post-war period, he looks at the historiography of citizenship in earlier parts of the century and his discussion is particularly relevant here. He offers three ways in which citizens perform their citizenship: legally by formal interactions with the state, socially by their involvement in various communities and culturally by talking and thinking about citizenship as relating to themselves and others.¹² This definition for the legal performance of citizenship may include anything from voting to interactions with the clerk at the labour exchange bureau. The definition for cultural performance of citizenship can similarly encompass a broad variety of activities, from academic writings about citizenship to informal understandings of belonging. The performance of citizenship in the social register, however, tends to focus almost entirely on forms of “active” citizenship, traditionally understood as participation in the voluntary sector, and the level to which these were practiced. Grant suggests that in order to expand our understanding of the social practice of citizenship, we need to shift our focus away from “active” citizens who volunteer in the

¹¹ Matthew Grant, “Historicizing Citizenship in Post-War Britain,” *The Historical Journal* 59, no. 4 (2016): 1189, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X16000388>.

¹² Grant, “Historicizing Citizenship in Post-War Britain,” 1188-9.

public sphere onto stories of so-called passive citizens, who are not seen as taking an active part in political life or in the public sphere.¹³

As part of this framework, the questions that arise within the social register and those that arise within the cultural register are similar. The cultural register enquires about the ways a national community defines belonging, not only through ethnic characteristic, but through behaviour and morality.¹⁴ This in turn raises important questions about the way citizens understood and interacted with these definitions.¹⁵ The social register enquires about forms of participation in the community as well as the social value certain forms of participation, and citizens who participated in them, held. Grant proposes that what is missing in this field is a better understanding of how so-called passive citizens interacted with concepts of passive and active citizenship and with the labelling of passive citizenship as less deserving.¹⁶ The route forward that Grant offers for both these fields of historical investigation of citizenship deal to some extent with the labelling of “good” and “bad” citizenship, and the ways in which citizens interacted with this labelling. It may be more useful to think about the labelling and negotiation processes as the subject of discussions of the cultural register of citizenship, and of the practices that relate to these labels (whether or not they are performed in the voluntary sector) as coming under the heading of the social register of citizenship.

Rose’s work is a good example of how these three aspects of citizenship – legal, cultural and social – can overlap and interact. Her work on the Second World War highlights the role that the cultural construction of citizenship had in framing particular

¹³ Grant, “Historicizing Citizenship in Post-War Britain,” 1198-1202.

¹⁴ Grant, “Historicizing Citizenship in Post-War Britain,” 1196.

¹⁵ Grant, “Historicizing Citizenship in Post-War Britain,” 1198.

¹⁶ Grant, “Historicizing Citizenship in Post-War Britain,” 1201-2.

behaviours as “good” or “bad” social practices of citizenship; a framing which served as the basis for arguments about inclusion in or exclusion from the national community, both in the cultural and in the legal sense. This is particularly evident in two of her case studies, one focusing on women and the other on men of colour, both of which explore the discourses surrounding the participation of these two groups in the war effort.¹⁷ In these and her other case studies, the conceptualisation of certain actions through overt and covert propaganda as contributing to or disrupting the war effort, meant that citizens performing these actions were being labelled as “good” or “bad” citizens, as virtuous patriots or as morally dubious. But while elsewhere Rose shows the role that morality played in relation to the construction of this discourse of belonging, it is only explored in her work in terms of sexual morality. There is little discussion of the bigger role played by perceptions of morality in relation to citizenship, although Rose does suggest that other forms of morality also play a part in the formation of national communities.¹⁸ For the most part, Rose considers civic action only through actions conducted in the public sphere and in direct relation to the war effort.¹⁹ Her work focuses mostly on heroism and active participation through war-related work and services as actions that denoted good citizenship – actions that are traditionally thought of as part of citizens’ duty to their country, like serving to protect it or providing the tools of protection.

Yet, as a total war, citizens’ duties in the Second World War went well beyond the realms of munitions production and service in the armed and auxiliary forces or even fire-

¹⁷ Rose, *Which People’s War?* 108, 112-17, 249-51; See also: Grant, “Historicizing Citizenship in Post-War Britain,” 1195-6.

¹⁸ Rose, “Cultural Analysis and Moral Discourses,” 232, 236n24. See also: Rose, *Which People’s War?* 71-106, 170-8; Grant, “Historicizing Citizenship in Post-War Britain,” 1196.

¹⁹ The exception is her chapter about women’s association with “quintessential aliens,” see: Rose, *Which People’s War?* 71-106.

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watching and the Home Guard.²⁰ Wartime government propaganda touched on a variety of other ways in which citizens could positively contribute to the national effort, labelling both obligatory and voluntary actions as active participation and contribution. Government propaganda prompted citizens to collect salvage, buy war bonds and reduce personal consumption to a bare minimum by growing a vegetable garden and mending clothes. As other historians have noted, many of these requests were directed towards housewives, but it is important to remember that there were other groups on the Home Front, and that other groups of citizens were also the targets of pleas to aid the war effort in various ordinary ways.²¹ Through posters, short films, speeches from officials and with the support of the press the government framed these activities as citizens' duties (Figure 1).



Figure 1 - Wartime posters from the Imperial War Museum, encouraging voluntary contribution to the war effort. From top left clockwise: the Dig for Victory campaign poster, encouraging the keeping of private vegetable gardens, Art.IWM PST 0696; the Make do and Mend campaign, encouraging people to ward of buying new clothes Art.IWM PST 4773; a war savings poster, encouraging women to invest in war savings, using images of new clothes and vacations as incentives Art.IWM PST 8298; one of the many salvage pleas, encouraging housewives to contribute materials unnecessary in their homes to the war effort Art.IWM PST 14735.

²⁰ Rose, *Which People's War?* chapters 2, 4 and 5.

²¹ See for instance: Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jennifer Purcell, "The Domestic Soldier: British Housewives and the Nation in the Second World War1: British Housewives and the Nation in the WWII," *History Compass* 4, no. 1 (2006): 153–60, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2005.00147.x>.

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Some of these activities were undertaken in the context of voluntary organisations, in the spirit of pre-war discussions of active citizenship.²² As Grant shows, voluntary work of this kind is generally understood by historians to be a way of performing citizenship in the social realm.²³ Indeed, several works in recent years shed light on the contribution of the voluntary services during the conflict, showing the wide scope of this form of active citizenship from the Red Cross to salvage collection.²⁴ Yet this focus on formal voluntarism in the context of the war often overlooks the even wider array of voluntary action the British public was requested to take, which was outside the public sphere and not part of organised voluntary work. Henry Irving's recent work on salvage collection shows the potential of such requests when framed around active contribution to the war effort. Irving demonstrates that government campaigns did much to alter public perceptions of recycling waste, which was crucial, since the state and local authorities depended for their salvage collection scheme on the participation of the public – not in organizing the scheme, but in separating and accumulating their private recyclable waste.²⁵ Although recycling within the home was not a voluntary service, it was an action performed for the sake of the national community at the request of the state, done voluntarily by private citizens. The same could be said about clothing. While rationing meant an involuntary restriction on clothing consumption, the additional ways in which British citizens were asked to contribute to the war effort through their wardrobe – by economizing beyond the ration, and by making their

²² Abigail Beach, "Forging a 'Nation of Participants': Political and Economic Planning in Labour's Britain," in *The Right to Belong: Citizenship and National Identity in Britain, 1930-1960*, eds. Richard Weight and Abigail Beach (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), 91.

²³ Grant, "Historicizing Citizenship in Post-War Britain," 1198-1202.

²⁴ An overview of recent work on the subject can be found in: Henry Irving et al., "The real lessons of the Blitz for Covid-19," (*History and Policy*, April 2020).

²⁵ Henry Irving, "'We Want Everybody's Salvage!': Recycling, Voluntarism, and the People's War," *Cultural and Social History* 16, no. 2 (2019), 167-70, 174-6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780038.2019.1586811>.

clothes last longer in various ways – were equally done voluntarily, and were equally expected to be done as a service to the national community and the state.²⁶

Unlike salvage collection, however, requests of the public to economise on clothing were only marginally dependent on public organisation and voluntary services. The success of the call for frugality and acceptance of shabbiness depended far more heavily on citizens' willingness to sacrifice their appearance for the greater good. That willingness depended on the ability of government campaigns to position clothing economy as the right choice of the conscientious citizen, turning it from a private financial decision into a moral decision with consequences for the national community.

While, as I will show in Chapter Two, this is exactly what the British government attempted to do, these campaigns did not operate in a symbolic void. Clothes, dress and appearance already had symbolic connections to morality and collective identity, and through these, to understandings of “good” or “bad” citizenship. Unlike sumptuary laws, which operated in the early modern era as explicit indicators of class, gender and civic hierarchies, the norms that governed dress and appearance in mid-twentieth-century Britain were implicit and fluid.²⁷ So while garments and appearance did not signify the legal status of citizens, they were read for signs indicating moral standing and status (or in other words, respectability), prior to the introduction of austerity.

As already noted above, morality plays a crucial role in constructing collective identities. Rose's study of the relationship between moral discourses about sexuality and national identity builds on theoretical works that emphasise the symbolic connection between the individual body and the social body and view the moral impurity of the former

²⁶ David Morgan and Mary Evans, *The Battle for Britain: Citizenship and Ideology in the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 1993) 55-6.

²⁷ Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), 15, 46-7, 83-4.

as a threat to the latter. She proposes that discourses regulating sexual moral conduct in relation to civic conduct and national identity tend to surge at times of crisis, when the collective identity is under threat and there is therefore a need to draw the lines of belonging more clearly.²⁸ Yet, as Rose herself suggests, “[...] moral discourses are crucial components of imagined unities,”²⁹ and these understandings of collective identity existed whether or not the community experienced crisis; crisis only threw them into sharp relief. As this thesis will demonstrate, the importance of appearance to collective identity in Britain before the war was highlighted by the fact that dress assumed a new moral role in the context of the national community.

Philosophers and theorists of social studies have long understood dress and the construction of appearance as ways of asserting collective identity. Georg Simmel identifies the ways clothing and adornment function in society as tools for declaring inclusion in or exclusion from certain groups.³⁰ While this understanding originates in discussions of national costumes, it has many modern iterations in the history of Britain as well. Dick Hebdige, for instance, shows that style could convey rebellion against the existing social order in the context of youth subcultures in the post-war period, demonstrating its centrality to group identities in those subcultures.³¹ Both Melanie Tebbutt and Ugolini’s works on early twentieth-century masculinities discuss the tensions between asserting individuality and conforming to collective identities in men’s relationship with clothes.³² Catherine Horwood’s study of middle-class dress cultures in the interwar period demonstrates the

²⁸ Rose, “Cultural Analysis and Moral Discourses,” 231-2.

²⁹ Rose, “Cultural Analysis and Moral Discourses,” 232.

³⁰ See for instance: Georg Simmel, “Fashion, Adornment and Style,” in *Simmel on Culture*, eds. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1997), 190-2.

³¹ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1991).

³² Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*; Melanie Tebbutt, *Being Boys: Youth, Leisure and Identity in the Inter-War Years* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1vwmfqq>.

ways class identity was preserved through intricate dress norms in the face of a perceived democratisation of dress.³³ Similarly to Houlbrook's study, mentioned above, which notes the use of dress to convey gender nonconformity, Shaun Cole's work focuses on dress as a tool of homosexual identity formation.³⁴ All of these studies, to some extent, suggest that the construction of identity through dress owed something to the interpretation of dress as an indicator of morality. But because these studies focus on identity, the ways in which dress and appearances were interpreted as evidence of moral character are often of marginal concern to them, and the issue remains under-developed. In the case of Hebdige, Houlbrook and Cole, their focus on marginal groups means that they highlight dress as a tool of dissent, giving little attention to its role in the reinforcement, rather than the breaking of social order.

It is this aspect of dress that is highlighted by fashion philosopher Joanne Entwistle, who criticises fashion historians for focusing on the extraordinary rather than the everyday, thus overlooking "the mundane and routine part [dress] plays in reproducing social order."³⁵ Entwistle argues that this blind spot is a result of the deep embedding of dress in human social interactions, which has made its function invisible to us.³⁶ Similarly to Rose, she constructs the connection between morality and dress using theories that explore the symbolic parallels between the body and society, or between the dressed body and the social body. She argues that the construction of appearance, as part of what she terms "rituals of the body," is socially constructed as a moral issue, subjecting those who trespass

³³ Catherine Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances: Fashion and Class between the Wars* (Stroud: Sutton, 2005).

³⁴ Shaun Cole, *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel: Gay Men's Dress in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

³⁵ Joanne Entwistle, "The Dressed Body," in *Real Bodies: A Sociological Introduction*, ed. Mary Evans and Ellis Lee (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 136.

³⁶ Entwistle, "The Dressed Body," 135.

dress norms to the same kind of social regulation as that associated with moral norms.³⁷ Entwistle posits that breaches of dress codes are themselves understood as immoral, since they disrupt the social order. The social theorist James Coleman categorises dress norms as a type of convention and suggests that they are primarily governed by interest in group membership, even if the imperatives that frame them are moral.³⁸ Norms of etiquette, however, do not just create group membership, but the membership of a status group – that is, membership of a group which is better than other groups.³⁹ In this sense, the norms that governed respectability in mid-twentieth-century Britain as well as the new norms introduced by the state under austerity can be seen as norms of etiquette, which used morality and duty as incentives to follow norms that defined belonging in the exclusive group of respectable citizens and in the national community. Dress functioned as a symbol of moral conduct, a shorthand for a person's moral character as a member of the national community. A further discussion of the relationship between moral, social and dress norms can be found in the methodology section below.

It is my intention, therefore, to bring to the fore the routine functions of dress and appearance as tools for judging others and for establishing one's own character in social interactions, functions which historians of twentieth-century Britain have tended to overlook. The ways in which appearances (rather than dress) were used to assess character is of some concern to Mike Savage in his study of the changing attitudes of social researchers in Britain over the course of the twentieth century.⁴⁰ Savage demonstrates how

³⁷ Entwistle, "The Dressed Body," 138-9.

³⁸ James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 257-8.

³⁹ Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory*, 258-9.

⁴⁰ Mike Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

a certain branch of social research in the 1930s and 1940s made use of appearances to form impressions about research subjects. As Savage argues, this type of research blended “physical, social and moral characteristics: one’s appearance was a central signifier of not only your dress sense or personal hygiene, but your entire social and moral being.”⁴¹ Researchers used their understandings of cultural signifiers as a way of assessing and categorising their interviewees. Savage’s focus, however, is on social research and social methods, not on the norms of appearance that governed these impressions and there is little room for how norms operated outside the boundaries of the interviewer-interviewee relationship.

What looking at Savage’s study makes evident is how neglected dress has been in the study of social interaction in twentieth-century Britain. Studies that discuss cross-class judgements have highlighted the role of privacy and the home as the symbols of respectability,⁴² and of nutrition as the focal point of efforts to educate working-class housewives.⁴³ Similarly to food and housing, clothes were a cultural aspect on which Britons judged others and through which they asserted their moral superiority to each other. Yet dress, despite its ubiquity in encounters between different social groups throughout this period, is conspicuously absent from their historiography. And despite the role it played in the construction of class identities, it is rarely mentioned by studies of class cultures.⁴⁴ Ross Mckibbin’s *Classes and Cultures*, which provides a detailed discussion of class-based

⁴¹ Savage, *Identities and Social Change*, 95.

⁴² See for instance: Jon Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me?: The Search for Community in Post-War England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 11, 180-5. See also Claire Langhamer’s work about the meaning of home, which uses terms associated with respectability such as “neat,” “tidy” and “privacy”: Claire Langhamer, “The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005): 341–62, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009405051556>.

⁴³ James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674044678>, 196-235.

⁴⁴ Two exceptions are: Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances* (which focuses on dress); Tebbutt, *Being Boys* (where Chapter 3 tackles the subject of appearance).

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cultures as well as the relationship between classes, only mentions dress a handful of times although it is particularly relevant to its subject matter.⁴⁵

It is possible that the invisibility of the everyday functions of dress, which Entwistle discusses, is the reason that social historians have tended to overlook this aspect of social interaction. Austerity, however, presents a unique opportunity to discuss norms of appearance. Rose suggests that the war created an atmosphere that highlighted the need to reiterate certain social norms because they were under the threat of change. Similarly, clothing controls foregrounded dress norms, since these were put up for debate by the state, either by sanctioning or by condemning them. State interference forced citizens to confront norms that had hitherto been taken for granted and it affords historians a chance to examine the way these norms functioned, as they became a matter of public concern and debate that left their mark on the historical record.

With one exception, studies that focus on clothes and appearance during the Second World War or under austerity did not discuss them from the view point of citizenship or in the context of citizen-state relationship. Studies like Julie Summers' recent *Fashion on the Ration* or Geraldine Howell's older *Wartime Fashion* offer a description of the restrictions and the various schemes and a broad view of what this meant for consumers.⁴⁶ They tend to highlight public celebration of the make-do-and-mend spirit rather than question how broad acceptance really was or discuss what the loss of access to clothes meant to citizens beyond practical considerations. A more complex approach exists in several other studies. Pat Kirkham's study of beauty culture, for instance, emphasizes the contrast between open

⁴⁵ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). See full discussion in Chapter One below.

⁴⁶ Julie Summers, *Fashion on the Ration: Style in the Second World War* (London: Profile Books, 2015); Geraldine Howell, *Wartime Fashion: From Haute Couture to Homemade, 1939-1945* (London: Berg, 2012).

demands from women to maintain a groomed appearance and the material conditions they faced: consumer rationing on clothes and cosmetics on the one hand, and increased demands on their time on the other hand.⁴⁷ Rose builds on this study to show the conflicting demands they faced in their capacity as citizens and in their role in the national community as women. This focus on women characterises most studies about clothing under austerity. Two recent departures from this have been Danielle Sprecher's study of demobilisation suits, and Geraldine Biddle-Perry's study about post-war austerity.⁴⁸ Biddle-Perry's study is also the one study that engages with clothes in the context of citizenship. Biddle-Perry contrasts the Labour government's support for utilitarian styles with popular tastes to demonstrate the gap between consumers' perceptions of desirable clothing consumption and the semi-utopian vision that Labour idealists had for Britain's socialist citizens.⁴⁹ This culture-based analysis is useful for understanding the part clothes, dress and appearance played in the relationship between citizens and the state and in differential definitions of citizenship.⁵⁰ By concentrating on the post-war period, however, Biddle-Perry's study overlooks the long view on this relationship, building it as a specific post-war phenomenon rather than one that existed beforehand but had a specific post-war form.

⁴⁷ It is useful to give Kirkham's full list of publications on the subject here, since each has its own unique emphasis: Pat Kirkham, "Beauty and Duty: Keeping Up the (Home) Front," in *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two Britain*, eds. Pat Kirkham and David Thomas (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1995), 13-28; Kirkham, "Fashioning the Feminine: Dress, Appearance and Femininity in Wartime Britain," in *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 152-74; Kirkham, "Keeping Up Home Front Morale: 'Beauty as Duty' in Wartime Britain," in *Wearing Propaganda: Textiles on the Home Front in Japan, Britain and the United States, 1931-1945*, eds. Jaqueline and John W. Dower (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 205-27.

⁴⁸ Danielle Sprecher, "Demob Suits: One Uniform for Another? Burtons and the Leeds Multiple Tailors' Production of Men's Demobilization Tailoring after the Second World War," *Costume* 54, no. 1 (2020): 108-30, <https://doi.org/10.3366/cost.2020.0145>; Geraldine Biddle-Perry, *Dressing for Austerity: Aspiration, Leisure and Fashion in Post-War Britain* (London: I B Tauris, 2016), see especially chapter 5.

⁴⁹ See: Biddle-Perry, *Dressing for Austerity*, 84-109 and throughout.

⁵⁰ Biddle-Perry, *Dressing for Austerity*, 136.

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Studies that use austerity regulations as their focal point tend to provide more insight about citizen-state relationship. These studies provide useful background to controls. This background is beyond the scope of this thesis, since, rather than examining the details of controls, this thesis focuses on how controls affected the relationship between citizens and the state, and the relationship between citizens and their various communities – with which the state interfered through clothing controls. There are several volumes surveying the history of austerity regulations. The relevant volume for clothing controls from the official history of the Second World War, E.L. Hargreaves and M.M. Gowing's *Civil Industry and Trade*, is still, to date, the most comprehensive survey of the details of wartime regulations.⁵¹ Although it does not provide an analysis of the operation of the various schemes, or attempts to include or interpret citizens' reactions to them, it is an invaluable resource when discussing these regulations, since it covers considerations, decision-making processes and the development and minutiae of controls. This volume, however, only covers the war years and is limited to a discussion of the perspective of the state.

An analysis of all consumer regulations throughout the period of austerity, as well as the first attempt to examine the position of citizens in relation to these regulations can be found in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska's *Austerity in Britain*.⁵² This volume covers controls broadly, and its perspective on clothing controls is extended in another work by Zweiniger-Bargielowska, which deals specifically with women's reaction to clothing controls.⁵³ Together, they cover all aspects of consumer controls – operation of the different schemes,

⁵¹ E. L. Hargreaves and M. M. Gowing, *Civil Industry and Trade* (London: HMSO, 1952).

⁵² Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*.

⁵³ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Women under Austerity: Fashion in Britain during the 1940s," in *Representations of Gender from Prehistory to the Present*, eds. Moira Donald and Linda Hurcombe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 218-37.

their reception in the British population, political aspects of the regulations and public opinion about, and government attempts to control, the Black Market. As extensive as it is, however, Zweiniger-Bargielowska's work creates as many gaps as it closes. One of its issues is that the wideness of its scope leaves little room for a detailed discussion of any one scheme or any one aspect of controls. On the Utility Scheme, at least, more detailed work was already available in Christopher Sladen's *The Conscription of Fashion*.⁵⁴ Sladen's work offers a comprehensive analysis of the development and operation of the scheme, as well as its reception among consumers. On another aspect of Zweiniger-Bargielowska's volume, the Black Market, subsequent work by Roodhouse puts forward a more detailed examination of the evasion of controls under austerity, discussing enforcement and policies alongside the operation of black marketeers and the actions and views of ordinary citizens.⁵⁵ Roodhouse's work demonstrates the extent to which a discussion of citizens' views on state policies can develop beyond Zweiniger-Bargielowska's narrow view of public opinion. Zweiniger-Bargielowska uses mainly opinion polls, surveys and voting behaviour to argue that Britons demonstrated a "moral duality" by both denouncing and participating in Black Market activity.⁵⁶ Roodhouse uses these alongside a plethora of qualitative sources to create a more nuanced discussion of how Britons constructed complex moral codes that allowed them to participate in some evasion practices while denouncing others.⁵⁷ Roodhouse's study also makes clear that Zweiniger-Bargielowska's discussion of Black Market activity as a term with a clear,

⁵⁴ Christopher Sladen, *The Conscription of Fashion: Utility Cloth, Clothing, and Footwear, 1941-1952* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1995).

⁵⁵ Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*.

⁵⁶ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 151-202.

⁵⁷ See for instance his discussion of the self-justification processes of evasion here: Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, 195-210.

definitive meaning crumbles in view of the multiplicity of ways Britons used and understood it.⁵⁸ This suggests the possibility of expanding the discussion on other topics covered by Zweiniger-Bargielowska's work.

Among these are citizens' experiences of controls and the factors that shaped the relationship between citizens and the state under controls. Zweiniger-Bargielowska gives ample attention to housewives' experiences of controls and to the material factors that affected them uniquely.⁵⁹ Her main argument is that the widely unpopular austerity policy was the main reason for the fall of the post-war Attlee government. She demonstrates that women, as the demographic group bearing the brunt of most austerity policies, were pivotal in tipping the results in favour of the Conservative party in the 1951 elections.⁶⁰ Zweiniger-Bargielowska stirs away from class analysis of voting behaviour that dominated previous scholarship about politics in this era, focusing instead on gender. She argues that women's experiences were similar across class lines, since regardless of income, women were the ones who had to navigate the regulated market on a daily basis.⁶¹ Her analysis of women's experiences of controls demonstrates the various ways in which consumer controls, with an emphasis on food controls, disadvantaged housewives to a degree that rallied them against the Labour government, as the representative of post-war regulation.⁶²

While this line of argument is compelling, growing attention in recent years to intersectionality – the ways in which individuals' experiences are shaped by the intersection between their various group identities – suggests that we need to re-examine the use of gender as an all-encompassing category. Although class alone, as Zweiniger-Bargielowska

⁵⁸ Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, 15-16, 78-9.

⁵⁹ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 99-150.

⁶⁰ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 243-55.

⁶¹ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 251-2.

⁶² Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 112, 117-19, 121-9, 132-3, 149-50, 253-5.

rightly argues, is not a sufficient category for analysing citizens' experiences, neither is gender. Women were not a uniform mass, and their attitudes to consumption could differ considerably depending on income, class, geographical location and life-stage. Moreover, if gender is applied as a category for analysis on a subject that influenced all citizens, more space should be given to a comparison across gender lines. Using an intersectional lens allows for a more nuanced understanding of the various experiences citizens could have of controls, and the factors that induced various groups in the population to view controls in a negative or positive light. As I will discuss below, my case-study approach, which focuses on specific groups in the British population is designed to address this issue.

While Zweiniger-Bargielowska does not explicitly discuss citizenship, her work focuses on two aspects of the politico-legal register of citizenship: voting behaviour and the rights of consumers as citizens. Her analysis of consumer rights activism in the post-war years has been challenged by Matthew Hilton's work about consumer politics.⁶³ Hilton suggests that in the landscape of consumer activism after the war, demands to end consumer rationing were marginal, while support for a regulatory policy that defended consumer rights, and which was on the Labour agenda was rife.⁶⁴ Yet Hilton's account takes a narrow view of consumers' and citizens' opinions by focusing on organised civic activism. I aim to complicate both Hilton's and Zweiniger-Bargielowska's accounts of the austerity years by examining private citizens' reactions to clothing controls in the context of government rhetoric about those controls.

⁶³ Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Search for a Historical Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 160-1.

⁶⁴ Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain*, 161.

Sources

Primary sources are a crucial element in understanding the interplay between appearance and citizenship and in creating a picture that takes into account government construction of dress and citizenship as well as public and private discussions and understandings of this construction. This thesis therefore uses a blend of sources that addresses the multiplicity of angles on its subject matter. The various ways the British government, and in particular the Board of Trade (hereafter: BoT), communicated their message of clothing economy to the public are used to understand the background against which citizens formed their own views about dress and appearance under austerity. These communications are examined through advertisements, leaflets and other publications used in government campaigns, reports about press conferences in the daily newspapers and the proceedings of the House of Commons. Alongside these, memos and internal correspondence found in government files shed light on the intentions and workings behind those public communications. Among these are: the issues that concerned the departments in charge of clothing controls and what were their priorities; what they saw as possible resistance from the public or possible public relations disasters; who they saw as their target audience for propaganda, which ideas they wanted to express through their communications with the public and which they wanted to suppress. These also helped me gain insight into the ways that existing perceptions of dress and appearance influenced not only British citizens but also British civil servants – who, rather than being a faceless mechanism were themselves a part of the national community and influenced by their own set of ideas about citizenship and appearance.

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Many of the government's communications with the public were mediated through the press, which played an important part in circulating discourses of frugality and citizenship and in iterating or undermining ideas about appearances. The way different publications discussed these issues was influenced to a certain extent by their perceived audience. This thesis therefore uses publications aimed at a variety of audiences, keeping both audience and writers in sight when using this material. Publications were chosen for their circulation and representativeness of the various political denominations (as well as for practical considerations of access). The widely circulated dailies, aimed at middle-class and working-class audiences are represented by the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *Daily Mirror*. The *Times* was added to these to represent the more conservative, upper-class outlook, while the *Daily Herald* and *Daily Worker* represent the radical left. These are supplemented by the large variety of local and regional newspapers, most of which were accessed through the British Newspaper Archive (BNA). The development of digitisation in recent years meant that I could make use of the vast corpus of newspapers available at the BNA and at other digital depositories. This allowed me to expand my research beyond what previous scholars were able to explore. The large regional papers, like the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Yorkshire Post*, provide important insight into subjects that were neglected in the national papers. This is particularly important since this period was plagued by paper rationing, which necessarily restricted the space available in the latter and by implication the subjects discussed. As a subject that was often labelled "frivolous," clothing cannot be discussed without these regional publications. The Yorkshire papers were particularly useful, since the flourishing wool and tailoring industries in the region meant that they often dealt with issues of dress from the business point of view, and shed

light on the interests of the clothing trades. Chapter Five, which deals with the minority of large-bodied citizens and their clothing difficulties under austerity, makes extensive use of local and regional papers, since they were more likely to discuss the scarcity of large-sized clothing than most national newspapers were.

Alongside these daily newspapers, this thesis uses a range of publications aimed at more specific audiences. Trade papers like *Drapers' Record* and *Tailor & Cutter* proved useful for understanding the information available for clothing makers and retailers, their views, difficulties and various clothes buying trends. Several magazines provided insight on the cultural construction of appearance. *Woman* and *Woman's Own* were chosen for their wide circulation as magazines aimed at a lower middle-class and affluent working-class female audience, and supplemented where necessary with the *Daily Mirror Women's Page*. The *Daily Mirror* became particularly useful after the outbreak of the Covid-19 global pandemic meant that I was no longer able to access *Woman* and *Woman's Own*. *Punch* and *Men Only* were chosen for their uniqueness as magazines aimed at an upper-middle and middle-class male audience, respectively. Magazines aimed at men and women helped reconstruct the gendered way in which appearance was constructed, what was included in the boundaries of clothing economy and what was marked as conspicuous consumption for men and for women depending on class, occupation, body shape or age.

Central as all these publications were in constructing and circulating discourses about dress and appearance, they did not necessarily reflect the way Britons thought about these issues. This thesis uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative sources to glean information about attitudes towards dress, appearance, clothing economy and austerity conditions. The 1940s saw a proliferation of social surveys used to test and follow the

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opinions and behaviour of the public, and the BoT (particularly its Consumer Needs Section) made particular use of these. As many historians have noted before, these surveys were not without their problems – both because the methodology of consumer research was still undergoing development and because the acceptability of these surveys, in the eyes of both the commissioners and the surveyed was not yet established.⁶⁵ These problems are mitigated by using a variety of quantitative social surveys alongside qualitative sources. The former include surveys conducted by the British Institute of Public Opinion (BIPO), the government’s Social Survey (originally named the Wartime Social Survey) and the BoT’s wardrobe surveys, conducted independently by the British Market Research Bureau. They also include several surveys concerned with expenditure conducted by both government officials and independent social organisations in the 1930s used in the discussion of pre-war spending patterns. These various surveys are used to contextualise personal sources like letters, diaries and memoirs, as well as qualitative surveys like the ones conducted by Mass Observation.

The use of the Mass Observation (MO) material is under constant debate among historians. The richness of the material that can be found in the MO archive and the variety of topics it covers are difficult to ignore when studying the late 1930s and 1940s, yet this proliferation comes with an abundance of problems. As David Chaney and Michael Pickering warned in one of the early arguments against the unqualified use of MO, this material should not “be pillaged indiscriminately by social historians looking for nuggets of

⁶⁵ See: Savage, *Identities and Social Change*; Mark Roodhouse, “‘Fish-and-Chip Intelligence’: Henry Durant and the British Institute of Public Opinion, 1936–63,” *Twentieth Century British History* 24, no. 2 (2013): 224–48, <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hws012>.

information.”⁶⁶ In his comprehensive history of the organisation, James Hinton demonstrates that the organisation’s methods of analysis tended to be unsystematic, and their panel was not representative of the British population at the time.⁶⁷ Elsewhere Hinton argues that, like other writing, the MO diaries and directives were a kind of “performance,” intended to construct a curated image of the writer to an “imagined audience,” but which also encouraged a remarkable level of sincerity compared with other types of personal sources.⁶⁸

When these factors are taken into consideration while using this resource, the MO archive can offer insight into the attitudes and opinions of certain groups in the British population. MO diarists and the organisation’s panel of respondents came mostly from the middle-class.⁶⁹ The considerable investment of time required to keep their diaries and answer the directive questionnaires that the organisation sent every month meant that they had to be invested enough in the ideas that MO represented to wish to participate in such a project and dedicate to it the appropriate amount of time. They were, in other words, active citizens to some extent.⁷⁰ This thesis therefore uses the MO archive in order to glean the opinions and attitudes of this group. This is most apparent in Chapter Four, which examines the responses of men in white-collar occupations to austerity conditions, and which uses responses written by men in these occupations to MO directive questionnaires about personal appearance, dress and clothes rationing. In analysing their writings, what they chose to express and found appropriate to discuss is valuable in understanding the social

⁶⁶ David Chaney and Michael Pickering, “Authorship in Documentary: Sociology as an Art Form,” in *Documentary and the Mass Media*, edited by John Corner (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1986), 33.

⁶⁷ James Hinton, *The Mass-Observers: A History, 1937-1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 268-72, 278-82.

⁶⁸ James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass-Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5-6.

⁶⁹ Hinton, *The Mass-Observers*, 62, 270-2.

⁷⁰ Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*, 2-3.

constructions and constraints around clothing, dress and appearance. While this use of the MO material plays to the archive's strengths, we need to acknowledge that the extensive use of this archive amplifies middle-class voices and cements the middle-class perspective on this period, an issue with which the historiography is only beginning to grapple.⁷¹

The MO material is used alongside other personal sources, including diaries, memoirs and oral history accounts. Here too, problems of class representativeness abound, as detailed sources from working-class Britons are often difficult to come by. Accounts of working-class lives used in this research are often mediated, either through the lens of middle- or upper-class individuals (be it the newspaper editor or the middle-class diarist writing about encounters with working-class individuals) or the distance of time (as is the case with memoirs and oral history accounts). These mediations, particularly those of the former kind, are acknowledged as a part of the analysis of these sources. As will be demonstrated in both Chapter One and Chapter Three, middle-class writings about working-class Britons do much to shed light about class relationships, even when what they say about the behaviour and attitudes of working-class individuals should not be taken at face value.

Methodology and Theory

Grant discusses the need for further research about citizenship to bridge between its different registers, considering different levels of discourse alongside lived experience.⁷² This thesis aims to do just that. It considers iterations about the ways clothes and appearance featured in the relationship between citizens, state and society as they were

⁷¹ See: Geoffrey G. Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil: Remaking the British Working Class, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁷² Grant, "Historicizing Citizenship in Post-War Britain," 1204-5.

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articulated by government propaganda and officials, by the widely circulated press as well as by private individuals. Through that, it traces a debate about the social, national and personal meanings of appearance in which citizens took an active part, negotiating the levels to which their own appearance could or should signify their place in the national community.

While the language used to discuss austerity regulations was egalitarian, experiences of these regulations were highly unequal. Different groups in the British population entered the austerity period with diverse material conditions, different resources and with distinctive social norms governing their appearance. This renders ineffective any attempt to capture the experience of the entire British population or of very broad groups within that population. Instead, I focused on three relatively small groups, which had a clear social and moral norm that governed their appearance and complicated the relationship between their appearance, their performance of citizenship and their belonging to the national community or to their particular community. This allowed me to demonstrate the various particular ways in which the state's regulation of dress intersected with the social norms that governed it.

My discussion of social norms is partially reliant on the definition of these norms in the studies of social theorists James Coleman and Jon Elster. As noted above, Coleman defines dress norms as a type of convention, in which the creation and preservation of the norm is governed by the need to define the boundaries of group membership.⁷³ The cases I examine in the thesis, however, fit better under his definition of norms of etiquette, under which membership in the group that upholds a certain norm is perceived as better than

⁷³ Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory*, 257-8.

membership of a group that does not uphold that norm.⁷⁴ This categorisation is supported by Elster's inclusion of dress norms under norms of etiquette.⁷⁵ Elster's analysis differs from Coleman's in that it gives a more primary place to emotions in the study of social interactions. Considering the relationship between emotions and norms of etiquette, Elster is baffled by the discrepancy between the trivial nature of the objects of these norms (dress, manners, language and so on) and the strength of reaction to the violation of these norms, which is often met by social ostracism that generates the feeling of shame in the violator.⁷⁶ He suggests it has something to do with the idea that adherence to these norms implies adherence to other norms, as well as consideration for the opinion of others more generally.⁷⁷ This explanation chimes with the limited discussion of dress norms that historians offer, included above.

Yet, as already mentioned, and as will be more thoroughly explored throughout this thesis, dress norms and norms regulating appearance were not, in fact, trivial, but perceived as having moral significance. Elster considers moral norms as a category separate from social norms, which entails a different regulation process (self-inflicted rather than socially inflicted) and evokes a different emotion (guilt, which is related to behaviour, as opposed to shame, which is related to character).⁷⁸ The cases considered in this thesis demonstrate that they cannot easily be separated: the regulation of dress norms, whether these were government induced or existing social norms, could be done internally or socially, could cause shame as well as guilt and could be seen as a clear indication of morality as well as

⁷⁴ Coleman, 258-9.

⁷⁵ Jon Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 363.

⁷⁶ Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior*, 364.

⁷⁷ Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior*, 364.

⁷⁸ Jon Elster, "Norms," in *The Oxford Handbook of Analytical Sociology*, ed. Peter Hedström and Peter Bearman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 195-8.

signifier of social group and status. This messiness of human contact defies the neatness of theory, a problem which Elster acknowledges.⁷⁹ In the context of the period that this thesis explores, dress norms were understood as related to and as part of the system that signalled moral behaviour and character, delineated group membership and indicated one's status within the national community. They were social norms of etiquette, but they were also moral norms.

In considering social views and understandings of dress and appearance, Pierre Bourdieu's work about habitus and social distinction is particularly useful. Bourdieu's concept of habitus organises a person's dispositions around a complex system of social positions.⁸⁰ Bourdieu demonstrates the relevance of individuals' particular position in society and background to the way they conduct themselves, their habits, outlook, inclinations and taste. This system of practices organises individuals' relationship to dress, clothes and appearance in several ways. Most straightforwardly, aesthetic taste informs choices of style.⁸¹ Yet appearance is shaped by other aspects of a person's disposition as well. Practices of embodiment – like posture, the way individuals move, and the way they treat and view their bodies – are also defined by social position.⁸² Lastly, economic inclinations (and realities) and moral values inform the purchases individuals make and the meaning they assign to form.⁸³ In this manner, choosing clothes, buying them, wearing them to construct one's appearance and assessing others' appearance are all practices filtered through the inclinations born of an individual's social position. While structuralist

⁷⁹ Elster, "Norms," 198-9.

⁸⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2010), 93-105.

⁸¹ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 50.

⁸² Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 149-50, 215.

⁸³ See for instance: Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 169, 176.

in form, Bourdieu's theory allows for a certain level of agency, both in the way practices are performed and in the possibility of dissent.⁸⁴ Social position forms a person's disposition; the way this is translated into practices varies. This understanding of attitudes to appearance as the product of personal inclinations informed by social status and social norms influenced my approach in this research. It is evident in my focus on an analysis of the way social status governed individuals' relationship with dress and in a structure that focuses on specific groups and their relationship with different aspects of appearance.

Structure

The structure of this thesis moves from an analysis of old norms to their disruption by new norms, and from the introduction of new norms to a view of how particular groups interacted with them. It begins by sketching a picture of the social order of appearances as it was before war and clothing controls interrupted it, discusses the introduction of new norms by the state and then demonstrates how citizens made sense of and negotiated new norms in light of the old social order. The thesis can largely be divided into two parts: the first establishing sartorial norms, old and new, and the civic meaning they signified, and the second exploring citizens' negotiation of these norms under austerity, through three case studies.

Chapter One discusses the social context of dress and appearance on the verge of clothing controls. It demonstrates the practical and material considerations that governed dress as well as the social interpretations of certain modes of dress and appearance. It discusses material conditions and their influence on the moral meaning that different social groups attributed to appearances and the implications this had on perceptions of citizenship.

⁸⁴ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 105; Entwistle, "The Dressed Body," 149.

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It particularly focuses on the relationship between respectability and dress to show how the appearance of respectability was considered a part of positive civic conduct. The last part of this chapter examines the early wartime period before the introduction of clothing controls, analysing two instances in which the threat of regulations incited a discussion about the moral, social and civic meanings of dress.

Chapter Two discusses the ways government rhetoric constructed good civic conduct as part of its policy of clothing regulations under wartime and post-war austerity. It demonstrates how this construction utilised some pre-war middle-class understandings of respectable behaviour, formally sanctioning them as “good” civic behaviour, while condemning other middle-class sartorial norms, imbuing them with new, negative civic meaning. As the chapter outlines the appearance expected of citizens, it also explores the way propaganda constructed the role of the British government in seeing to the needs of its citizens. These two themes – one exploring the relationship between state propaganda, social norms and civic behaviour, and the other discussing the formal relationship between citizens and the state in the context of clothing regulations – are developed throughout the following three chapters that focus on three case studies. Thus, this chapter sets the backdrop for the ways citizens negotiated notions of citizenship and appearance, and viewed their relationship with the state in the context of clothing controls.

The chapters that follow concentrate on the ways specific groups in the population reacted to clothing controls. Before the introduction of austerity, each of these groups had its own set of norms that constructed the relationship between appearance and citizenship. The case studies will demonstrate how the combination between these norms, the conditions of austerity and the government’s rhetoric all informed citizens’ views about

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appearances, austerity, their civic duties and the government's responsibility for their wardrobes. They give voice to those who were exhorted to accept shabbiness, count their coupons, mend and avoid waste while going through the upheaval of the war and its aftermath.

Chapter Three focuses on young working-class women in the context of conspicuous consumption. It explores the culture of glamour and fashion that appealed to these young women, and its interpretation by middle-class observers as the performance of bad citizenship. The chapter traces this discussion of glamour culture to pre-war debates about cinema, passive leisure and Americanisation. It shows how these debates found a new lease of life among members of the middle-class under austerity, as young working-class women became a prominent workforce and came under close scrutiny. Members of the middle-class who came into contact with young working-class women during this period interpreted their appearance through a lens that blended pre-war constructions of respectable appearance and economic behaviour with the rhetoric of sartorial behaviour under austerity. They understood young women's glamorous appearance as evidence for their failure to perform their duty to the state and to the national community. The chapter then examines how young women viewed their own conduct in this context, suggesting that pre-war working-class notions of respectability, which differed from middle-class understandings of it, shaped the way young women understood their civic role and the relationship between their consumption habits and the state.

While Chapter Three explores themes that are common to historiographical discussions of dress under austerity, such as women's appearance and consumption patterns, Chapter Four directs attention to a less common focal point – men in white-collar

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occupations. This chapter discusses the clash between pre-war dictates of respectable appearance and the construction of appropriate behaviour for men under austerity, which emphasised the acceptability of shabbiness. It argues that, far from embracing the frugal consumption of clothes as patriotic practice, men in white-collar occupations continued to view their sartorial struggles through a social lens, which focused on their duty to their occupational community rather than their duty to the state. The chapter follows these men through war and post-war austerity and demonstrates how, as time progressed, men were increasingly less able to mitigate the effects of rationing and shortages and more willing to view the government as responsible for enabling them to maintain their standards of appearance.

If the first two case studies discuss groups for which norms of appearance mostly organised clothing choices, for the group at the centre of the third case study, social norms regulated their appearance by drawing attention to their physical proportions. Chapter Five focuses on citizens wearing outsize clothes and on their difficulties in coping with a rationing mechanism that placed them at a considerable disadvantage as consumers. Their difficulties are discussed in light of government promotion of rationing policies as “fair shares.” It demonstrates how pre-war perceptions of bodily largeness as indicative of laziness and conspicuous consumption influenced the way civil servants perceived this population, delaying a solution to their clothing problems. Met with assumptions about the way they conducted themselves, however, outsize citizens chose to assert their identity as good citizens, contrasting their consideration for the needs of the national community with the government’s failure in facilitating the fair distribution of supplies to all citizens. This

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chapter is followed by a conclusion, which suggests some further thoughts about the inter-relationship between dress norms, appearance and citizenship in twentieth-century Britain.

Chapter 1: Dress, Classes and Cultures: The Cultural Context of Clothes in Britain on the
Eve of Austerity

Ross McKibbin's *Classes and Cultures* has little to say about clothes. This influential survey of the cultural differences between social classes in England in the middle of the twentieth century notes clothes as a prominent middle-class expenditure and as the main item that working-class people bought on credit.¹ As an aside, McKibbin adds that the latter detail indicates, "the importance decent clothing was coming to have" for working-class Britons in this period.² The only clue McKibbin gives about the social and cultural significance of garments is in his commentary about their importance as status markers in middle-class work cultures.³ Interestingly, the photo chosen for the book's cover, dated 1935, uses dress to mark social difference, as it contrasts a couple clad in luxurious evening clothes with a man whose threadbare appearance marks him as destitute. The photo, it can be imagined, was chosen to represent social gaps and whether it is candid or not, it uses dress and appearance to convey the concept of class.

While it serves its purpose well, this clichéd image glosses over the complexity of dress in this period. The two decades between the First and Second World War saw a rise and an improvement in the production of ready-made garments that scholars often refer to as a "democratisation of fashion."⁴ This retail revolution made fashionable clothing increasingly available to men and women, yet its potential to blur social boundaries was also a source of social anxieties and tensions. The level to which these anxieties represented

¹ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 70-1, 178-9.

² McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 178-9.

³ McKibbin, 65.

⁴ Sarah Norris, "Mass Observation at the Dance Hall: A Democracy of Fashion?" in *Recording Leisure Lives: Histories, Archives and Memories of Leisure in 20th Century Britain*, eds. Robert Snape and Helen Pussard (Brighton: Leisure Studies Association, 2009), 90-1; Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, Chapter 4, "The Democratisation of Menswear? 1919-1939," 99-124.

any real disappearance of class distinction is an ongoing source of historiographical debate. Recent scholarship emphasises the difference that income gaps, as well as social factors, perpetuated. In many ways, clothes and appearance continued to be a field of class difference and a tool of social scrutiny in the years leading to the Second World War and the introduction of austerity. As I will show in this chapter, clothes were markers of status, dictated by gender and could be the difference between having and lacking respectability. They communicated the wearer's social belonging and identity, yet were not always understood in accordance with the wearer's intentions. In 1937, the writer Elizabeth Bowen reflected, "dress has never been at all a straightforward business," and as such, it was "an area of floating mines — tabus [*sic*], *idées fixes*, snobberies, un-admitted frustrations."⁵ For all these reasons, clothes and appearance had a central cultural and social role in British society during this period, a role with which clothing controls interfered.

In the last section of this chapter, I will explore two early wartime discussions of clothes. These public debates, arising before the introduction of any direct interventions with, or official position regarding citizens' clothing habits, are particularly telling of the central role clothes held in British society. The fear of standardisation of dress, already apparent in reactions to the rise of cheap, mass-manufactured fashion, reflected the centrality of dress as an ongoing marker of class. The way beauty columnists reacted to women's new need for practical clothes echoed the way dress was gendered, reflecting women's perceived roles and their perseverance despite women's additional roles as citizens. Both of these debates mark this period as a time of transition in which wartime demands had challenged but not yet transformed established consumption practices. Britons still felt comfortable aligning themselves publicly with pre-war social norms, treating

⁵ Elizabeth Bowen, *Collected Impressions* (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1950), 111.

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clothes as a social tool and personal possession rather than an item of national importance. These debates demonstrate the multi-layered meaning clothes could have, and the complexity of reading them.

The intricate cultural and social role of clothes in this period was governed by the different aspects of these objects. As a commodity, clothes had a monetary value determined by the fabric from which they were made and the methods by which they were designed and sewn. This monetary value determined who was able to obtain them and how often they were able to do so. Income, however, was not the only thing to determine a person's clothing budget and sartorial choices. The way a person dressed in this period often reflected his or her social position: employment, leisure activities, social background and aspirations. The relative importance of work and leisure in certain social circles determined in what garments the people who belonged to those circles invested and why they chose to do so. The way a person appeared to others was also influenced by a myriad of factors: their own social position and that of the observer, their body, the state of their clothes (cleanliness and repair) and additional details that make up personal appearance like hair, make-up and posture. Social norms and concepts of morality and respectability influenced the way Britons looked at each other's appearance and judged it. Attitudes towards clothes therefore incorporated a person's attitude towards garments, dress and appearance.

On a more conceptual level, clothes were thought of as either a basic necessity or a frivolous luxury. Philosopher Kate Soper defines dress as a human social need, as distinct from, but on par with the physical need for clothes as a protection from the elements.⁶ In

⁶ Kate Soper, "Dress Needs: Reflections on the Clothed Body, Selfhood and Consumption," in *Body Dressing*, eds. Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 16-17.

this period, however, attitudes towards dress as an element of social performance were ambivalent. If the necessity of clothing the body for warmth was taken for granted, the need to be dressed in a certain way could produce several interpretations. A middle-class man might consider wearing the appropriate outfit a social necessity, but a supporter of the rational dress movement might consider it a redundant practice that bore unnecessarily heavily on body and budget.⁷ Working-class parents might be satisfied if their children were clothed, but their growing children might consider the clothes in question unbearably embarrassing.⁸ This meant that there was often a gap between what an individual thought he or she needed in terms of clothing and what others thought was essential for that individual to have.

The examples above are taken from a wide range of studies that, unlike McKibbin's, flesh out the complex cultural position of clothes and appearance in British society. Some of these studies focus on clothes as their main object of investigation. Laura Ugolini, for instance, explores the relationship between clothes and identity in the personal writings of men. Her research highlights the relationship between choices of attire, ideas of masculinity and collective identities, which existed in some form in all social classes.⁹ Catherine Horwood focuses on middle-class attitudes to dress in the inter-war period, pointing out the level of social anxiety associated with dressing 'correctly.'¹⁰ Sarah Norris addresses claims about the democratisation of fashion in the same period, demonstrating the disparity between the clothes to which middle- and upper-class women had access and

⁷ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 22-8, 106-7.

⁸ Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 32, 34; Ugolini, "Autobiographies and Menswear Consumption in Britain, c. 1880–1939," *Textile History* 40, no. 2 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1179/004049609x12504376351461>, 208-9.

⁹ Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*; Ugolini, "Autobiographies and Menswear Consumption."

¹⁰ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*.

those to which working-class women could obtain.¹¹ Sarah Levitt and Katrina Honeyman discuss the popularisation of the suit as the mainstay of male attire in the first half of the twentieth century, and Janice Winship explores the new accessibility of women's fashions.¹² Their conclusion is that class differences eroded in this period, unlike Norris and Ugolini, who emphasise difference over similarities in dress.¹³ Alongside studies dedicated to clothes and dress, studies that explore the cultural habits of different groups also provide useful commentary on the role clothes played in British society. This is most evident in studies of youth: Selina Todd and Tebbutt discuss clothes as markers of independence and maturity in the lives of young women and men respectively.¹⁴ Similarly, Andrew Davis and David Fowler highlight the place dress and appearance had in working-class youth cultures, for both men and women.¹⁵ In the following, I will use these studies alongside a range of contemporary social studies to position clothes in British culture and society. I will then explore the tensions that rose in the early months of the war as precursors to Britons' responses to the legislation that unfolded from 1941 and in the context of pre-war social understanding of clothes. This will allow me, in later chapters, to show how wartime regulations intersected and interfered with existing attitudes towards clothes and contextualise of the way citizens reacted to restrictions.

¹¹ Norris, "Mass Observation at the Dance Hall," 90-1, 106-8.

¹² Katrina Honeyman, *Well Suited: A History of the Leeds Clothing Industry, 1850-1990* (Oxford: Pasold Research Fund: Oxford University Press, 2000), 20-1; Sarah Levitt, "Cheap Mass-Produced Men's Clothing in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Textile History* 22, no. 2 (1991), 189-90; Janice Winship, "Culture of Restraint: The British Chain Store 1920-39," in *Commercial Cultures: Economies, Practices, Spaces*, ed. Peter Jackson et al. (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 26-30.

¹³ Norris, "Mass Observation at the Dance Hall," 106-8; Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 111-14.

¹⁴ Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England, 1918-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 199-200; Tebbutt, *Being Boys*, 121-3.

¹⁵ Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-Class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992), 104-5; David Fowler, *The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of Young Wage-earners in Interwar Britain* (London: Woburn Press, 1995), 108, 115n91.

Buying Clothes: Expenditure, Garments and Stores

In the decade leading up to the Second World War, class differences in expenditure on clothes reflected differences in income and priorities. While the clothing expenses of middle-class Britons were socially determined, those of the working-class were dictated mostly (though not only) by necessity. This necessity meant finding solutions to the high cost of clothes but also compromising on quality and appearance. For middle-class Britons, appearances were central, determining a higher investment in clothes. Middle-class consumers therefore differed from the working-class consumers in what they wore, where they bought their garments and the sums they spent on their wardrobes.

In 1937, Seebohm Rowntree updated *The Human Needs of Labour*, his 1914 study devoted to determining minimum wages for workers. As part of the study, he offered guidelines on the minimal expenditure on various necessities including a section devoted to the family's clothing budget. Rowntree estimated that a family of five (a working man, a housewife and three dependent children) could be clothed for an average of 8s. per week, or an annual clothing budget of £20 16s. This budget, based loosely on a small sample of family budgets, was said to represent "the minimum sum which a working-class family must spend on such clothing as is necessary to keep the body warm and dry, and to maintain a modest respectability."¹⁶ A few years earlier, the author of the *Survey of Merseyside* similarly attempted to determine what was an adequate income. The figures given suggested that a weekly expenditure of 6s. 10d. (or £17 15s. 4d. annually) on "clothing, cleaning and light" was sufficient to maintain a family of five, though the author of the survey acknowledged that his rather low figure did not leave any margin of

¹⁶ B. Seebohm Rowntree, *The Human Needs of Labour* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1937), 94.

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comfort.¹⁷ The actual expenditure on clothes provided by the survey shows a far lower figure: a median expenditure of about 3s. a week per family for all but the poorest families, regardless of family size. A Rowntree's Cocoa advertisement from early in the war suggests that these 3s. could be payment for a clothing club: a form of savings account for clothing purchases that I will discuss below (Figure 2). The survey itself supports this option, although its expenditure figures were not necessarily representative given that the survey was based on purchases made in a single week.¹⁸ The fieldwork for *The New Survey of London Life and Labour*, conducted at the end of the 1920s similarly included an estimated minimum standard of living budget. Here the clothing budget was lower than that given in the other surveys, estimating that for a family of five, spending 5s. a week (or £13 a year) on clothes would be sufficient to keep them over the poverty line.¹⁹ This lower estimate could indicate the greater availability of cheaper commodities in London.²⁰ This survey did not attempt to ascertain the expenditure of working-class households.²¹



Figure 2 - Detail from a Rowntree Cocoa advertisement, *Daily Mirror*, 9 September 1939. The weekly budget includes 3s. for a clothing club.

¹⁷ D. Caradog Jones, ed., *The Social Survey of Merseyside* (Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool, 1934), 1:151, 155-6.

¹⁸ Jones, *The Social Survey of Merseyside*, 1:213.

¹⁹ London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), *The New Survey of London Life and Labour*, vol. 3, *Survey of Social Conditions: (I) The Eastern Area (Text)*, (London: P. S. King, 1932), 435.

²⁰ James B. Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain, 1850-1950: A Study of Trends in Retailing with Special Reference to the Development of Cooperative, Multiple Shop and Department Store Methods of Trading* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 343-4.

²¹ LSE, *The New Survey of London Life and Labour*, 3:413-25.

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A Ministry of Labour investigation, undertaken between 1937 and 1938, gives a more reliable representation of working-class expenditure on clothes. The investigation suggests that average weekly expenditure on clothes for working-class families was 5s. 6d., but this figure fluctuated between as little as 2s. 9d. and as much as 10s. 2d.²² The writer of the survey asserted that this difference could be attributed to a greater number of wage earners in the household, making higher expenses possible due to the additional income, and necessary, due to the greater needs of young adults in setting up a wardrobe.²³ Given a similar family composition to that given in the budgets above, expenditure on clothes fluctuated between 3s. 7d. and 9s. 6d., with an average of 5s. 11d. (£15 7s. 6d. annually).²⁴ These figures represented about 6.5 percent of a family's total expenditure, and, compared with the alternative budgets, demonstrate that working-class families rarely spent on clothes the sums that Rowntree deemed necessary to maintain respectability. His estimate for expenditure represented an ideal that was far from the life of many working-class families. Although the budgets published in *The New Survey of London Life and Labour* and *The Social Survey of Merseyside* were closer to reflecting the average sum spent on clothing, it is worth keeping in mind that these budgets were meant to reflect the experience of families living just above the poverty line, rather than the average expenditure. A desire to improve appearances, however, can be extrapolated from the rate at which this figure changed among different household expenditure rates: as expenditure rose, clothing expenditure grew more rapidly, occupying a greater proportion of the family's budget.²⁵ This potential

²² K.H. Ross, "Working Class Clothing Consumption, 1937-1938," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Series A (General)* 111, no. 2 (1948): 147, table 1.

²³ Ross, "Working Class Clothing Consumption," 146.

²⁴ Ross, "Working Class Clothing Consumption," 147 table 1. However, most families in the survey were probably not comparable, since the average number of children (under 14) was 1.15.

²⁵ Ross, "Working Class Clothing Consumption," 148.

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demand for more and better clothes in working-class families began realising itself as war production improved wages, but was then suppressed by clothing controls.²⁶

In comparison, middle-class expenditure on clothes represented an average of 9 percent of total household expenditure across income levels. That this figure barely changed with increased income indicates that expenditure on clothes grew proportionately to income in middle-class populations.²⁷ The average weekly expenditure on clothes for all middle-class income levels, according to a 1937-1938 government inquiry conducted alongside the working-class inquiry mentioned above, was 15s. 6¹/₂d., nearly three times the average working-class weekly expenditure. This result, however, is skewed by the high expenditure of the higher middle-class income groups; the majority of households in this government inquiry spent less than that. Those in the £250-£350 income bracket (41 percent of the sample) spent a weekly average of 12s. 5d. per household (£32 5s. 8d. annually), while those in the £350-£500 income bracket (a further 39 percent of the sample) spent an average of 15s. 4d (£39 17s. 4d. annually).²⁸ Organised by total expenditure rates across classes, it is visible that as total expenditure grew, expenditure on clothes increased, gradually occupying a greater part in a family's budget, up to a limit of nine percent. This suggests that, as income grew, Britons were able to allocate an increasing proportion of their income to their clothes budget, and that their needs grew proportionately to income.

Age and marital status were significant factors in determining clothing expenditure in the sense that young, unmarried wage earners were expected to spend more on their

²⁶ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 177; Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, 3; Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-45*, (London: J. Cape, 1969), 44.

²⁷ Philip Massey, "The Expenditure of 1,360 British Middle-Class Households in 1938-39," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 105, no. 3 (1942): 180, table XXI.

²⁸ Massey, "The Expenditure of 1,360 British Middle-Class Households," 174, table XIV, 175, table XV.

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appearance than either children or married adults. That was particularly true for young women, who were encouraged to present themselves to the best advantage. Rowntree considered young unmarried women's expenditure separately from family budgets, and had this to say about their clothing budgets:

A girl rightly demands not only tidy and suitable working clothes, but garments which she can wear in the evenings and on Sundays. The question of attractive clothing may seem at first sight of small moment, but a little thought will show that a girl who cannot afford to dress nicely will be seriously handicapped in the matter of marriage. Quite apart from vanity, she rightly and naturally desires to look her best, and her admirer or her fiancé likes to see her looking nicely dressed.²⁹

Following this reasoning, he allocated 5s. 3d. to their clothing needs, considerably more than he allocated married women.³⁰ As I show in Chapter Three, clothes were a significant item in young women's budgets. Tebbutt argues that by the 1930s young men from the lower middle- and affluent working-class were also beginning to pay more attention to clothing and personal style.³¹ Working-class youth looked to American films for fashion inspiration: young women imitated Hollywood starlets and young men copied what Roodhouse termed "Gangster Chic."³² Young men would certainly have had more spare money to spend on clothes, given that they earned, on average, 7s. 7d. a week more than young women.³³ Yet, even without the responsibility of supporting a family, for both young

²⁹ Rowntree, *The Human Needs of Labour*, 108.

³⁰ Rowntree, 108.

³¹ Tebbutt, *Being Boys*, 113.

³² Fowler, *The First Teenagers*, 100-1, 104; Mark Roodhouse, "In Racket Town: Gangster Chic in Austerity Britain, 1939-1953," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 31, no. 4 (December 2011): 523-41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2011.620846>.

³³ See Figure 11.

men and women, leisure clothes were not always within reach.³⁴ The subject of personal grooming among working-class youth will be explored in further detail below.

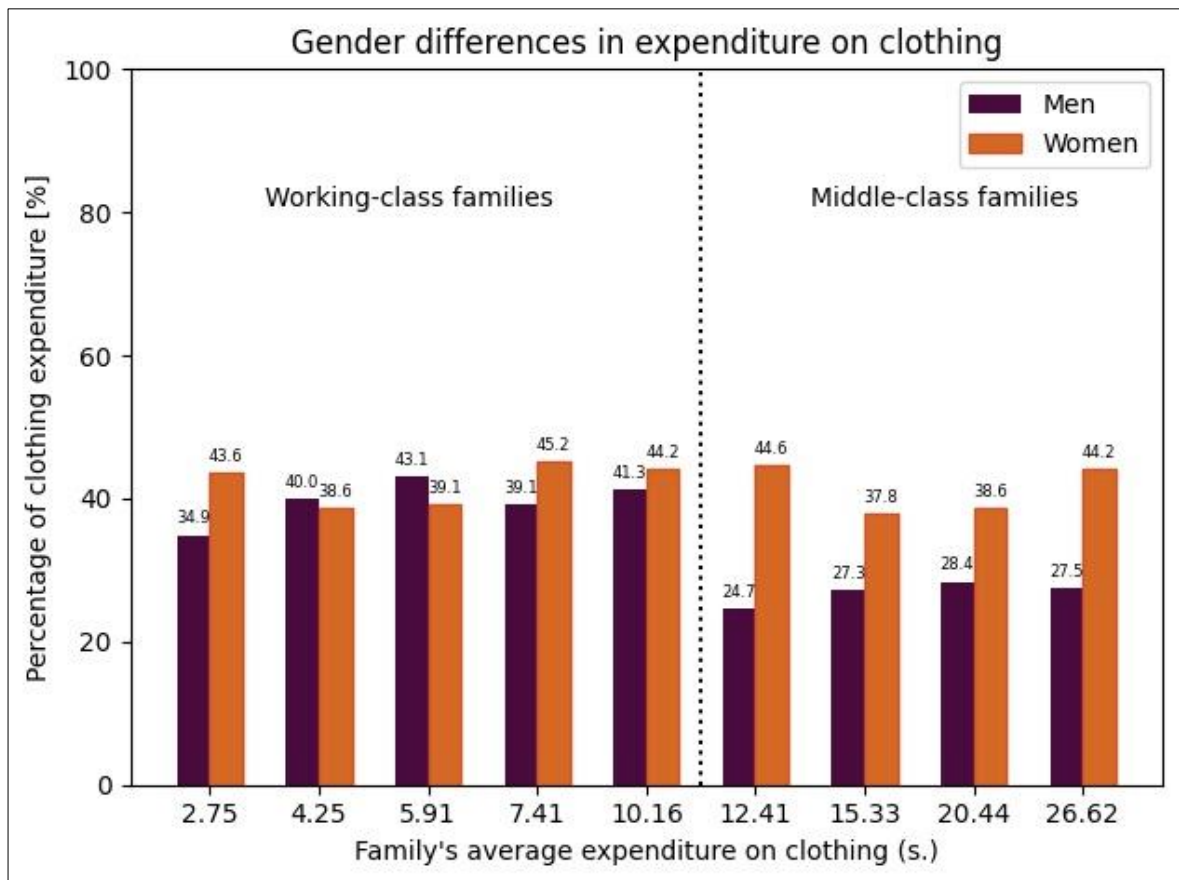


Figure 3 - Gender differences in expenditure on clothes across classes. Expenditure on women's or men's wear is shown as part of total household expenditure on clothes. Sources: Massey, "The Expenditure of 1,360 British Middle-Class Households," 175, table XV; Ross, "Working Class Clothing Consumption," 147, table I.

Gender differences in clothing consumption were class-dependent. In middle-class families, expenditure on women's clothing was consistently higher than expenditure on men's clothing.³⁵ Working-class budgets show no such distinct pattern. In Rowntree's suggested clothing budget, he allocated a 3s. weekly budget for men and a 1s. 9d. weekly budget for their wives.³⁶ In reality, however, women's expenditure could be marginally larger or smaller compared to men's expenditure on clothes, and grew at about the same

³⁴ Davies, *Leisure, Gender, and Poverty*, 104-5; Tebbutt, *Being Boys*, 120-1.

³⁵ Massey, "The Expenditure of 1,360 British Middle-Class Households," 175, table XV.

³⁶ Rowntree, *The Human Needs of Labour*, 95.

rate. That being said, in working-class families with higher expenditure, differences became slightly more pronounced as women spent more on clothes. Rowntree's estimation that working men ought to spend nearly twice as much as their wives on clothing was detached from working-class realities. Looking across classes, expenditure on women's clothes never falls far below 40 percent of the family's expenditure on clothes, while expenditure on men's clothes remains at a similar rate in working-class families, dropping to less than 30 percent of the family's expenditure on clothes in middle-class families (Figure 3).

On the more affluent end of the middle-class scale, budgets could rise significantly higher. Clothing conduct guides like Alison Settle's instructional *Clothes Line* provide interesting insight into social expectations and norms of dress. Unlike Ethyl Campbell, whose guides are popular among historians, but who was relatively unknown, Settle was a former editor of *Vogue*, and a well-known fashion personality at the time.³⁷ The annual budget for women suggested by Settle was £100. Although Settle signals in the text that this sum was higher than what most of her intended readers would spend (she uses it since it suggests percentages rather than a representative budget), she hints that a reasonable budget would still amount to "seventy-five or eighty pounds."³⁸ That budget would have been well beyond most middle-class women, who, according to the above investigation spent an average of about £16 on clothes a year. Since even in the highest income group included in the investigation women's clothing budgets only amounted to about £30, Settle's £75 budget seems to have served a very different social class. It might, however,

³⁷ Quintin Colville, "Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer: The Role of Uniform in Shaping the Class- and Gender-Related Identities of British Naval Personnel, 1930-1939: The Alexander Prize Lecture," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13 (2003): 114; Ilaria Coser, "Alison Settle, Editor of British Vogue (1926-1935): Habitus and the Acquisition of Cultural, Social, and Symbolic Capital in the Private Diaries of Alison Settle," *Fashion Theory* 23, no.1 (2019): 85-108, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704X.2017.1371982>.

³⁸ Alison Settle, *Clothes Line* (London: Methuen and Company, 1937), 140.

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have been the difference between the expenditure of housewives and that of professional women, since there is evidence that professional women spent considerably more than housewives on clothes.³⁹ Budgets, then, could vary significantly, depending not only on class, but on gender, age and employment status. Budgets determined how many articles of clothing a person could buy as well as the quality of garments bought, with higher expenditure often reflecting more spending per item and more items bought.⁴⁰

Class-based distinctions in the types of clothes bought and the ability to assess a person's social class according to appearance remain a source of historiographical debate. In terms of men's clothes, the decades preceding the Second World War brought many changes to patterns of dress. As Ugolini shows, distinct forms of menswear associated with localities, professions and class grew rarer, but did not entirely disappear over this period.⁴¹ Honeymann and Levitt suggest that class distinctions in the types of clothes bought were blurrier towards the end of the 1930s than they were at the beginning of the century. Although certain sections of the upper- and middle-class continued wearing a morning suit (morning coat and striped trousers) as their main form of work-wear until the late 1930s, they began using it alongside the lounge suit.⁴² In fact, the rise of the lounge suit and its ready-to-wear iterations made this form of menswear very common among all classes. Multiple tailoring stores such as Burton and Price popularised the lounge suit by considerably lowering its price and bringing it into the reach of some working-class men,

³⁹ Yearly Budget for a Woman Training College Assistant, Age 59, Mass Observation Archive (MOA), Topic Collection (TC) Shopping, 4/3/J, "Shopping and Saving: Expenditure, February 1942"; "Between You and Me," *Woman's Own*, 9 March 1945; The National Archives (TNA), RG 23/92, "Survey of Knowledge and Opinion About the Economic Situation, December 1947."

⁴⁰ Ross, "Working Class Clothing Consumption," 150.

⁴¹ Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 25-7, 42-4. See also: Tebbutt, *Being Boys*, 115.

⁴² Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 36-40.

especially young men.⁴³ The lowering of prices was possible thanks to the introduction of the wholesale bespoke production method, also known as made-to-measure, which firms like Burton used.⁴⁴ This brought Montague Burton to claim this new method of production made class distinction in dress obsolete.⁴⁵

However, as Ugolini argues, even if the rise of multiple tailoring brought lounge suits within the reach of working-class men, the suits working-class men wore were visually distinct from those middle-class men did. Affluent middle- and upper middle-class men generally saw ready-to-wear suits as drab and shabby, even if those wearing them did not necessarily feel the same way.⁴⁶ Ready-made suits were beginning to become more acceptable in the higher end of the market at the end of the 1930s, and even then, affluent consumers would only buy them in particular firms such as Simpson or Austin Reed.⁴⁷ Horwood suggests further that although lower middle-class men bought suits from multiple tailoring shops, those stores offered a variety of suit options, from ready-to-wear to made-to-measure, and their ready-made suits were not socially acceptable among middle-class Britons.⁴⁸ And although stores like Burton sold far more made-to-measure suits than ready-made ones, the quality of made-to-measure was not equal to that of bespoke. James Jefferys, writing in the 1950s about the development of the retail trade in Britain asserted that there was “no comparison between the quality of the product of the retail bespoke

⁴³ Honeyman, *Well Suited*, 20-1, 53-4; Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 183-4.

⁴⁴ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 297-99, 304-6.

⁴⁵ Katrina Honeyman, “Following Suit: Men, Masculinity and Gendered Practices in the Clothing Trade in Leeds, England, 1890-1940,” *Gender & History* 14, no. 3 (2002): 426-46, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.00276>, 429.

⁴⁶ Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 110-11.

⁴⁷ Ashley Havinden, “Men’s Wear,” in *Design ’46: A Survey of British Industrial Design as Displayed in the ‘Britain Can Make It’ Exhibition Organised by the British Council of Industrial Design* by the Council of Industrial Design (London: HMSO, 1946), 74. See also Chapter Four below.

⁴⁸ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 25-6.

tailor and that of the wholesale bespoke tailor or the ready-made factory goods.”⁴⁹ In other words, although the lounge suit became the ubiquitous male garment, not all lounge suits were alike.

A similar historiographical argument exists with regards to women’s clothes. The women’s wear sector saw a shift towards ready-to-wear garments that was said to democratise fashion as well.⁵⁰ Horwood locates the democratisation claim in the advertising techniques of ready-to-wear firms, which, along with her description of the proliferation of middle-class minutiae of dress etiquette, demonstrate that the expansion of the clothes retail trade should not be taken for a class-crossing levelling of appearances.⁵¹ The persistence of class differences is apparent in the garments themselves; Norris uses images and material sources to demonstrate that the evening-wear working-class women wore to dance halls in the inter-war period could not easily be mistaken for the fashion it was said to copy.⁵² Contemporaries often discussed the levelling of fashions as well. A 1948 article in *Contact* magazine asserted that by 1939 it became “impossible to tell to which class any moderately well-dressed woman belonged.”⁵³ Yet such claims should be qualified by the state of the outfit — even if a young wage earner could afford to buy the latest fashion, her new outfit would not have been of the same quality or lasted as long as one bought from a high-end fashion designer or even a high-end retail firm like Simpson. So, even if they were indistinguishable when new, this would have changed quickly as the cheaper materials

⁴⁹ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 314.

⁵⁰ Winifred Aldrich, “History of Sizing Systems and Ready-to-Wear Garments,” in *Sizing for Clothing: Developing Effective Sizing Systems for Ready-to-Wear Clothing*, ed. S. P. Ashdown (Cambridge: Woodhead Publishing, 2007), 38.

⁵¹ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 6-8 and throughout.

⁵² Norris, “Mass Observation at the Dance Hall,” 95-101.

⁵³ Ruth Sheradski, “Clothes & Class,” *Contact* no. 10 (1948), 52. See also: James Laver, “Fashion and Class Distinction,” *Pilot Papers* no. 1 (1945), 63-74.

grew shabby.⁵⁴ The ability to replace worn out articles of clothing, or to buy articles that might wear out more slowly, became a main factor in the ability to read class into clothing. When rationing was introduced in 1941, this became one of the main claims for inequality in the scheme — that the levelling of the amount of clothes bought did not level their quality and that the gap in quality meant that rationing disproportionately affected poorer populations. This egalitarian measure did more to reverse the democratisation of clothing consumption than to support it.

The price a consumer paid and the quality of the garment they bought were determined to a large extent by where they bought it. The ‘newer’ types of stores developed in the nineteenth century — department stores and multiple stores — saw an unprecedented expansion from the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵⁵ Unlike department stores, multiples, led by the example of the Co-operative stores, tended to control their entire supply chain — manufacturing, packaging, distributing and selling goods unique to their stores. This level of control allowed them to keep down the cost, offering the consumer a more attractive price, and thus appealing particularly to a working-class and lower middle-class market.⁵⁶ Similarly to department stores, multiples tended to keep goods in a range of prices. This practice suggests an appeal to a wide market, yet most multiple stores tended to cater to a certain class. In the menswear trade, for instance, Simpson and Austin Reed catered to a distinctly middle-class clientele, while Burton catered to a lower middle-class and upper working-class market.⁵⁷ For women, large multiple shops like Marks and Spencer or C&A would have been an affordable option that catered to a lower middle-class

⁵⁴ Norris, “Mass Observation at the Dance Hall,” 108. See also: Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 111-12.

⁵⁵ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 315-17, especially 315, table 63.

⁵⁶ Janice Winship, “Culture of Restraint,” 20-5.

⁵⁷ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 24; Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 183.

and affluent working-class market.⁵⁸ A street survey conducted in London in the early 1940s confirmed that they remained popular with that market for their affordable prices.⁵⁹ Department stores developed similar class affiliations in this period.⁶⁰ Fashionable upper middle-class women, argues Bronwen Edwards, shopped in London's West End, using the varied collection of designer boutiques, department stores, multiples and little dressmaker shops to the best advantage.⁶¹ When MO asked these women about their shopping habits in 1942, upper middle-class women in London cited this location as their usual destination for clothes buying before the war, where the large shops had particular appeal.⁶² Edwards notes that although the West End's Oxford street housed large branches of stores catering to the lower middle- and upper working-class, *Vogue* writers ignored their existence when writing to its more affluent readers — suggesting distinct class-based shopping experiences.⁶³

Since the growth of multiple stores was so rapid in the inter-war period, it is easy to think that they dominated the market, and most scholarship emphasises the slow disappearance of independent shops: independent tailors and seamstresses and independent retailers selling ready-made garments.⁶⁴ This narrative of rapid expansion obscures the extent to which independent stores still dominated the clothing market in 1938, claiming about 47.5 percent of profit in the women's outerwear market and 54 percent in the men's outerwear market.⁶⁵ This became a problem when clothing controls were introduced, since

⁵⁸ Bronwen Edwards, "We Are Fatally Influenced by Goods Bought in Bond Street," *Fashion Theory* 10, no. 1-2 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.2752/136270406778050987>, 75; Winship, "Culture of Restraint," 26-7.

⁵⁹ MOA, TC Shopping, 4/3/E.

⁶⁰ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 344-5.

⁶¹ Bronwen Edwards, "West End Shopping with *Vogue*: 1930s Geographies of Metropolitan Consumption," in *Cultures of Selling: Perspectives on Consumption and Society since 1700*, eds. John Benson and Laura Ugolini (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 44-7.

⁶² Edwards, "We are Fatally Influenced by Goods Bought in Bond Street," 75-6; MOA, TC4/3/E.

⁶³ Edwards, "West End Shopping with *Vogue*," 51-4.

⁶⁴ See for instance: Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 175-7.

⁶⁵ James B. Jefferys, *The Distribution of Consumer Goods: a Factual Study of Methods and Costs in*

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it complicated the bureaucracy.⁶⁶ Janice Winship argues that the lingering significance of independent stores was the result of Britain's cultural and economic environment. Strong trade associations prevented multiple stores from utilising bulk buying and an economic "culture of restraint" led the larger British retailers like Burton and Marks and Spencer to eschew competition.⁶⁷ Edwards' research into the way *Vogue* advocated the use of a variety of shops, as well as home dressmaking, further suggests that despite the appeal of the large new shops and their growing prominence in patterns of consumer expenditure in Britain in this period, consumers did not necessarily abandon old shopping habits for new, but used different types of shops on different occasions or for different purposes.⁶⁸ Geographical location also factored into inter-war shopping habits, since, as widespread as large stores were across the country, they were not available to all shoppers.⁶⁹

The advantage of buying in small shops was that they often enabled their customers to buy things on credit.⁷⁰ McKibbin notes that credit buying was becoming a common way of purchasing clothes among poorer populations in the inter-war period.⁷¹ A survey conducted in 1942 found that about 37 percent of working-class consumers were using credit buying, the majority of whom used it to buy clothes and shoes.⁷² Of the various credit systems that existed in this period, those most associated with clothes buying were clothing clubs and Provident checks, in which weekly sums would be paid to an agent, making the payer entitled to a check that could be used to pay for clothing in certain

the United Kingdom in 1938 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), chart VI.

⁶⁶ See: 'Trade Suppliers' Sub-Committee on Coupon Deficits,' dated 15 July 1941, TNA, BT 131/38, "Clothes Rationing: Various Meetings."

⁶⁷ Winship, "Culture of Restraint," 24-6.

⁶⁸ Edwards, "West End Shopping with *Vogue*," 44-7, 54-6.

⁶⁹ Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 184; Edwards, "West End Shopping with *Vogue*," 51-2. See also Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 344.

⁷⁰ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 334.

⁷¹ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 178-9.

⁷² TNA, RG 23/22, "Credit Buying."

shops.⁷³ These methods accounted for about a quarter of clothes credit buying in 1942.⁷⁴ The survey was an attempt to understand whether banning this type of commerce would have a negative impact on people's ability to get by; the results showed that about 23 percent of the population examined in the survey would not be able to use cash instead of credit. The populations most dependent on this route were often the poorer ones: soldiers' wives, young families with many small children and urban populations "living in a poor neighbourhood."⁷⁵ Accounts of working-class lives in the inter-war period demonstrate that this was sometimes the only way poor families could get clothing.⁷⁶ Although credit helped families to make ends meet, it bore considerable stigma. The author of the report noted that, particularly in "more respectable" households, there was a reluctance to admit to buying on credit, and concludes "it is possible that the number of people who buy on credit is larger than the figures in this inquiry show."⁷⁷ Sean O'Connell shows that this negative perception of the practice was centered on the class and gender of buyers: working-class women were depicted as victims of the temptation to buy on credit luxuries they could not afford and that did not befit their status.⁷⁸ Avram Taylor's research suggests that in the inter-war period, this stigma was mostly associated with buying on the Hire Purchase system, which was less associated with clothing.⁷⁹ Yet the colloquial name for buying on credit, 'on the never-never,' which could be used for clothes buying as well, does imply a lack of

⁷³ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 334; Avram Taylor, "'Funny Money', Hidden Charges and Repossessions: Working-Class Experiences of Consumption and Credit in the Inter-War Years," in Benson and Ugolini, *Cultures of Selling*, 168.

⁷⁴ TNA, RG 23/22. Provident checks were mistakenly called "Providence checks" in the survey.

⁷⁵ TNA, RG 23/22.

⁷⁶ Tebbutt, *Being Boys*, 121; Norris, "Mass Observation at the Dance Hall," 93-4.

⁷⁷ TNA, RG 23/22.

⁷⁸ Sean O'Connell, *Credit and Community: Working-Class Debt in the UK since 1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 30-2, 37.

⁷⁹ Taylor, "'Funny Money'," 162-172.

commitment to making the payments in full, and in consequence, questionable character.⁸⁰ This did not, however, necessarily correspond with the characters of consumers using this system. Consumers could use credit as a convenient way of saving, which was a practice associated with respectability, and many shop owners and credit agents were reluctant to sell on credit to those whom they did not know, were known to neglect their payments or even to those who were not deemed respectable enough.⁸¹ O’Connell further notes that reliability of credit repayments was dependent on stability of income, and bad debt was uncommon in times of relative prosperity.⁸²

Alongside the less expensive options for clothes buying, home dressmaking continued to exist as a way of economising without compromising on fashionability. The wide variety of sewing patterns, available through women’s magazines and women’s pages in the daily and weekly press made it possible for women to copy fashionable styles in their homes.⁸³ This practice was encouraged regardless of class, and included in magazines with wildly different readerships — from *Vogue*, which catered to the upper middle-class to *Woman*, which catered to a lower middle-class and affluent working-class market.⁸⁴ Sewing machines could be very helpful in the process of making up these patterns. Although a relatively expensive item, the ability to buy them on credit made them available to a wider public.⁸⁵ The other items required for home dressmaking, namely, fabric and haberdashery were mostly sold by department stores although, here too, independent shops still held a large proportion of the market.⁸⁶ While dressmaking remained a common option for

⁸⁰ Tebbutt, *Being Boys*, 121. See also: O’Connell, *Credit and Community*, 12, 30.

⁸¹ TNA, RG 23/22; Taylor, “‘Funny Money’,” 171; O’Connell, *Credit and Community*, 3, 37-9.

⁸² O’Connell, *Credit and Community*, 36.

⁸³ Norris, “Mass Observation at the Dance Hall,” 101-6.

⁸⁴ Edwards, “West End Shopping with *Vogue*,” 54-6.

⁸⁵ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 401.

⁸⁶ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 348. Compare: Jefferys, *The Distribution of Consumer Goods*,

clothing as late as the 1930s, this option was not available to all. Norris notes the limitations of home dressmakers, and suggests that mothers rather than young women were the ones making the garments.⁸⁷ The increasing reliance on mass-manufactured goods meant that the skills needed to sew garments at home were no longer as common as they had been in the previous century. The Pilgrim Trust report, for instance, indicates that sewing skills among young unemployed women were significantly lacking.⁸⁸ It is possible however that this was a sign of their poverty, since sewing classes at schools and for adults were widely available even before rationing made sewing into a practice of national importance.⁸⁹

Work, Leisure and Dress Cultures

In all classes, where possible, clothes worn for work tended to differ from clothes worn for leisure purposes. The way workers of different classes dressed for their activities depended on the nature of their occupation and social attitudes towards appearance and work. Yet, what is apparent in all classes is that attitudes towards work influenced attitudes towards leisure-wear as well as attitudes towards work-wear. Broadly speaking, the mutual interplay between work, leisure and appearance differed according to the different elements composing the identity of the individual — class, gender and age. In the following section I will outline the way work and leisure played a part in determining attitudes towards dress and appearance.

chart VI.

⁸⁷ Norris, "Mass Observation at the Dance Hall," 102-3.

⁸⁸ Pilgrim Trust, *Men without Work: A Report Made to the Pilgrim Trust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 255.

⁸⁹ Norris, "Mass Observation at the Dance Hall," 102.

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Middle-class dress and appearance were intricately connected to work. As Horwood describes, the morning suit was a marker of status for men in the professions into the late 1930s.⁹⁰ Whether in a morning suit or a lounge suit, middle-class men usually wore a suit, collar and tie to work. Although by the 1930s a suit had become common work wear for manual workers as well, it was not mandatory, while for office workers and professionals it was.⁹¹ The importance of attire permeated middle-class institutions as well. Quintin Colville shows that the prominence of suits in middle-class culture influenced institutional attitudes towards dress and masculinity in the navy.⁹² Virginia Woolf, writing in 1938, observed that men often used dress as a symbolic marker of status, and as a way of “advertising” their education, rank and profession.⁹³ The operation of tailors who specialised in the attire of civil servants, officers or supplied to specific educational institutions re-enforces the connection between work and dress in a middle-class context.⁹⁴

Appearance therefore occupied an important place in British middle-class culture. McKibbin notes the immense pressure on entry-level clerks to spend money on clothes at a rate they could hardly afford on an income of less than £250 a year, which was considered the minimum middle-class income but was often higher than the pay for entry-level positions.⁹⁵ The pressure McKibbin mentions did not necessarily reflect expense on clothes worn during the workday. Although a certain standard had to be kept at the office, clerks often kept their good suit for leisurewear, using it at the office when it wore out.⁹⁶ Yet

⁹⁰ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 36-8.

⁹¹ MOA, FR A17, “Clothes,” April 1939, 4-5. See also: McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 65.

⁹² Colville, “Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer,” 105-13.

⁹³ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1952), 35-40.

⁹⁴ Colville, “Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer,” 111-12; Leonard Woolf’s tailor was styled “Jennings and Gully, Ltd.: Court, Civil and Military Tailors.” See: University of Sussex Library Archive, Leonard Woolf Papers, SxMs 12/2/k/2.

⁹⁵ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 70-1.

⁹⁶ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 42.

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leisurewear and formal dress worn outside the office could be important for career prospects as well. In middle-class professions, important aspects of work culture were conducted outside of work, and leisure activities in the company of colleagues and superiors could often help with promotions and working relations.⁹⁷ A 1939 MO report on clothes remarked that “the need to look ‘respectable’ for business” was a primary concern among men.⁹⁸ Chapter Four will explore the reaction of men in white-collar occupations to their inability to maintain these sartorial standards. A humorous story published in *Punch* in 1948 demonstrates this tension between the existence of pre-war norms and the difficulty of upholding them. Although the protagonist no longer had access to evening-dress, he wanted to look his best to a dinner party “for business reasons.”⁹⁹ He wanted to reflect his ability and success through his dress, wearing well-fitting, clean garments that were appropriate for the occasion, as he did before the war, but years of rationing meant that this was no longer possible.¹⁰⁰

If the absence of the ‘right’ clothes was a ludicrous but temporary problem in the sketch, their long-term absence could pose a very real barrier that prevented working-class Britons from climbing up the social ladder. Tebbutt recounts the story of a young man from a poverty-stricken family who had quit his training course after being ridiculed for his shabby, second-hand clothes, giving up an opportunity to improve his prospects.¹⁰¹ It is possible that this need for clothes that blended in with a middle-class crowd caused scholars to argue that respectability in dress in working-class contexts was associated with

⁹⁷ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 88-90.

⁹⁸ MOA, FR A17, “Clothes,” April 1939, 16.

⁹⁹ Reprinted in: “Optional: A Suitable Story for Xmas,” *Manufacturing Clothier*, December 1948.

¹⁰⁰ See: Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 101-3.

¹⁰¹ Tebbutt, *Being Boys*, 122.

ambition.¹⁰² The need to be dressed appropriately in this context reflected a tendency to read character into dress. As I will show below, a person's ability to be a good worker was judged by how neatly and smartly they dressed, as it was a common conception in middle-class society that a person who was neat and tidy in dress was neat and tidy in their attitude to work. According to Pierre Bourdieu's social theory of distinction, the imperative to follow social rules and dress appropriately weighed particularly heavy on those who still needed to establish their inclusion in a certain group or class, while those whose place was indisputable were not as bound by the social norms of the group.¹⁰³

All of this was true for middle-class women in employment as much as it was true for middle-class men, with the added complication that their gender marked them as frivolous and inferior workers. In a recent study, Beth Jenkins shows that at the beginning of the twentieth century, the gender of women professionals made them conspicuous in the work-place, influencing their construction of appearance.¹⁰⁴ Horwood similarly explores the line women had to carefully tread in the inter-war period between a groomed and feminine personal appearance and the performance of efficiency and diligence, which was traditionally masculine. Just like their male counterparts, women had to be dressed for their entry-level jobs, and outside of them, according to middle-class notions of correctness, while often earning even less than their low-paid male counterparts did.¹⁰⁵ As I will show in Chapter Three, young working-class women were judged on their overtly feminine appearance especially when they crossed into the middle-class domain of the office. Any appearance of indulgence in clothes, hair or make-up created the impression that women

¹⁰² Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 30.

¹⁰³ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 88-9.

¹⁰⁴ Beth Jenkins, "Gender, Embodiment and Professional Identity in Britain, C.1890-1930," *Cultural and Social History* 17, no. 4 (2020): 501.

¹⁰⁵ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 44-50.

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were distracted by more traditionally feminine preoccupations like clothing, glamour and romance, and therefore were not serious about their work.¹⁰⁶ As Jenkins argues, and as apparent from Horwood's study, the archetype for a good white-collar worker was male, and women had to negotiate their position between this archetype and a feminine personal identity.¹⁰⁷

Judged by these middle-class standards, young working-class women often missed the mark with their work attire, as they did not necessarily consider their career when they dressed for either work or leisure. The relationship between work and clothes in this group was defined by its transitory nature — a brief period between leaving school and starting a family, as I show in Chapter Three. This is not to say this period did not matter — the transition from school to work occupied a meaningful place in relation to dress. Selina Todd notes that entering into employment marked a change of wardrobe from childhood to adulthood.¹⁰⁸ What that wardrobe looked like was a product of considerations that were only partially related to work, though clearly affected by wages. The Pilgrim Trust report of unemployment, *Men without Work*, published in 1937, laments the poor garments young women wore to their factory work — discarded dance frocks and shabby dresses riddled with holes. The writers were surprised to find that a young woman dressed that way despite having better clothes at her disposal. From the young woman's perspective, there was no reason to dress smartly for her work at the factory, so she kept her nice clothes for social occasions. Her work was not a place where she was concerned about her appearance, and the possibility that the work might damage her clothes was probably a more pressing consideration than the need to look "clean and tidy," as the report puts it, during the

¹⁰⁶ See also: Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 46.

¹⁰⁷ Jenkins, "Gender, Embodiment and Professional Identity in Britain," 505-10.

¹⁰⁸ Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England*, 199.

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workday.¹⁰⁹ This attitude echoes the conduct of middle-class men, who saved their best suit for social occasions, keeping older suits for office use. The difference, as discussed above, was that these men did so in the interest of their work opportunities and were careful to maintain a certain standard of dress at work, while this young woman chose to put her best dress forward in a social context that was unrelated to work, neglecting her appearance during the workday. Indeed, the report reveals that young working-class women's appearance affected their employability: employers cited neglected clothing and a "poor" appearance as reasons young women were not hired for domestic work.¹¹⁰ Although not all girls neglected their appearance at work, a groomed appearance could be read in a social context as well. Wartime reports about the groomed appearance of factory workers often focused on its sexualised nature and its complete disregard for workplace safety – interpreting it as socially-related rather than work-related.¹¹¹ While their employers thought their appearance should communicate their characters as good workers, young women were more concerned with the social aspects of dress and with constructing a fashionable, Hollywood inspired, appearance.

The expectation that work would be a significant part of their lives meant that for working-class men, both young and old, there was a more complex relationship between work, leisure and clothes. Having a Sunday best suit, which by the 1930s meant a lounge suit, was important for social purposes in many working-class communities, but it was also a representation of financial status.¹¹² It was a physical manifestation of the ability to pay

¹⁰⁹ Pilgrim Trust, *Men without Work*, 253-4.

¹¹⁰ Pilgrim Trust, 255.

¹¹¹ See Chapter Three below.

¹¹² Tebbutt, *Being Boys*, 120-1; Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, 104; Pilgrim Trust, *Men without Work*, 308.

for more than the bare necessities of living by having a clean change of clothes.¹¹³ A spruce appearance, however, was not above all else, and some values could supersede it. In poor communities, the ability to blend in meant that shabbiness was sometimes valued more than a new set of clothes.¹¹⁴ For the unemployed, having a new set of clothes bought with money earned by their ‘dependents’ was unimaginable, since there was no pride in possessions that were not earned.¹¹⁵ The connection between appearance and community value systems that these relationships suggest will be further explored below.

The kind of work in which middle-class and working-class Britons were traditionally involved dictated their social perceptions of clothes. As James Laver noted in 1946, “Clean linen is a symbol of gentility because it cannot be worn by anyone who engages in any kind of manual work.”¹¹⁶ For middle-class men in the twentieth century, the suit, with its white shirt, collar and cuffs, represented their position as non-manual workers and communicated their respectability. They wore it at work, and were able to wear more elevated versions of it for social occasions. When Virginia Woolf wrote about the symbolic use of men’s attire she referred to ceremonial dress, but this was true, if not quite in the same straightforward way, for their more commonly worn clothes as well. Middle-class men, particularly in white-collar occupations, used their clothes to communicate their success and the desire to improve their position. For the poorer working-class men and women, the ability to change into different clothes at the end of the workday was in itself a mark of affluence, and such clothes had to be cherished and saved. As access to fashion

¹¹³ Tebbutt, *Being Boys*, 121-4. For pride taken in the workwear of skilled labour, see: Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 33-5.

¹¹⁴ Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 42-4.

¹¹⁵ Pilgrim Trust, 148; Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 117-19.

¹¹⁶ James Laver, *A Letter to a Girl on the Future of Clothes* (London: Home and Van Thal, 1946), 17.

improved for both men and women, particular social cachet and personal pride became attached to the ability to obtain clothes independently, particularly if they were new. The emphasis in this culture of appearance was placed on the social acceptability clothes secured through their conformity or the social values they communicated. As different as they were, both middle-class and working-class approaches to dress were entangled in notions of respectability. The next section will discuss the way respectability defined dress norms in specific class contexts and how fashion influenced choices of attire.

Appearance: Dress, Respectability and Fashion

Attention to respectability and fashion in *Classes and Cultures* appears to be almost incidental. McKibbin's discussion of respectability is brief, mainly dealing with the blurry line within the working-class between rough and respectable behaviours.¹¹⁷ Yet his research demonstrates the importance of respectability in the construction of class in British society, as it crops up in relation to questions of morals and class conflict.¹¹⁸ Although there is no direct discussion of fashion, his portrayal of extravagance as problematic in a middle-class context gives some indication of how this subject related to class distinctions and change.¹¹⁹ Later studies of class shed more light on these subjects. Savage, for instance, shows how middle-class social investigators assessed working-class respectability by judging personal appearance and surroundings, suggesting that there was an acceptable association between the two.¹²⁰ Jon Lawrence builds on this work to show how such social constructions of respectability operated within the working-class by examining their later

¹¹⁷ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 198-202.

¹¹⁸ For instance in conflicts around housing, see: McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 98-100.

¹¹⁹ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 54-6, 72.

¹²⁰ Savage, *Identities and Social Change*, 100-101.

disintegration.¹²¹ Following the path laid by these studies, I will examine the complex relationship between respectability and appearance below, unpacking what respectability meant for different groups. I will then use studies of inter-war fashion to examine how changing trends informed the clothing choices of different groups.

Rowntree's remark that a working-class family's clothing budget should allow them to maintain "a modest respectability" hints at the centrality of that concept to the relationship between upper- and middle-class social investigators and their working-class subjects.¹²² The inclusion of this note as part of a discussion of the clothing budget shows that there was an important connection between appearance, dress and respectability, which Rowntree did not feel the need to illuminate. This connection is apparent in many other social studies in the first half of the twentieth century, when the use of visual cues to determine respectability was common.¹²³ Few, however, reflected on what the term meant.

The Pilgrim Trust report was unusual in the amount of attention it paid respectability and its effort to define what the term meant in working-class contexts. It included a chapter that examined the various behaviours and habits that determined a person's respectability among the unemployed it studied. The authors defined respectability as the quality that indicated moral standing and status within a community.¹²⁴ In addition to this direct debate about the working-class meaning of the word, the report also reveals, indirectly, its somewhat different middle-class interpretations. In their discussion of working-class respectability the writers attached respectability to character and to actions that directly indicated it. This interpretation was different to the one used by the social

¹²¹ Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me*, 11-14 and throughout.

¹²² Rowntree, *The Human Needs of Labour*, 94.

¹²³ Savage, *Identities and Social Change*, chapters 2 and 4.

¹²⁴ Pilgrim Trust, *Men without Work*, 181.

investigators who gathered the evidence on which the report was based, which judged a family's respectability according to appearances: the tidiness and neatness of their dress and their surroundings. This middle-class notion of respectability is also apparent in the way working-class respectability is framed. In one place, the writers note of the unemployed in Leicester:

... those who had maintained membership of the Boot and Shoe Operatives' Union in spite of being out of work for years, were the most respectable; not necessarily keeping up fancy domestic standards, but feeling, as it seemed, that solidarity with those with whom they had once worked gave them a sort of independent status in relation to the community as a whole.¹²⁵

What this passage suggests is that the writers understood the word "respectability" to mean the maintenance of certain domestic standards, and felt compelled to point out when the word was used to denote something else. Other sections in the report also demonstrate the strong connotation between respectability and a certain standard of living. In one place, the report describes a middle-class family of a man who was unemployed for over four years. Although they had no money left, and were quickly accumulating debts, they refused to let go of "that last straw [...] their respectability," materialised in their distinctly middle-class home and clothing.¹²⁶ The respectable home, as reported by the social investigators, tended to be "very clean" and "tidy," and the families living in it "neatly dressed."¹²⁷ Those who could not claim that title were described as "not too clean" and as living in "somewhat nightmarish surroundings."¹²⁸ This does not mean that respectability for them was simply

¹²⁵ Pilgrim Trust, *Men without Work*, 195.

¹²⁶ Pilgrim Trust, 93.

¹²⁷ Pilgrim Trust, 191, 194. See also: 197, table XLI.

¹²⁸ Pilgrim Trust, 192, 189 respectively.

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about outward appearance. What it does mean is that for the middle-class investigators and writers of the report, cleanliness and a neat and tidy appearance were so closely connected to a respectable character that the existence of the visible qualities was an indication of invisible ones.

As the reference to other interpretations of “respectability” suggests, the way the investigators defined respectability – through the medium of appearance – did not necessarily match the definition of the communities they studied. The historiography of the nineteenth century has a rich debate about the multiple meanings of respectability, though little has been written about it in the context of the twentieth century.¹²⁹ What is apparent from scholarship about the nineteenth century is the malleability of this term, that depended on class and context – whether someone was or was not respectable, depended on the intersection between their class and the class of the person who defined them.¹³⁰ This is apparent in twentieth-century social surveys. Savage, Lawrence and other scholars highlight the play of class hierarchies in the encounters between social investigators and their subjects throughout the twentieth century, suggesting that field notes should be ‘read’ for class-bound judgements and assumptions.¹³¹ In the Pilgrim Trust report, references to and definitions of respectability thus reveal the assumptions of investigators about what they thought respectability looked like.

¹²⁹ For a survey of this debate see: Peter Bailey, “‘Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?’ Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Working-Class Respectability,” *Journal of Social History* 12, no. 3 (1979): 336-53, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3787265>; Matthew Hilton implicitly suggests a continuities in notions of respectability, see: Matthew Hilton, “The Legacy of Luxury: Moralities of Consumption since the 18th Century,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 4, no.1 (2004): 107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540504040906/>.

¹³⁰ Bailey, “Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?” 337, 340, 342-3.

¹³¹ Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me*, 6-9; Savage, *Identities and Social Change*, 94-9 and throughout. See also: Daisy Payling, “‘The People Who Write to Us Are the People Who Don’t Like Us’: Class, Gender, and Citizenship in the Survey of Sickness, 1943–1952,” *Journal of British Studies* 59, no. 2 (2020): 315–42, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2019.291>.

The report also makes evident that middle-class incomes were what made it possible to comfortably maintain a “respectable” appearance, without the need for excessive sacrifice elsewhere.¹³² In populations whose income could not sustain the effort of keeping up appearances, the meaning of the word “respectable” was not always as firmly attached to external markers. Rather, there could be two competing understandings of this concept. One attitude replicated the middle-class association of cleanliness and tidiness with a respectable moral character, placing undue emphasis on appearances. This often came at the expense of essential food items or in place of the moral qualities these displays meant to represent.¹³³ For others, however, “respectability” was detached from tidy appearances, which could not be maintained, and only denoted some moral quality — independence, a sense of self-worth or loyalty to one’s trade — that could not be read at a glance. McKibbin similarly emphasises the shifting meaning of respectability that changed with time and place, while noting that some behaviours were considered universally respectable or unrespectable.¹³⁴ The Pilgrim Trust report made it clear that above all, the working-class sense of respectability was tied to different aspects of independence: the ability to support oneself and keep certain aspects of one’s life, like expenditure, private – abilities which, in themselves, were performed socially in some manner.¹³⁵ In Chapter Three, I will demonstrate how this sense of independence guided the behaviour of young working-class women, who were adamant about their right to construct their appearance without the censure or interference of outsiders. While this understanding of respectability did not

¹³² Pilgrim Trust, *Men without Work*, 93-5, 121-3, 190-1. See also: David Vincent, *Poor Citizens: the State and the Poor in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Longman, 1991), 3-4.

¹³³ See for example: Pilgrim Trust, *Men without Work*, 121-3, 191.

¹³⁴ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 198-9.

¹³⁵ Pilgrim Trust, *Men without Work*, 180-200. See also: Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, 3.

dictate a certain appearance, it could influence people's attitude toward their own, and others', appearance.

Prevailing middle-class notions of respectability influenced dress more directly. Horwood notes the long standing middle-class association between cleanliness of attire and respectability.¹³⁶ She also marks the boundaries of acceptable — and thereby respectable — middle-class dress as a cautious middle-ground that steered clear of any extremes, either in appearance or in expenses on appearance.¹³⁷ This chimes with McKibbin's observation that middle-class norms equally disapproved of both under- and over-spending.¹³⁸ These observations suggest that respectability was associated with restraint. Ugolini points to the vague nature of respectability, and the association of this concept with particular forms of dress, most notably collar and tie, emphasising the importance of this concept for class distinctions. To be respectable, she argues, meant to be, or to aspire to be, a member of the middle-class.¹³⁹

As important as dress was for notions of respectability, a respectable appearance was meant to represent certain personal qualities, and the existing scholarship about dress does not discuss these at length. Horwood suggests that hygiene and restraint connoted respectability and that for women, respectability was connected to modesty and sexual morality.¹⁴⁰ Ugolini grounds respectability in nineteenth-century notions, associating it with social status and assumptions about law-abiding social behaviour.¹⁴¹ Relying on nineteenth-century scholarship is a common approach: in an essay about morality and consumption,

¹³⁶ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 125.

¹³⁷ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 6.

¹³⁸ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 72.

¹³⁹ Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 30-1.

¹⁴⁰ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 120.

¹⁴¹ Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 30.

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Matthew Hilton suggests that the concept of respectability continued to represent values of “thrift, industry, honesty, prudence, forethought and temperance,” that dominated nineteenth century middle-class outlook, yet like Ugolini, he offers little analysis of mid-twentieth century material.¹⁴² The Pilgrim Trust report defined respectability as an indication of morality, yet the studies cited above demonstrate that this morality was tangled with certain class-specific norms and was not universal. In order to ground the term in a twentieth-century context and understand what were the characteristics middle-class contemporaries thought a respectable appearance connoted, it may be helpful to think about the words that the Pilgrim Trust’s investigators used to describe the appearance of those who were considered respectable: neat, tidy and clean.

When asked about their preferences regarding personal appearance in themselves and others in 1939, many of the middle-class respondents on the MO panel used these words to describe what they thought were the minimum demands of grooming and hygiene.¹⁴³ Many insisted that others should adhere to these basic expectations more than they were willing to subject themselves to any strict grooming and styling routines. Occasionally, one of the respondents gave their reasons for thinking personal appearance was important:

A reasonably good appearance is a duty to the community which should not be condemned to put up with drabness and dirt. [...] A person careless with dress would probably be careless in most other things.¹⁴⁴

Keeping a neat, tidy and clean personal appearance conveyed organised thought, while “an untidy dress usually denotes an untidy mind,” or even an unclean mind.¹⁴⁵ Often, however,

¹⁴² Hilton, “The Legacy of Luxury,” 107.

¹⁴³ MOA, answers to April 1939 Directive.

¹⁴⁴ MOA, DR 1099, reply to April 1939 Directive.

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cleanliness was in itself a valuable quality in a person. A woman typist, protesting against the unfairness of judging people according to their appearance, proclaimed “I’ve known apparently neat and clean girls wear the most awful underclothes,” suggesting that the act of wearing underwear which were not neat and clean was in itself a deplorable character trait.¹⁴⁶ These social standards were well known and well understood enough that even those who professed themselves not to believe in them felt that a tidy or untidy appearance influenced their immediate impression of people.¹⁴⁷ In other cases, those who did not like to invest in their personal appearance felt compelled to do so in order to conform to basic social expectations.¹⁴⁸ This was particularly true in the work environment, where a certain standard of respectability had to be maintained, and smartness could be “a business asset.”¹⁴⁹ Respectability in dress therefore practically meant clean, neat and tidy clothes, but denoted a character that was organised, methodical and efficient, in line with nineteenth-century values of respectability.

The effort of self-presentation was not only considered beneficial for the community and for gaining status within the community, but was considered to be beneficial for the self. In a study of old age and poverty included in *The New Survey of London Life and Labour*, the writer noted his pleasure at the good standard of appearance that most of the old age pensioners interviewed displayed. When commenting on the state of mind of those surveyed, he added,

¹⁴⁵ MOA, DR 1034, reply to April 1939 Directive; DR 1325, reply to April 1939.

¹⁴⁶ MOA, DR 1040, reply to April 1939 Directive.

¹⁴⁷ MOA, DR 1019, reply to April 1939 Directive.

¹⁴⁸ MOA, DR 1094, reply to April 1939 Directive; DR 2384, reply to April 1939.

¹⁴⁹ MOA, DR 1099, reply to April 1939 Directive.

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The few who are depressed are, as one might expect, largely identified with those who have not taken the trouble to keep their houses and themselves clean [...].¹⁵⁰

Cleanliness and tidiness, then, were understood to improve a person's attitude as well as his or her status.

As explored above, such commentary about the cleanliness and appearance of working-class people was common in social surveys, betraying a middle-class interpretation of working-class appearances and habits. Instructions for New Survey of London Life and Labour investigators encouraged them to write down "any other information that may help to define the economic position of the family."¹⁵¹ From the published interviews, it seems that some of the investigators responded to this encouragement by including extensive notes about the appearance of the interviewees and their surroundings.¹⁵² These notes were informative about more than just economic position, and they are often intertwined with comments about industriousness and forethought.¹⁵³ Savage places the social investigation projects conducted in the 1930s in the context of larger projects of social policy meant to benefit the masses they studied. He notes how this line of sociological investigation focused on character and culture, and used visual markers to glean information about both. His argument shows how these projects culminated in works about the cultivation of citizens – most notably T.H. Marshall's. The reforms that these projects of mass investigation were meant to further saw the cultural improvement of workers as a key concern in their development as more involved, active

¹⁵⁰ LSE, *The New Survey of London Life and Labour*, 3:208.

¹⁵¹ LSE, 3:415.

¹⁵² See interviews included in: LSE, *The New Survey of London Life and Labour*, 3:457-68.

¹⁵³ Compare, particularly, the interviews with Mrs. P and Mrs. K to the interview with Miss S.: LSE, *The New Survey of London Life and Labour*, 3:457-9.

citizens, which made it important to note their character as well as their well-being.¹⁵⁴ As Savage notes, these ideas about civic character were the reincarnation of older ideas about the civilization of the working-class.¹⁵⁵ The visual cues that middle-class social investigators perceived as indicators of a positive character, and which included a neat, tidy and clean personal appearance, marked their working-class subjects as contributing members of the community, or as good citizens.

The middle-class outlook on dress was therefore intertwined with its outlook on character. When worn, clothes represented positive or negative character traits and contributed to the cultivation of the individual as well. Acceptable patterns of behaviour were also entangled in the purchase of clothes as a commodity. Horwood suggests that respectability was moderation and could not be associated with extremes in price or in fashion.¹⁵⁶ McKibbin points out that furs symbolised the *nouveaux riche* and profiteers, who were not liked among the established middle-classes.¹⁵⁷ The views expressed and observed in Nella Last's wartime diaries link the newly rich with furs, but also with unrespectable qualities like grubbiness.¹⁵⁸ This raises questions about the respectability of fashion.

It is revealing that Settle bid "au revoir to fashion" and declared that "showiness is the deathblow to fine dressing."¹⁵⁹ Her advice, aimed as it was to upper middle-class women, highlighted a planned, budget-conscious approach to clothes buying that did not

¹⁵⁴ Savage, *Identities and Social Change*, 106-8.

¹⁵⁵ Savage, 107-8.

¹⁵⁶ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 7.

¹⁵⁷ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 54.

¹⁵⁸ Nella Last, *Nella Last's War: The Second World War Diaries of Housewife*, 49, eds. Richard Broad and Suzie Fleming (London: Profile, 2006), 85, 208.

¹⁵⁹ Settle, *Clothes Line*, 265.

fall easily for new fashions.¹⁶⁰ This does not mean that middle-class women did not participate in fashion, the proliferation of fashion advice in women's magazines and women's pages suggests that such guidance was sought, but that middle-class culture considered too much fashionability suspect. One of the MO respondents, a 24-year-old civil servant, expressed this view, writing "Generally I like to buy good things, not too fashionable, so that they will last 2 or 3 seasons, and look tidy all the time."¹⁶¹ Her purpose was to look good, but in buying fashion she was calculated and thrifty – considering the serviceability of an item and not just its appearance. With the introduction of rationing, such a calculated approach will receive the government's endorsement.

If middle-class women's approach to fashion was cautious, middle-class men's approach was doubly so – even those respondents who thought investment in personal appearance was important, were careful to emphasise that too much attention should be avoided. A 61-year-old chemist expressed a common view when he wrote,

I like and value neat, tidy and suitable clothes but not meticulousness. I don't like extremes or slavish adherence to fashion in either men or women – for the sake of fashion, or pretentiousness. [...] I am more prone to despise the ultra dressed as a dude, than the careless.¹⁶²

What one respondent called "dandyism" was considered inappropriate and bore effeminate connotations for men.¹⁶³ Although attention to the details of dress – its cleanliness, state of repair and appropriateness for the occasion – was a staple of middle-class men's life, they had to balance this care with a sober wardrobe that did not *seem* to have required much

¹⁶⁰ See: Settle, *Clothes Line*, 133-45.

¹⁶¹ MOA, DR 1024, reply to April 1939 Directive.

¹⁶² MOA, DR 1099, reply to April 1939 Directive.

¹⁶³ MOA, DR 1325, reply to April 1939 Directive. See also: Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 146-51.

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thought.¹⁶⁴ Beyond the danger of social sanction, any kind of effeminacy implicated men in the eyes of the law, putting into question their status as law-abiding citizens.¹⁶⁵

Similarly, on working-class men meticulous dress was often interpreted as evidence of delinquency. When working-class men dressed fashionably, middle-class onlookers categorised it as “flashy,” and flashy clothes were the dress of criminals. The Pilgrim Trust report pointed out that “the flashily dressed young men in South Wales (or indeed anywhere else) are often not the best,” categorising them elsewhere as “work shy.”¹⁶⁶ Roodhouse argues that the imitation of the American gangster style, a type of flashy style popular in the 1930s and ‘40s, was culturally interpreted as the mainstay of delinquent working-class youths despite its prevalence among all classes, regardless of criminal tendencies.¹⁶⁷ This categorisation of working-class fashionable dress as indication of lacking morals chimed with middle-class aversion of sartorial excess, as well as with another, older view that disapproved of dressing beyond one’s social status and position.¹⁶⁸

The fashionability of copying film styles among young working-class men and women was noted above. When young working-class women imitated these styles, public reaction to them was milder than the reaction to young men, and as Anette Kuhn shows, they were considered amusing and mostly harmless girls, who had not yet outgrown their childish fantasies.¹⁶⁹ This is not to say that young women’s imitation of film stars was viewed in a positive light. Claire Langhamer notes the disapproval that middle-class investigators demonstrated towards young women’s indulgence in the cinema as a

¹⁶⁴ See also: Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 148-9.

¹⁶⁵ Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 144-7.

¹⁶⁶ Pilgrim Trust, 185 and 173, respectively.

¹⁶⁷ Roodhouse, “In Racket Town,” 525-7.

¹⁶⁸ See for instance: MOA, DR 1092, 1124 and 1178, replies to April 1939 Directive.

¹⁶⁹ Anette Kuhn, “Cinema Culture and Femininity in the 1930s,” in Gledhill and Swanson, *Nationalising Femininity*, 177-8.

“passive” form of leisure.¹⁷⁰ I will explore in Chapter Three how the imitation of Hollywood styles was seen as part of this passivity, and how this was linked under austerity to conspicuous consumption, seen as a sin against the nation.

Regardless of the criticism directed towards this youth fashion, studies of youth leisure in the inter-war period demonstrate that young men and women utilised what they saw on screen as an act of aspiration and self-fashioning in both senses of the word.¹⁷¹ Langhamer’s discussion of the cinema comes in the context of a broader exploration of young women’s perceived entitlement to leisure. She frames this discussion around women’s memories of youth as “a period of legitimate leisure,” in which women felt justified in spending money on themselves for pleasure if they had the time and financial ability to do so.¹⁷² This feeling of entitlement is evident in my exploration of how young women dealt with external limitations and censure placed on their fashion choices in Chapter Three.

Appearance on the eve of the Second World War was a matter of individual preference and budget, but its public aspects were unavoidable. It was read for signs of correct spending patterns and self-management habits; for signs of fashionability and influence; and for signs of class, status and respectability. In the context of middle-class society there were minimum standards of respectability that were necessary for social acceptance. These affected a person’s employability, since certain aspects of appearance were thought to represent certain character traits and could therefore influence the lives of all workers, whatever their social class. To some extent, these norms shaped the way

¹⁷⁰ Claire Langhamer, *Women’s Leisure in England 1920-60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 52.

¹⁷¹ Roodhouse, “In Racket Town,” 527; Kuhn, “Cinema Culture and Femininity,” 187-9.

¹⁷² Langhamer, *Women’s Leisure in England*, 50.

Britons presented themselves, through dress, make-up and hair styling. All of these aspects of appearance however, were presented on the body, which was itself subject to public scrutiny. The next section will discuss the way body shapes were conceptualised in the inter-war period and the relationship between these bodies and the clothes that adorned them.

Ideal and “Difficult” Figures: Bodies and Clothes

In an essay about the dressed body, fashion philosopher Joanne Entwistle laments that social scholars have often neglected the relationship between clothes and the bodies that wear them.¹⁷³ Some attention to how contemporaries thought about bodies in relation to clothes is therefore due. The socially acceptable sizes and shapes of the body were influenced in this period by health considerations of diet and exercise and by considerations of fashionability. In an age that saw an increased standardization of clothes and their sizes, this meant that individuals whose bodies were outside the norm could find it difficult to dress themselves.¹⁷⁴ While studies about the regulation and shaping of the body in the name of health in this period are abundant, there is very little research about how these conceptions influenced dressed bodies – or consumers who had to dress abnormal bodies. This section will discuss contemporary ideas about health and the body as well as the configuration of morality around ideal and deficient bodies. It will also offer some initial thoughts about how the intersection between this image of the body and the increasing standardization of clothes affected consumers.

¹⁷³ Entwistle, “The Dressed Body,” 135.

¹⁷⁴ Emma Purce, “Scales of Normality: Displays of Extreme Weight and Weight Loss in Blackpool 1920–1940,” *Cultural and Social History* 14, no. 5 (2017): 675.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14780038.2017.1375720>.

By the 1920s, the mass production of garments began imposing a narrow set of available sizes. The development of mass-produced garments for both men and women accelerated in Britain after the First World War. According to Winifred Aldrich, the women's wear sector was aided by the shift towards less form fitting garments, while the menswear sector benefitted from the collection of a wide range of anthropometric data for uniform during the war.¹⁷⁵ The British garment industry, however, did not have a single system for sizing. In the menswear industry, two sizing systems were available and the sector will be discussed below. In the women's wear sector there was a plethora of local systems, in addition to the use of American sizing charts.¹⁷⁶ Lauren Downing Peters suggests that American manufacturers tended to concentrate on sizes below a 42-inch bust size.¹⁷⁷ British sizing systems tended to use names rather than measurements: SW (small woman), W (woman), WX (woman extra), OS (outside), XOS (extra outside). The measurements these denoted could vary considerably. XOS, usually the largest size, went up to a 46-inch bust, yet the more commonly advertised sizes reached WX, which was probably equivalent to a 38- to 40-inch bust size.¹⁷⁸ A sample of newspaper advertisements for the Whitsun sale in May 1938 suggests that size ranges changed significantly between stores and between models: some stores stating they carried "all sizes," others carried some models in smaller sizes and others in larger sizes, while several stores advertised frocks

¹⁷⁵ Aldrich, "History of Sizing Systems," 39-42.

¹⁷⁶ Aldrich, 39, 42.

¹⁷⁷ Lauren Downing Peters, "Flattering the Figure, Fitting in: The Design Discourses of Stoutwear, 1915-1930," *Fashion Theory* 23, no. 2 (2019):167-194, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704X.2019.1567059>.

¹⁷⁸ Aldrich, "History of Sizing Systems," 41. Aldrich does not mention WX, but this was a very common size in clothes advertising in the late 1930s as well as throughout the 1940s. See advertisements cited below.

only up to size WX.¹⁷⁹ Unlike garments made to fit the wearer, ready-to-wear clothes existed in particular sizes, and women had to find the sizes that fit them.

The situation in the menswear trade was similar. In 1949, a prominent tailoring guide asserted that wholesale bespoke tailoring “well ‘covered’ [...] the various sizes and types of figures.”¹⁸⁰ According to Katrina Honeyman, however, the most popular wholesale tailor, Burton, discouraged his sales assistants from selling to men whose girth measurements exceeded 44 inches.¹⁸¹ Men who were not of standard size, then, did not get to benefit from the increasing availability of cheap, made-to-measure suits. Honeyman’s assertion that Burton’s approach was dictated by profit considerations, suggests that there may have been a scarcity of sizes in ready-to-wear styles as well. Advertisements for menswear at the time tended either to mention no sizes or state that the store carried “all sizes” – which was equally uninformative about the range of sizes available.¹⁸² To add to these, corpulent figures were considered a difficult fit in the menswear trade, ones which required skill and experience to make as well as a different approach to pattern making.¹⁸³ All of this suggests that large sizes were less readily available for both men and women and that bespoke tailoring and dressmaking probably remained the more viable clothes-buying options for outsize consumers. This would prove problematic in wartime and post-war conditions.

¹⁷⁹ For example: W.A. Lea and Sons ad, *Leicester Evening News*, 12 May 1938; Dickins and Jones ad, *The Tatler*, 18 May 1938; D.M. Brown’s ad, *Courier and Advertiser* (Dundee), 19 May 1938; Midland Drapery ad, *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 26 May 1938.

¹⁸⁰ Reuben Sytner, “The Wholesale Trade, Grading (Gentlemen’s Garments),” in *The Modern Tailor, Outfitter and Clothier*, rev. ed., 3 vols., eds. A. S. Bridgland and A. A. Whife (London: Caxton, 1949), 3:42.

¹⁸¹ Honeyman, “Following Suit,” 438-9.

¹⁸² For instance: Sam Stocks ad, *Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian*, 4 May 1938; D.M. Brown’s Men’s Shop ad, *Courier and Advertiser* (Dundee), 5 May 1938. Simpson were unusual in offering some descriptions to their range, see ads included in: David Wainright, *The British Tradition: Simpson – a World of Style* (London: Quiller Press, 1996), 14, 1824

¹⁸³ A. A. Whife, “Gentlemen’s Garments Cutting for Corpulent Figures,” in Bridgland and Whife *The Modern Tailor, Outfitter and Clothier*, 1:168-9.

This change in the availability of larger sizes was accompanied by the spread of a public discussion about weight in the context of health. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska argues that although this discussion was mostly concerned with those who suffered from nutritional deficiency, a parallel debate about obesity was beginning to develop.¹⁸⁴ Zweiniger-Bargielowska demonstrates that obesity was perceived as the ailment of the comfortably off, middle-aged and middle-class population, constructing it as an issue of excessive consumption of food and sedentary life styles.¹⁸⁵ A recent study by Emma Purce shows how the size of the normal body was defined through its positioning in comparison to other bodies: both ideal and abject.¹⁸⁶ Purce argues that while popular culture encouraged its consumers to compare themselves to and strive to imitate ideal bodies, represented by film stars, they were also encouraged to recoil from abnormal bodies on both the large and small extreme ends of the scale, which were publicly displayed in freak shows.¹⁸⁷ Fascination with the over- and under-weight bodies thus displayed was part of the national debate that Zweiniger-Bargielowska explores, which was concerned with the health and the bodies of citizens, who had a moral duty to maintain a healthy body that could serve their nation.¹⁸⁸ Purce argues that the merits of healthy nutrition were reflected in provocative displays of obesity and starvation, but her conclusion frames starvation displays around the “Hungry England” debate, while discussing obesity shows in the context of individual action.¹⁸⁹ As James Vernon shows, the 1930s saw increasing advocacy for the intervention

¹⁸⁴ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, “Slimming through the Depression: Obesity and Reducing in Interwar Britain,” in *The Rise of Obesity in Europe: A Twentieth Century Food History*, eds. Derek J. Oddy, Peter J. Atkins and Virginie Amilien (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 177.

¹⁸⁵ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, “Slimming through the Depression,” 178-9. See also her discussion of gender differences: Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 181.

¹⁸⁶ Purce, “Scales of Normality,” 675-6.

¹⁸⁷ Purce, “Scales of Normality,” 673, 676.

¹⁸⁸ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, “Slimming through the Depression,” 182.

¹⁸⁹ Purce, “Scales of Normality,” 686.

and planning of the state in securing the adequate nutrition of its citizens.¹⁹⁰ This suggests that although the slim bodies of the malnourished were presented as a problem with a social solution, responsibility for the overweight body was solely in the hands of the individual.¹⁹¹

This framing of fatness as an individual flaw that affected the nation was, of course, not new. Jean Webb discusses the nineteenth-century construction of patriotic imperial masculinity around Christian values as it was embodied in the healthy, athletic and slim literary hero of adventure stories for boys. Immorality in these stories, she argues, was embodied in fat or gluttonous characters, who did not fit into the vision of the virtuous citizen, a trope that remained central into the middle of the twentieth century.¹⁹² The popular association between corpulence and immorality was prevalent in adult culture as well, in the image of the money-thirsty capitalist. Jean-Louis Robert shows that during the First World War, when popular anger against profiteers began to emerge, caricatures of this character in Britain relied on pre-war imagery of the corpulent industrialist.¹⁹³ Inter-war popular fiction continued to evoke the spectre of the profiteer as the ultimate literary villain despite the end of hostilities.¹⁹⁴ The profiteer's physical attributes in these novels – unhealthy and expansive – suggests Christine Grandy, was an embodiment of selfishness and conspicuous consumption.¹⁹⁵ Zweiniger-Bargielowska similarly shows that obese bodies were perceived as deviant, associated with criminality, greediness and

¹⁹⁰ James Vernon, *Hunger*, 118-58.

¹⁹¹ Although Vernon demonstrates that individual responsibility was often emphasised alongside social responsibility in finding a solution to malnutrition (see Vernon, *Hunger*, 196-223), no social solution was voiced for problems of excess body weight.

¹⁹² Jean Webb, "'Voracious Appetites': The Construction of 'Fatness' in the Boy Hero in English Children's Literature," in *Critical Approaches to Food in Children's Literature*, eds. Kara K. Keeling and Scott T. Pollard (London: Routledge, 2011), 105-10. For the history of these values, see: Janet Sayers, "Feeding the Body," in Evans and Lee, *Real Bodies*, 151-66, especially 155-8.

¹⁹³ Jean-Louis Robert, "The Image of the Profiteer," in *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919* eds. Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 123, 127.

¹⁹⁴ Christine Grandy, "'Avarice' and 'Evil Doers': Profiteers, Politicians, and Popular Fiction in the 1920s," *Journal of British Studies* 50, no. 3 (2011): 668-9, 673-6.

¹⁹⁵ Grandy, "'Avarice' and 'Evil Doers,'" 676.

homosexuality.¹⁹⁶ Remaining thin, by contrast, was a “duty of citizenship because the fit male body symbolised the well-managed life of the good citizen.”¹⁹⁷ There are also longer traditions viewing corpulent bodies as sinful, gluttonous and lazy.¹⁹⁸ The perception of fatness as immoral and unpatriotic therefore had a long tradition in the British popular imagination. The scarcity of supplies introduced by the war meant that corpulent bodies were seen as consuming more than their share of both food and fabric, as I will discuss in Chapter Five.

If Zweiniger-Bargielowska emphasizes the centrality of health to inter-war dieting cultures, she also suggests that inter-war fashions contributed to the desirability of slimming, albeit in less healthy ways.¹⁹⁹ Downing Peters demonstrates that, in targeting stout women, American fashion brands emphasised the slimming effect of the clothes they sold. A similar emphasis on using clothes to conceal fat figures is evident in British inter-war fashion advice as well as in some advertisements for outsize fashions.²⁰⁰ Settle, for instance, thought that the best way to sell to an outsize customer was to employ “big, broad saleswomen so cleverly dressed that they look less big and broad,” since they could convince the customer that they were capable of helping her hide her “difficult figure.”²⁰¹ This could go both ways: the promise of fitting into fashion could also be evoked as a motivation for slimming: a Bile Beans ad from 1938 suggested:

¹⁹⁶ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body*, 216, 218-19.

¹⁹⁷ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body*, 223.

¹⁹⁸ David W. Haslam and Fiona Haslam, *Fat, Gluttony and Sloth: Obesity in Medicine, Art and Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 145-184.

¹⁹⁹ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, “Slimming through the Depression,” 183.

²⁰⁰ For example: Midland Drapery ad, *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 26 May 1938.

²⁰¹ Settle, *Clothes Line*, 129-30.

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Just think how much nicer you'll look in your evening frocks if you've got a good figure – and how much healthier, fresher, and fitter you'll feel if you get rid of surplus fat the Bile Beans way.²⁰²

A “good” figure was slender, while a broad figure was ‘difficult’ and unhealthy.

In the inter-war period, slim and healthy ideal bodies were defined against immoral and imperfect fat bodies. Fat bodies reflected the shortcomings of their owners, representing over-consumption (whether in the bodily or economic sense), an unhealthy lifestyle, laziness and selfishness. These qualities marked outsize consumers as self-serving, rather than contributing members of the community. This association with conspicuous consumption became a more pressing problem under the frugal climate that dominated the national public debate about consumption of clothes from 1941 onwards. Under this atmosphere, corpulent citizens, whose bodies required more cloth to cover them than average, were not seen as deserving of equal access to clothes – a subject I explore in Chapter Five. While from 1941 consumption became an unpatriotic practice, this was not so in the early days of the war. The last section will look at early wartime debates about clothes and appearance in relation to the norms that preceded them and the subsequent circumstances of shortages and rationing.

War and the Wardrobe: National Concerns in the Wake of Hostilities

It is customary to think about clothes in the Second World War in terms of the Make Do and Mend campaign and Utility Scheme. Although both of these were central to the way clothes were linked to the war effort, neither existed before 1941, and both came to define wartime fashion after the fact. In the first year of the war, attitudes towards spending and appearances in public discussion was wide ranging. Before the notion of shabbiness as

²⁰² Bile Beans Advertisement, *Daily Mirror*, 6 May 1938.

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patriotic assumed a hegemonic position, other attitudes to clothes and appearance were touted as patriotic. The way consumption and dress were defined in the first year of war reflected a new preoccupation with patriotic conduct, but they also reflected the pre-war cultural and social meaning that continued to be attached to clothes. The tension between the two contexts in which clothes and appearance could be read – through the lens of wartime patriotism and as part of pre-war social norms – was most apparent in wartime debates about women’s appearance and about the standardisation of men’s suits.

In January and February of 1940, the clothing trade was preoccupied with a rumour that suits are going to be standardised. Responses to this rumour illustrate the ambivalence among the British public, consumers and clothing trade personnel alike, about the proper relationship between clothes and the war, when frugal consumption had not yet become the order of the day. Yet, these debates were not only about consumption. Suits served as a metaphor for class difference and the idea of standardisation brought these differences to the surface, turning this from a debate about the clothing market to a battle about hierarchies and the social order. Given the importance of suits to middle-class culture discussed above, these debates also predicted some of the issues that would rise once shortages and clothes rationing began restricting men’s access to suits.

The debates began after headlines in several daily papers on 9 January 1940 warned of the imminent introduction of standardised suits as part of the effort to save materials for war-related production.²⁰³ The story was soon discovered to have been “based on a chance remark,” and bearing no immediate consequences for the civilian clothing market, but its

²⁰³ “Mr Chamberlain to Call for Greater War Efforts,” *Scotsman*, 9 January 1940; “‘Standard Suits’ May Come in,” *Daily Herald*, 9 January 1940; “Standard Suits for All,” *Daily Mirror*, 9 January 1940.

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echoes continued to ring in the press for another month.²⁰⁴ While some papers reported this story as null the next day, others kept developing and responding to it. The *Daily Mirror*, for instance, gave full details on what a standardised suit might look like, based on the estimations of clothing manufacturers, including price range and the reassurance that standardised suits will be made in “a wide range of patterns.”²⁰⁵ Local papers in Yorkshire a region associated with wholesale tailoring, also continued to discuss the prospect of standardisation. The *Yorkshire Observer* and *Yorkshire Post* both reported that standardisation would be inevitable at some point, the latter emphasising that standardisation did not have to mean the absence of choice.²⁰⁶

Yet while most manufacturers interviewed for the papers assumed some change to the operation of the clothing industry, such as restrictive cloth specifications, limited colours or designs, the *Yorkshire Evening Post* pointed out that standard suits were already being made in the wholesale tailoring and ready-to-wear branches of the trade:

[...] although the industry would be right in protesting that the suits are standard only in name [...] So what would the civilian have to complain about? Nothing very much, except for his pathetic belief that his dignity as a human being entitles him to a tailor of his own choice, [...] who will use workshop instead of factory methods in [his suit's] production.

In the long run or after only a little wear, this convenience of being tailored individually does not send forth some of us very greatly different from

²⁰⁴ “Premier’s Vigorous ‘Will to Win’ Speech,” London Letter, *Nottingham Journal*, 10 January 1940.

²⁰⁵ “Standard Suit: £3.10s.,” *Daily Mirror*, 10 January 1940.

²⁰⁶ “Britain’s Clothes May Be Rationed Soon,” *Yorkshire Observer*, 9 January 1940; “The Standard Suit,” *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury*, 10 January 1940; “Standard Clothes Need Not Be Drab,” *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury*, 10 January 1940.

those who are tailored in the mass – even though the appropriate federation of master tailors sues us for libel in saying so!²⁰⁷

In placing the mass-produced suits in which the local trade specialised on equal footing with bespoke suits made by traditional tailors, the writer did not only assert the merits of his home county's trade, but hinted at a deeper rivalry expressed through dress – between the low earning masses and the high income few.

This thread connecting standardised suits to class rivalry was more visible elsewhere. Two days after the story first appeared, the *Daily Mirror's* editorial sarcastically remarked:

Suppose, as months or years of war go by, all the gentlemen get into the same sort of suitings as the non-gents. Suits without style about them. [...] You won't be able to pick them out. You won't be able to give them jobs in Whitehall. You may pick a non-gent instead and give him a job because of his brains, not on account of the cut of his coat. This must not be. Those in the running for gents' jobs must **not** be forced to wear coupon clothes. They might become invisible. As it is, we know them by their suits.²⁰⁸

The editor placed resistance to standardisation with the elite, taunting its members for putting too much value in appearances, while acknowledging the persistence of class-based differences in dress. The assumption that it was the well-off, urban elite who was most concerned about the prospect of standardisation was wide-spread.²⁰⁹ And although the *Times*, the paper which represented the point of view of this urban elite, published a column

²⁰⁷ "Standard Suits," *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 10 January 1940.

²⁰⁸ "Coupon Clothes," *Daily Mirror*, 11 January 1940 [emphasis in the original].

²⁰⁹ See for instance: "Standard Suit is Off – Beacons in Fact – Planning Summer Holidays – Living Mascots," Our London Letter, *Liverpool Daily Post*, 24 January 1940; "Listening to Town Topics," *Stapleford and Sandiacre News*, 17 February 1940; "Standard Suits No, But – Men Will Have Fewer Clothes," *Daily Herald*, 16 February 1940.

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in support of the standard suit, its writer made his case through another class-based tension, between a city man and his artisan tailor.²¹⁰ In the early days of war, then, clothes were still commonly thought of as a sphere of class difference and conflict, and the notion of standardised dress was perceived as threatening to erase class differences.



JACKSON THE TAILOR CALLING

"What about these robot suits," he said!

Upon my word, my customers do make some funny remarks to me. This man had been reading in his newspaper about the prospect of 'standard suits' and he was all hot and bothered about it.

"Think I'm going to go about looking like a robot in a suit stamped out of a cloth made by the mile he said." "Not me!" I laughed.

"I don't think it'll come to that," I said. "But I can tell you one thing. So long as we here can get hold of a yard of good cloth - so long as we've got the use of our brains and our clever designers - our suits are going to be made to suit the taste of

each customer. We're a stronghold of clothes with personality - and we'll fight standardisation to the last pair of scissors!"

"Good for you!" he said. But I think I'll make sure of two 'personality' suits before the fight starts!"

Far-sighted man, that. For however strong our feeling is at Jacksons against standardised clothes, there's no doubt we shan't have so many patterns or such marvellous cloth to show you in six months' time. And suits won't be the same price, either! So now's your chance to stock up. And that's a straight tip, I can tell you.

• JACKSON •

of Leith Street, Edinburgh Lothian House, Edinburgh

Figure 4 – Jackson advertisement encouraging men to buy a suit before the introduction of standardisation, *Southern Reporter*, 8 February 1940.

Whether urban professionals were in favour or against standard suits, men who could afford to do so were evidently concerned enough about the prospect of standardisation to rush to order new suits before it was introduced.²¹¹ They were encouraged by menswear firms whose advertisements employed the fear of standardisation to promote sales. The Leeds Industrial Co-operative Society, for instance, boasted its suits

²¹⁰ "Suits and Standards," *Times*, 16 January 1940.

²¹¹ "Leeds Clothing Trade: Impetus of Standard Suit Fears," *Yorkshire Post*, 20 January 1940; "Rush for Suits," *London Letter, Falkirk Herald*, 24 January 1940.

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were “Not ‘standard’ suits but suits of high standard!”²¹² The National Federation of Merchant Tailors (NFMT) even placed an advertisement which advised men to “avoid standard suits by buying from a member” of their Federation.²¹³ Several companies followed their lead, with one ad from the Edinburgh tailoring firm Jackson suggesting that “now’s the time to stock up” (Figure 4).²¹⁴

Eighteen months later, any encouragement from businesses to buy more and any rush to make unnecessary purchases would have been considered strictly unpatriotic. In early 1940, however, these practices could still easily be interpreted as supportive of the national interest. In a letter to the editor of Hull’s *Daily Mail* a member of the NFMT argued that “nothing undermines self-respect and morale so much as being forced to dress less well [...] it marks the defeatist mind.”²¹⁵ Echoing the writers of the *New Survey* before the war, he thought of dress as a means of retaining a positive outlook – only now it was confidence in victory rather than a general optimistic view on life. There were also economic motives against standardisation. A prominent figure in the menswear trade emphasised that standardisation would be disastrous for the export trade, since it would endanger the English reputation for “taste and individuality in clothes” on which this trade’s export relied.²¹⁶ Robert Hudson of the government’s Overseas Trade Department, who was anxious to increase exports, agreed anything that might harm the export trade

²¹² Leeds Industrial Co-operative Society advertisement, *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 8 February 1940.

²¹³ National Federation of Merchant Tailors notice, *Daily Mail* (Hull), 19 January 1940.

²¹⁴ Jackson advertisement, *Southern Reporter*, 8 February 1940. See also: Smith Brothers advertisement, *Courier and Advertiser* (Dundee), 19 February 1940; E. J. Godfrey advertisement, *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 6 February 1940.

²¹⁵ George Conlon, “Standard Suits,” Our Readers Say, *Daily Mail* (Hull), 18 January 1940. See a similar view in: “A Threat to Long Trousers,” *Yorkshire Post*, 14 February 1940.

²¹⁶ “Standardised Suits,” *Liverpool Daily Post*, 16 February 1940. The *Liverpool Daily Post* expressed this view earlier in the debate as well, see: “Standard Suit is Off,” *Liverpool Daily Post*.

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should be avoided.²¹⁷ Keeping British men well-dressed was therefore a matter of supporting British economic interests abroad as well keeping morale high at home. This attitude was to lose traction over time, only to regain it after the war when the export trade was once again the focus of the nation's economic efforts, as I discuss in Chapter Four.

The attitude that eventually became prominent, which saw any sacrifice made for the war effort as worthwhile, was also apparent in the standard suits debate. Early in the debate, the *Yorkshire Post* dismissed men's worry over their appearance as the result of "wifely fuss," while asserting that "we must learn to deny ourselves as we take the strain of war."²¹⁸ The *Yorkshire Evening Post* published a rhyme in response to the rumours of standardisation that emphasised the precedence of the war effort over appearances:

If Britain needs materials
I do not care a boot –
If the cloth is rather shoddy
And it hardly fits one's body,
I hate the sin of vanity –
I'll wear the standard suit.²¹⁹

The only suit that mattered, suggested the next verse, was the prisoner's uniform that the German rulers should be forced to wear when the war was over. The *Daily Mirror's* suggestion that only the ruling class should be afraid of standardisation, cited above, suggests a similar support to do what it takes to support the war effort. Early responses from some figureheads in the clothing trade also emphasised the precedence of military and export needs over those of the home trade.²²⁰ Yet while the view that sacrifices had to be

²¹⁷ "Standard Suits Feared by Tailors," *Daily Mirror*, 16 February 1940.

²¹⁸ "The Standard Suit," *Yorkshire Post*, 10 January 1940.

²¹⁹ Ratz, "Looking Ahead," *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 17 January 1940.

²²⁰ "'Standard Suits' May Come in," *Daily Herald*, 9 January 1940.

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made on the home front was already in circulation, it was not presented as forcefully as the case against standardisation. Pre-war notions about appearance were still far more acceptable than new ideas about the national need for frugality.

The same was true for women's wear. In the early days of the war, plenty of angry words were spilled over women's new tendency to neglect their appearance. Geraldine Howell writes that several fashion designers complained that the women who used to frequent their businesses were no longer buying glamorous clothes and instead wore slacks wherever they went.²²¹ Howell argues that the fashion elite felt its ideals of femininity being threatened by the utilitarian clothes women were beginning to wear, focusing on the use of trousers. This tension, she proposes, was resolved when the elite shifted its focus from trying to force women to adhere to old norms to regulating women's appearance in practical clothes.

When looking at magazines directed at a wider, and less elitist, audience than Howell's *Vogue*, however, it becomes clear that the tension between women's old and new roles was not resolved, and the only thing that changed was national attitudes towards consumption. From the very first weeks of the war, the *Daily Mirror* Woman's Page, aimed at a mostly (upwardly mobile) working-class audience, stressed the need for women to keep looking their best despite the war.²²² Keeping up appearances, stressed the paper's fashion and beauty writers, could keep their and their men's morale high, while letting go of one's beauty routine was a sure way to "feel discouraged, deflated."²²³ This advice was

²²¹ Howell, *Wartime Fashion*, 69-71.

²²² For *Daily Mirror* readership, compare the data given about women's readership by class in: J.W. Hobson and H. Henry, *The Hulton Readership Survey* (London: Hulton Press, 1947), 17-19 tables 7-9. The amount of references to office work as well as factory work in the columns, however, suggests an audience of urban, working young women, who aspire to improve their social position.

²²³ Theodora Benson, "Where's That Lipstick?" *Daily Mirror*, 14 September 1939.

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accompanied by an attack on women who had stopped grooming themselves, which the paper called “the Brigade of Dowds.”²²⁴ The newspaper’s writers framed this crusade in national terms, arguing that despite what these women thought, it was not patriotic to look slatternly.²²⁵ Lack of care for personal appearance was treated much as it was treated before the war – as an indication of laziness – with the added value judgement that this lack of care indicated a lacking national spirit.²²⁶

The writers’ evaluation of outward appearance received support from the news pages as well. The paper published the complaints of the clothing industry about declining trade, opening with the statement: “It’s not patriotic for women to dress slovenly in war time.”²²⁷ It framed the plight of the industry around its young women workers, pointing out that the slump in sales had left them out of work.²²⁸ This concern was also voiced a month earlier in Parliament by a Conservative MP, James Duncan, who requested that the Minister of Labour would endorse the buying of new clothes as a way of supporting the London clothing industry, receiving a positive reply.²²⁹ The *Mirror* reported this debate, leading with “Women who can afford new hats and clothes are being patriotic if they buy now.”²³⁰ The message was that women should buy new clothing and maintain their appearance.

As opposed to the conservative message that Howell reads in *Vogue*, the *Daily Mirror* embraced a more practical fashionability from the beginning. Women’s new roles were highlighted, as well as the need to wear appropriate clothes to do their duties. While the writers did not approve of trousers, advice concentrated on comfortable and serviceable

²²⁴ Kathleen Pearcey and Silvaine, “Live, Laugh and Waltz,” *Daily Mirror*, 30 October 1939.

²²⁵ Kathleen Pearcey and Silvaine, “Here’s What We Think,” *Daily Mirror*, 8 January 1940; “Being Shabby Doesn’t Help At All,” *Daily Mirror*, 23 September 1940.

²²⁶ Kathleen Pearcey and Silvaine, “Being Shabby Doesn’t Help At All,” *Daily Mirror*.

²²⁷ “War Fashion is Worrying Shops,” *Daily Mirror*, 24 November 1939.

²²⁸ “War Fashion is Worrying Shops,” *Daily Mirror*.

²²⁹ 351 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1939) cols. 2066-7.

²³⁰ “Buy a New Dress,” *Daily Mirror*, 6 October 1939.

items: flat leather shoes, woollens, tweed suits and practical skirts were all recommended alongside advice on how to make them attractive.²³¹ The paper also published advice guiding women on how to take care of clothes so they would last longer and how to choose purchases that will have lasting value. The femininity the writers promoted was strong, determined, organised and involved in the national effort but without forsaking beauty culture.²³² This attitude would be prevalent throughout the war.²³³

Where the writers of the *Daily Mirror* Woman's Page did change their approach was in their attitude towards consumption. Columns from early in the war tended to recommend the purchase of new clothes before rising prices would make purchases more difficult.²³⁴ Towards the middle of 1940, however, the mood changed, and the columns began placing more emphasis on maintaining and improving existing wardrobes rather than buying new clothes.²³⁵ Planning, mending and renovating became the order of the day, "because materials are going to be scarcer, we shall have to snip, stitch, cut and contrive. We will have to turn every cast-off into a new masterpiece," announced one writer in

²³¹ See for instance: "We're Keeping Your Heads for You," *Daily Mirror*, 7 September 1939; Pearcey and Silvaine, "Your Feet," *Daily Mirror*, 25 September 1939; "You – in Your Skirt," *Daily Mirror*, 16 October 1939.

²³² See: Pearcey and Silvaine, "Away with Dress Droops," *Daily Mirror*, 19 February 1940; "Be a Woman!" *Daily Mirror*, 2 October 1939; Theodora Benson, "Danger!" *Daily Mail*, 3 October 1939; "Being Shabby Doesn't Help At All," *Daily Mirror*.

²³³ Kirkham, "Keeping Up Home Front Morale," 206.

²³⁴ "We're Keeping Your Heads for You," *Daily Mirror*; Pearcey and Silvaine, "Be a Woman!" *Daily Mirror*; "That Bit of Fur," *Daily Mirror*, 23 October 1939; "Here's What We Think," *Daily Mirror*; "Which Do You Want?" *Daily Mirror*, 26 February 1940.

²³⁵ Kathleen Pearcey and Silvaine, "A Fool about Clothes," *Daily Mirror*, 1 April 1940; "Every Girls Has Something!" *Daily Mirror*, 29 April 1940; "Wartime Strategy for Women," *Daily Mirror*, 19 June 1940. From July this attitude became even more dominant, see: Kathleen Pearcey and Silvaine, "Emergency Page," *Daily Mirror*, 8 July 1940; Kathleen Pearcey and Silvaine, "There Are No Spots on You..." *Daily Mirror*, 22 July 1940; Theodora Benson, "Glamour is Different," *Daily Mirror*, 23 July 1940.

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June.²³⁶ Within nine months, the Woman's Page fashion writers switched from recommending that women "buy that tweed now,"²³⁷ to suggesting that

Shabbiness is an attitude of mind. [...] The woman who, with less money, less time and with last year's clothes, contrives something charming, shows character, resource and a good sense of proportion. She will spend shillings to get the effect of guineas, will press and mend and turn, will learn to make where before she bought.²³⁸

Other sections of the *Daily Mirror* went further, decrying any appearance of extravagance and expenditure on personal appearance as unpatriotic.²³⁹ This was particularly aimed at working-class women, whose wages began to rise, as I will discuss in Chapter Three. Women still had to maintain their appearance, they just had to do it under more constraining terms.

This change in the writers' attitude developed alongside a government policy that increasingly marked clothes as a luxury commodity. In April 1940, the BoT restricted supplies for civilian production of clothes to 75 percent of its pre-war market.²⁴⁰ In June, supplies for the clothing trade were further reduced.²⁴¹ In May, the government announced that clothes would be taxed as a luxury item.²⁴² As the draft of the Purchase Tax Bill continued being developed in July, luxuries were separated from necessities: footwear and children's clothes were exempt, while all other types of clothing were taxed at 12

²³⁶ Wynne Tait, "Wartime Strategy for Women," *Daily Mirror*, 19 June 1940.

²³⁷ "We're Keeping Your Heads for You," *Daily Mirror*.

²³⁸ "Being Shabby Doesn't Help At All," *Daily Mirror*.

²³⁹ John Boswell, "But Now It's Gin!" *Daily Mirror*, 10 July 1940; Reverend George Braithwaite, "The Seven Deadly Sins in Wartime," *Daily Mirror*, 1 August 1940.

²⁴⁰ "Fewer Clothes for You," *Daily Mirror*, 17 April 1940.

²⁴¹ "Luxuries are Cut," *Daily Mirror*, 6 June 1940.

²⁴² "Clothes in New Sale Tax," *Daily Mirror*, 2 May 1940.

percent.²⁴³ This escalating policy culminated in August, when during debates in Parliament about the Purchase Tax Bill, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Kingsley Wood, argued:

It may be that in a few months' time when a man walks along wearing a shabby hat or a shabby suit people will say, "What a patriotic man!" He will not be pointed out as a bad man because he is wearing a shabby suit or last year's hat. That would be a mark of patriotism.²⁴⁴

As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, this line of argument, which did not see new clothes as a mark of pride but as unpatriotic conduct, would increasingly come to represent the government's clothing policy and rhetoric. Yet as the three case studies in this work will show, the cultural and social understandings of clothes that were prevalent in British society before the war would prove difficult to break.

Conclusion

McKibbin defines the members of different social classes in Britain "by education [...], by style of life, salary, dress and deportment, by social aspiration, by what was expected of them from parents" or by what Bourdieu would have termed their habitus.²⁴⁵ While McKibbin brushed over "dress and deportment", it has become a largely unexamined commonplace of subsequent historiography. Dress was a signifier of class in British society, and, as I demonstrated above, was intertwined with other aspects of class culture – work, leisure and perceptions of morality and respectability. It functioned in social interactions to signal group membership and values, to place a person within a certain social position. Gender was another factor to influence dress and appearance, but it should

²⁴³ "How Your Tax Will Be Stopped Off Pay," *Daily Mirror*, 24 July 1940.

²⁴⁴ 364 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1940), col. 665.

²⁴⁵ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 45. For Bourdieu's definition of habitus, see: Bourdieu, *Distinction*, xxix.

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be thought of in the context of class. Although some aspects of gendered appearance were class crossing, like perceptions of body ideals, most were class-specific. These could determine a person's purchases and dress: what they wanted to convey to others, what they could afford to buy, the durability and fashionability of their clothes and their perception of respectability and appropriateness. Status, morality, fashionability and values were all bound in various ways with respectability, which in turn had an intricate connection to a citizen's stature in the community.

Soper proposes that we mostly tend "to dress in the manner in which we are happy for others to see us."²⁴⁶ This attitude dominated British approaches to dress before the war. For members of the middle-class, this often meant allowing social norms to determine how much attention they invested in their appearance, and the level of funds they allocated to it: sometimes in spite of its incongruity with their personal disposition or income. For members of the working-class, this could mean choosing how they presented themselves to others, depending on context: whether it was performing negligence to convey a message of self-reliance, taking pride in an excessive, fashionable appearance or saving 'best' clothes for social occasions, while neglecting workwear. For all classes it meant the knowledge that others judged them by their appearance. The commentary provided by social investigators is one example of the extent to which Britons relied on appearances in assessing the people they encountered. Cries against neglectful "dowds" in early wartime beauty columns illustrate how persistent these judgements could be. Men's rush to buy suits at the first rumour of standardisation demonstrates the significance – personal and social – of maintaining dress conventions even at a time of war.

²⁴⁶ Soper, "Dress Needs," 19.

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What is evident from the early wartime debates discussed above is that the changes required to conduct the war – restrictions on the production of civilian goods and the redirection of labour – were not always compatible with pre-war dress norms. For the British government, this meant that a new set of priorities, which placed the war effort above personal conveniences and social norms, had to be conveyed to citizens. The government's assertion that shabbiness was patriotic, justified as it may have been in the context of wartime constraints, had to fight for legitimacy against norms of respectability that were long established. The next chapter will examine how the British government tried to reshape the way Britons thought about clothes both during the war, when the needs of the military took precedence over civilian needs, and in its aftermath, when the fear of inflation and economic crisis deferred the removal of restrictions over the industry and its customers. The case studies that will follow it will assess to what extent that message, which equated good citizenship with frugal consumption, managed to supersede the social meaning clothes bore in Britain before the age of austerity, and what happened when established norms about the appearance of the upstanding citizen were challenged.

Chapter 2: “The Duty of Every Citizen” and “the Responsibility of the State”: Government Construction of the Citizen-State Relationship under Clothing Regulations

The austerity period introduced a new set of constraints to interwar social norms of appearance, complicating the meaning of respectable appearance and appropriate dress. When MO asked its respondents in April 1942 about their clothing habits, a young engineer’s draughtsman replied “whenever I see myself shabby, I can always console myself that I am being patriotic.”¹ By this point, Kingsley Wood’s words, cited at the close of the previous chapter, had transformed from the remark of one Cabinet member about a future possibility into a full propaganda effort. From 1941, the British government promoted frugal clothing habits in order to minimise the need to invest labour and raw materials in the production of garments. The normalisation of shabbiness was not the focal point of government efforts, which encompassed regulations over garment makers, clothes retailers and consumers. Yet it was part of the careful framing of these controls, which was utilised to gain the active cooperation of citizens. The regulations and their presentation to the public promoted certain clothing habits pertaining to buying, wearing and caring for clothes as both egalitarian and patriotic. Government campaigns encouraged citizens to be voluntarily frugal beyond the economy that the government enforced, making clothing economy into “the duty of every citizen.”² At the same time, they vaguely outlined the government’s responsibility to keep its citizens clothed.

If before the war the relationship between appearance and civic character was elusive and implicit, this new association between certain clothing habits and patriotic

¹ MOA, DR 2671, reply to April 1942 directive.

² ‘Make Do and Mend,’ dated 28 October [1943?], TNA, BT 64/3023, “Make-Do and Mend Campaign.”

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conduct was far more explicit, though no less complex. As seen in the early wartime debates discussed in the previous chapter, the conditions of austerity drew attention to established norms about appearance. When the new relationship between appearance and civic character was established by government propaganda, it had to vie for legitimacy with these old norms. During the war years, it was easier for the public to accept this new normal, but acceptance waned in the post-war years. The relative improvement of textile stocks made the extreme frugality of wartime unnecessary, decreasing (but not removing) the pressure government propaganda placed on citizens to economise. Instead, propaganda posited a renewed wardrobe as a legitimate aspiration for citizens, but one which they needed to defer for the country's, and their own, benefit. As far as the government was concerned, therefore, a shabby appearance remained the garb of the conscientious citizen. Similarly to citizens' duties, the government's construction of its own duties changed in the aftermath of the war. Its role as a defender of citizens grew less pronounced and instead it became a facilitator and a guide, helping citizens reconstruct the country and regain access to clothes through their labour. This chapter will explore the way that the British government constructed the conduct and appearance of good citizens and their wardrobe, as well as the way it constructed its own role in relation to citizens' wardrobes. It will discuss public reception of the idea that both citizens and their state had responsibilities regarding clothes, reflecting on the relationship between these ideas and the earlier concepts of proper appearance, detailed in the previous chapter.

Clothing regulations meant that the British government had a lot of control over citizens' wardrobes, but some aspects remained in citizens' hands. How citizens took care of their clothes, what proportion of their clothes ration they used and how they planned

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their purchases all remained beyond the limits of government regulation, but well within the scope of government rhetoric. In stirring citizens towards a more frugal consumption of clothes, the government, and more specifically the Board of Trade, prompted citizens to actively assist in preserving precious resources: workers, factory space and textile raw materials. Although Roodhouse shows that even BoT officials thought the connection between the garment industry and the war effort hard to establish in the public mind, I will demonstrate below that this connection was often brought up in the context of clothes rationing.³ Government campaigns constructed citizens on the Home Front as able to take an active part in the war effort through their clothing habits and as able to sabotage that effort by the same means.

Citizens' responsibility for the material resources of the nation grew more prominent after the war. When it came to clothes, emphasis shifted from citizens' role as economising consumers to their role as productive workers. Government propaganda pressured citizens to be active in increasing national production, whether by joining the workforce or by showing initiative in transforming the way their industry functioned. Rather than defending citizens from outside forces, in a post-war context, the government emphasised citizens' responsibility for their own welfare. Their role as workers had direct impact on their role as consumers. The government only facilitated citizens' control of their economic wellbeing. Prosperity, symbolised by new garments, became the goal towards which citizens should work. Until it arrived, however, good citizens had to patiently economise.

The emphasis on citizens' involvement in the preservation of scarce national resources did not only concern items of dress. Other commodities merited similar controls

³ Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, 131-2.

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and similar pleas for citizens' participation. Yet while citizens' use of other commodities was mostly private, happening inside their homes, their clothes, with the exception of undergarments, were constantly publicly visible, turning appearance into a ready criterion for judgement of their contribution to the war effort or their patience in the joined fight for prosperity. The shabbiness induced by clothing economy and the smartness that accompanied new items were both visible whenever citizens left their houses, open to the scrutiny of strangers and acquaintances alike. This meant that the social impact of clothing regulations was less avoidable.

Although this chapter will address the ways the British government constructed citizens' role in relation to clothing controls, it will not deal with the details of the regulations themselves. The minutiae of regulations are covered in *Civil Industry and Trade*, as part of the official history of the Second World War.⁴ Zweiniger-Bargielowska gives an analytical account of all regulations, including food rationing and restrictions on other commodities, as well as details about the whole period of controls.⁵ While she discusses the impact of controls on the public, this discussion is mostly limited to its impact on women, and there is little treatment of the way these regulations were publicly constructed. Dealing with compliance, Roodhouse offers some perspective on the way government entities framed the various controls in order to gain public cooperation. His discussion of regulations such as price control also offers a nuanced account of the convoluted way in which controls evolved. However, since his focus is more generally on adherence, or lack thereof, to controls, he does not deal with the specific ways clothing

⁴ Hargreaves and Gowing, *Civil Industry and Trade*.

⁵ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*; Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Women under Austerity."

controls shaped, or failed to shape, social perceptions of appearance.⁶ This chapter aims to show how government propaganda and government officials addressed the role of clothes in the context of wartime necessities and post-war economic crisis, constructing certain modes of behaviour and appearance as patriotic.

Appearance takes a more central role in studies of everyday experiences of clothes rationing. There is a rich variety of literature about the way British women adapted to rationing, shortages and to the imperative to make do and mend in more or less creative ways, with the support of the government and fashion designers during the war.⁷ Most of these, however, do not explore how ideas of appearance were constructed and disseminated. The one exception is Pat Kirkham, who explores the complex construction of feminine appearance and action during the war.⁸ The attempts to direct women's actions and beauty practices, however, were only part of a wider construction of how British citizens should act and look. A more recent study of the post-war era by Biddle-Perry explores both government agenda and everyday dress, concentrating predominantly on style without putting it in the context of citizen-state relationship.⁹ This chapter therefore takes a long view of the period of controls, examining the slow development of the ways regulations and propaganda constructed the appropriate roles for citizens and state with regards to clothing.

I discussed in the introduction the way that, as part of the mobilisation of civilians on the Home Front during the war, government propaganda urged citizens to perform a considerable amount of voluntary action in the private sphere. Clothing economy, as this

⁶ Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, 118-33.

⁷ Maggie Wood, *We Wore What We'd Got': Women's Clothes in World War II* (Exeter: Warwickshire Books, 1989); Summers, *Fashion on the Ration*; Howell, *Wartime Fashion*.

⁸ Kirkham, "Keeping Up Home Front Morale."

⁹ Biddle-Perry, *Dressing for Austerity*.

chapter will show, was included in these requests, creating a new set of duties for citizens. But just as wartime necessities gave rise to a new set of duties where citizens were concerned, they also emphasised the need to defend citizens as consumers. Lessons from the First World War about the impact war might have on the availability of products and the effects of scarcity on civilian morale prompted the Ministry of Food and the Board of Trade to introduce rationing and additional control schemes in the course of the war.¹⁰ While some government regulations and campaigns emphasised the active participation of citizens, others were framed as helping citizens, emphasising the government's responsibility to defend their interests as consumers. Citizens did not only have duties to assist in the national effort to win the war, they had a right to be shielded from some of its consequences.

Clothing Economy as the Duty of Patriotic Citizens

Clothes, as a scarce but essential commodity, produced the need for the cooperation of citizens, as well as government regulations that would enable citizens to access essential supplies. In the context of clothing, the British government's primary request was that citizens would minimise consumption, so as to maximise the quantity of workers and raw materials directed to the war effort. While economising was a simple imperative, the range of actions it implied was much wider. If citizens bought less, then they had to maintain existing clothes by brushing and folding them at the end of each day and by careful mending and washing techniques. When they did buy clothes, economy dictated simpler styles and citizens had to focus on items that would last and be as useful as possible, for as long as possible. Government regulations made some of these actions involuntary.

¹⁰ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 12-14.

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Rationing, the Limitations of Supplies Order and the concentration of production all played a part in curtailing civilian consumption, while the Utility Scheme and Austerity Regulations streamlined production, consequently reducing the variety of styles. As Roodhouse argues, controls required some willing cooperation from citizens.¹¹ As a way of securing that cooperation, the BoT made a direct appeal to citizens to take these actions voluntarily through the Make Do and Mend campaign. These requests appeared in other government-produced content as well, including speeches that government officials made to the public and in the context of the National Savings campaign. While government appeals and regulations focused on promoting certain actions, they also, perhaps inadvertently, promoted a certain appearance. This section will use materials produced by the government and government officials during the war to outline the image of citizenship they produced.

As discussed in Chapter One, the idea that shabbiness was patriotic was first introduced during a parliamentary debate about the purchase tax in mid-1940, where new clothes were, for the first time in the context of the war, framed as a luxury. This line was further endorsed in the National Savings campaign. The campaign appealed to the public to avoid spending money on non-essential commodities, and invest instead in a National Savings Certificate or Defence Bonds. As Victoria Carolan shows, the campaign promoted saving as a moral duty of citizens towards their country and community, creating an atmosphere where citizens felt pressured to save and where spending was “branded as selfish.”¹² At first, the campaign did not address savings on any specific commodities, but

¹¹ Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, 118.

¹² Victoria Carolan, “Lend to Defend: The National Savings Committee during the Second World War,” in *Allied Communication to the Public during the Second World War: National and Transnational*

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in 1941 that changed, and garments began appearing in advertisements as a specific area for economy. Three advertisements that appeared in the *Daily Herald* in the first half of 1941, suggested that indulging in clothes buying, whether for oneself or as a gift, should be avoided, and that the money “would do more good if it’s lent to the country.”¹³ One of the advertisements pointed out that “spending in wartime,” represented in the ad by expenditure on clothes, was “unpatriotic” (Figure 5).¹⁴ These advertisements presented new garments as a luxury and suggested to the public that saving on them was proper civic conduct.

In the second half of 1941, Wood’s prediction that shabbiness would be a mark of patriotism finally became government policy. Shortly after the National Savings advertisements appeared in the national newspapers, the Board of Trade introduced clothes rationing, turning clothing economy

from an appeal to voluntary action into an involuntary restriction. By that point, the



Figure 5 - National Savings campaign advertisement, portraying a man explaining to his wife and daughter why spending money on clothes in wartime is unpatriotic, *Daily Herald*, 6 March 1941.

Networks, eds. Simon Elliott and Marc Wiggam, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), Accessed: 12 October 2020. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350105157.0006>, 44-5.

¹³ The National Savings Committee, “How Much This Week Jim?,” *Daily Herald*, 16 January 1941.

¹⁴ The National Savings Committee, “Mother Sets the Fashion,” *Daily Herald*, 6 March 1941. See also: The National Savings Committee, “Ted, I’m Getting Meaner Every Week,” *Daily Herald*, 14 March 1941.

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availability of clothes to civilians had already been limited. From 1940, the Limitations of Supplies Order limited the raw materials available to make civilian clothes. The introduction of rationing limited not only the national availability of clothes, but their personal availability, by limiting the quantity of items each citizen could buy.¹⁵ The rhetoric that accompanied clothes rationing was the rhetoric of war. In Oliver Lyttelton's speech announcing the scheme, he compared the shabbiness that rationing was expected to bring to the marks of battle:

In war the term "battle-stained" is an honourable one. People admire the soldier whose uniform bears the marks of battle, or the fireman who is begrimed with his night's work. We must learn, as civilians, that it is also honourable to be seen in clothes which are not so smart, because we are bearing, as civilians, yet another share in the war if we too are battle-stained. When you feel tired of your old clothes, remember that by making them do you are contributing some part of an aeroplane or a gun or a tank, or perhaps even more simply, an overcoat to one of our fighting men.¹⁶

This rhetoric that framed the sacrifice of appearance that the Board of Trade expected civilians to endure as contribution to the war effort was prevalent in clothes rationing publicity and in government discussions of civilian clothing in wartime more generally. Clothing Quizzes, which usually included an introduction signed by the President of the Board of Trade, often included an explanation about how clothes rationing contributed to the war effort. Throughout the war, these booklets quoted statistical information about the workforce that rationing released to the war effort and the shipping space it saved, emphasising the contribution of the clothing control schemes (and adherence to those

¹⁵ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 46-8.

¹⁶ 'Broadcast Speech by the Rt. Hon. Oliver Lyttelton, M.P. President of the Board of Trade in the Home Service B.B.C News at 9 a.m. Sunday, June 1st on the Rationing of Clothes,' TNA, BT 64/871, "Clothes Rationing: Minutes of the Publicity Committee."

schemes) to the war effort. The 1943 and 1944 Quizzes suggested that clothes rationing, despite the “sacrifice of comfort or appearance” associated with it, assisted in bringing about victory.¹⁷

Although this rhetoric made a comparison between the contribution and sacrifice of the soldier and the contribution allowed by the civilian’s sacrifice of appearance, the two were never on an equal footing. While some propaganda efforts delivered the message that the sacrifice that civilians made on the Home Front contributed to winning the war, communication from BoT officials also undermined this message by emphasising the gap between the sacrifice made by men on the front and that made on the Home Front. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Four, the President of the BoT ridiculed men who complained about the Austerity Regulations, because their sacrifice of appearance could not be compared to the sacrifice of the men of the Merchant Navy, who risked their lives to bring precious resources to Britain. The sacrifices civilians made on the Home Front, even if they were necessary, were trivial. What this hierarchy of sacrifice meant for civilians on the Home Front was that they had to adjust to the changes and endure these sacrifices without complaint or resistance.

Civilian acceptance of these sacrifices was not easily secured. Despite the frequent reference to the link between clothing economy and the war effort, attitudes towards it at the BoT were ambivalent. As Roodhouse argues, C.C.J. Simmonds, who was in charge of public relations at the BoT, felt that the connection between clothing economy and the war effort was too vague to encourage public support for rationing.¹⁸ Upon the announcement of rationing, newspaper editorials insisted that the British public was ready and willing to

¹⁷ ‘The 1943-1944 Clothing Quiz,’ and ‘The 1944-45 Clothing Quiz,’ TNA, BT 131/37, “Clothing Policy.”

¹⁸ Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, 131-2.

make whichever sacrifices it could for the war effort. The *Daily Mirror* applauded the government's decision and pronounced that "victory is better than new clothes."¹⁹ The *Daily Mail*, echoing the government's language, wrote that "sacrifices of comfort, cuts in expenditure, the lending of money and service to the State, have become the paramount obligations of to-day."²⁰ While newspapers reflected the language of sacrifice, they did not use Lyttelton's more direct "battle-stain" metaphor. Given the relatively low listening rate his broadcast had, reports about it in the press were meaningful for public dissemination of the message.²¹ As Simmonds observed, the necessity to save on clothes as a direct contribution to the war effort does not seem to have easily stuck in the public mind. In a Wartime Social Survey enquiry in 1942, only five percent of respondents mentioned economising as one of the things that the British government asked its citizens to do. While most specific forms of savings scored similarly low, saving on clothes consumption was not mentioned frequently enough to merit a category in the table.²² Soon after the interviews for this survey were carried out, the BoT launched its Make Do and Mend campaign, in an attempt to better impress on consumers the need to economise on clothing.

The BoT's Make Do and Mend campaign, which ran between 1942 and 1946, complemented the Board's general clothing policy of limiting consumption for the benefit of the war effort. Despite the involuntary nature of rationing, the British government still sought the active support of citizens, pressuring them to economise beyond its restrictions.

In 1943, the National Savings Committee introduced two additional advertisements that

¹⁹ "Bravo, Lyttelton!" *Daily Mirror*, 2 June 1941.

²⁰ "Sacrifices," *Daily Mail*, 2 June 1941.

²¹ BBC Listener Research Department Reports, 1937-c.1950, Listener Research Weekly Reports/Bulletins, Vol. 1, ref: 1248-r9-01-01, report no. 39.

²² MOI Digital, Wartime Social Survey (WSS), RG 23/19, "Publicity Media: Three Short Inquiries Carried Out in 1942 and 1943 for the Ministry of Information into Public Attitudes," accessed 22 October 2020. <http://www.moidigital.ac.uk/reports/wartime-social-survey/the-social-survey-rg-23-19/idm140133741703984/>.

targeted clothes as a focal point for economy. These new ads linked the National Savings campaign to the Make Do and Mend campaign. They used a character called the Squander Bug to demonstrate that buying new items of clothing helped the enemy.²³ Similarly to the earlier parts of the campaign, the National Savings Committee treated clothes as an unnecessary expense. Buying new clothes when old ones could be saved by mending was unpatriotic.

This message was central to the Make Do and Mend campaign. The name of the campaign suggests that its purpose was to help citizens manage their wardrobes under the constraints of rationing, much like the Ministry of Food's Food Facts campaign. However, minutes pertaining to the planning of the campaign demonstrate that it was designed to promote frugality that went beyond the restrictions of rationing.²⁴ A civil servant working on the campaign suggested that campaign posters should deliver the message that "it is not patriotic to use all your [clothing coupons] unless essential."²⁵ An early document that discusses the agenda for the campaign marked out two objectives, one was to help those who had no coupons make do with the clothes they had and the other was to prevent those who had coupons from spending them. The use of the make do and mend message on the National Savings campaign served that latter objective. While many of the Make Do and Mend advertisements did not include that message overtly, they did emphasise that citizens should only buy the most essential items. Early advertisements for the campaign stated that mending saves "money as well as coupons" and that "every yard of wool, rayon, cotton or

²³ "Fancy Trying to Mend That Old Thing," *Manchester Guardian*, 4 August 1943; "You'll Never Be Able to Mend That," *Daily Worker*, 25 June 1943.

²⁴ Helen Reynolds, "'Your Clothes are Materials of War': The British Government Promotion of Home Sewing during the Second World War," in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 330.

²⁵ 'Tentative Suggestions,' TNA, BT 64/3023.

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other fabric that you buy unnecessarily deprives the war effort of vital material.”²⁶ Rationing was there to restrict excessive buying, but it was the duty of patriotic citizens to do their best to economise regardless of the size of the ration.

As stated above, clothing economy did not only mean that citizens should buy less, it also meant that they should take good care of their existing wardrobes. One of the first short films produced for the Make Do and Mend campaign demonstrated humorously that being careless with clothes was tantamount to sabotage.²⁷ The film showed how to take care of clothes daily – by putting them on carefully, brushing and folding them after use, and washing them in the appropriate manner to make them last longer. Another film gave audiences ideas about how to turn old clothes into new garments.²⁸ Additional guidance on how to take care of clothes and make them last appeared in posters, advertisements and leaflets that the Board of Trade published for the benefit of the public.²⁹ As Helen Reynolds discusses, the purpose of the Make Do and Mend classes that various women’s organisations ran was to help women renovate and mend old garments, giving them a new lease of life.³⁰ The message arising from this proliferation of instructions was that model citizens did not let the condition of their clothes deteriorate while they refrained from replenishing their wardrobes, they worked tirelessly to keep them in good condition. So while the message was that shabbiness was patriotic, this did not mean going about in rags, but maintaining a respectable appearance.

²⁶ ‘Do You Care for Clothes?’ and ‘Patriotic Patches,’ TNA, INF 2/98, “Clothing Economy Campaign.”

²⁷ *Sabotage!*, directed by Peter Pickering, produced by the Ministry of Information (1942), British Film Institute. <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-sabotage-1942-online>. Accessed: 25 September 2020.

²⁸ *Make Do and Mend*, produced by the Ministry of Information (1943), British Film Institute, <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-make-do-and-mend-1945-online>. Accessed: 25 September 2020.

²⁹ Jill Norman and National Archives (Great Britain), *Make Do and Mend: Keeping Family and Home Afloat on War Rations: Reproductions of Official Second World War Instruction Leaflets* (London: Michael O’Mara Books, 2013).

³⁰ Reynolds, “Your Clothes are Materials of War,” 329-30.

While the Make Do and Mend campaign encouraged citizens to “save buying new,” it also dealt with what citizens should do when they bought essential items. Its call to “Count Your Coupons” emphasised the need to plan purchases under rationing, thinking ahead about future necessities such as winter clothes. In a BBC programme script about Make Do and Mend in August 1942, the presenter, BoT official Jill Crawshay-Williams, emphasised to listeners that they should only buy “all-year-round clothes,” implying that a garment that was only useful for a particular season did not make full use of the ration.³¹ Although it is unclear whether this programme was eventually broadcast or not, the script illustrates that types of messages that the BoT conveyed to the public. The Utility Scheme endorsed another important element in planning: quality. With the announcement of clothes rationing, trade representatives outlined their predictions for the behaviour of consumers. They anticipated that styles will be less varied and that “people with money to spare are likely to spend more by buying better quality clothes that will last longer.”³² As part of the Utility scheme, the textile industry manufactured cloth to a set quality standard. The garment industry then used these textiles to make garments that bore the government’s stamp of assured quality.³³ By removing purchase tax from Utility clothes, the government made their price more accessible, improving public access to quality garments.³⁴ To make the clothes in this scheme more attractive, the Board also recruited the help of well-known fashion designers, who created models designed to be mass produced using Utility cloths.³⁵ Although the involvement of designers was intended to make the Utility scheme more

³¹ ‘The Story of Make-Do and Mend: Script of a Broadcast by Jill Crawshay-Williams, August 1942’ TNA, BT 64/3023.

³² “Fashions Simpler: What Stores Say,” *Daily Mail*, 2 June 1941.

³³ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 50.

³⁴ Sladen, *The Conscription of Fashion*, 36. See also: 32.

³⁵ Minutes of Meeting with Sir Thomas Barlow, January 27, 1942, V&A, AAD/2011/14/1, ‘Minutes of the Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers.’

attractive, Board officials were ambivalent about advertising this collaboration. Despite the benefit of buying clothes of assured quality at a time of curtailed consumption, the Board's Publicity Committee feared it would encourage citizens to make non-essential purchases.³⁶ Communications with the press about Utility garments stressed the good value of clothes included in the scheme and its affordable, controlled, prices, rather than their fashionable appearance.³⁷ While describing the clothes as "delightful," articles about the new garments in women's magazines placed more emphasis on the "cash value" of these clothes – their attractive prices and their quality.³⁸ This emphasis on the serviceability of clothes – their quality, price and suitability to a range of uses – as well as the need to plan their purchases carefully, chimed with pre-war middle-class norms of respectable and responsible economic behaviour. They can be seen in guide books like Settle's *Clothes Line*, but also in early wartime women's columns.³⁹

Recognising the benefits of quality under limited consumption, commercial advertisements for clothes emphasised the idea that high quality garments were a better use of coupons, particularly if the brand had a reputation for quality garments before the war.⁴⁰ Harrods' used this idea to advertise their officers' uniform department, announcing that "Coupons give quality new significance" (Figure 6). Harrods were not the only brand that embraced and promoted messages of clothing economy, care for clothes and careful planning. While clothing brands emphasised the benefits of their quality, soap brands

³⁶ Minutes of the 27th Meeting of the Publicity Committee, 20 March 1942, TNA, BT 64/3037, "Board of Trade: Publicity Committee."

³⁷ See for instance: Kathleen Pearcey, "Exactly What Are Utility Clothes?" *Daily Mirror*, 13 October 1941; Trevor Evans, "Standard Suits Plan Dropped, But –," *Daily Express*, 4 February 1942.

³⁸ "Fashion at a Fixed Price," *Woman*, 7 March 1942.

³⁹ Settle, *Clothes Line*, 49-57, 133-45; Pearcey and Silvain, "That's the Way Your Money Goes!" *Daily Mirror*, 4 September 1939; Pearcey and Silvain, "A Fool about Clothes," *Daily Mirror*, 1 April 1940.

⁴⁰ A few examples: Harrods, *Illustrated London News*, April 4, 1942; Debenham and Freebody, *Times*, June 3, 1941; Celanese, *Times*, August 28, 1941; Sparva Fabrics, *Woman's Own*, April 10, 1942; Moccasin Shoes, *Woman's Own*, January 10, 1947.

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promoted their ability to lengthen the life of a garment. Soap brand Lux, for instance, provided a Wartime Clothing Service, which gave tips about clothes renovations and repurposing.⁴¹ Wool manufacturers Wolsey also supported the message of thrift by encouraging consumers to knit shorter socks as a way of assisting the war effort.⁴² One of their competitors, Lavenda, offered knitting patterns that saved on wool.⁴³ The inclusion of brands like Lux on the BoT's Make Do and Mend Advisory Panel suggests that at least some of these companies collaborated with the BoT on these messages.⁴⁴



Figure 6 – Harrods advertisement, drawing attention to quality in the context of rationing, *Illustrated London News*, April 4, 1942.

As other scholars note, the Make Do and Mend campaign delivered its message through a multitude of channels and media. Government advertisements in newspapers,

⁴¹ See for instance: Lux News Scout, 'Net Result... Curtains into Brassieres,' *Picture Post*, 30 October 1943. The Lux Washability Bureau had a representative on the BoT's Clothing Advisory Panel.

⁴² Wolsey Advertisement, *Picture Post*, 5 June, 1943.

⁴³ Lavenda Knitting Wool, 'Wool from Nowhere,' *Picture Post*, 27 February 1943.

⁴⁴ Minute dated 23 October 1942, signed by C.C.J. Simmonds, TNA, BT 62/3023.

films and on the radio were joined by endorsements from commercial companies and from the press, which provided hints on how to manage a wardrobe under the restrictions while enforcing the message that frugality was patriotic.⁴⁵ With the message appearing in so many forms and on so many channels, it seems unlikely that citizens could avoid it. It did not necessarily mean that citizens always chose to listen to it. According to the BBC's Listening Barometer the two short-lived clothing economy programmes "Beating the Coupons" and "New Clothes for Old" had very low ratings.⁴⁶ Asa Briggs notes how frustrated BBC personnel were with the Board's failure to use the medium to the best advantage.⁴⁷ Towards the end of the war, however, programmes demonstrating wise use of coupons had a larger audience.⁴⁸ Citizens were not passive receptors of the message of thrift that the BoT directed at them. This was true for both men and women. As Zweiniger-Bargielowska shows, women were very critical towards campaign messages when these did not address their needs under rationing or work to supplement existing knowledge.⁴⁹ Chapter Three will examine the behaviour of young working-class women in the context of thrift to show that they did not always heed this message when financial means allowed them to avoid frugal consumption. Chapter Four will explore how the message of thrift was received by men in white-collar occupations, who, although not directly addressed in the Make Do and Mend campaign, were nevertheless urged to make do.

⁴⁵ Janice Winship, "Women's Magazines: Times of War and Management of the Self in *Woman's Own*," in Gledhill and Swanson, *Nationalising Femininity*, 127-139; Howell, *Wartime Fashion*, 131-9; Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 120.

⁴⁶ These programmes were listened to by 3.3 and 3.6 percent of the population on average, respectively. See: BBC Listener Research Department Reports, 1937-c.1950, General Listening Barometers, Vols. 5-6, refs. 1248-r9-11-05, 1248-r9-11-06.

⁴⁷ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, Vol. 3, *The War of Words*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 559-60

⁴⁸ Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting*, Vol. 3 of 5, 560.

⁴⁹ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 120-1.

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As the above implies, clothing economy was an idea that had different implications for different groups in the population, and the government's message was not a uniform one. Rather, messages were crafted to fit the perceived needs and social expectations of different groups. Perceptions of gender roles, which will be further addressed in the next two chapters, meant that women were the main target audience for instructions on how to manage wardrobes under the restrictions. Although some official Make Do and Mend advertisements featured illustrations of men, written messages were addressed to women.⁵⁰ Men were mostly spared advice about mending, but they still had to economise and bear their patches with pride. Internal BoT documents demonstrate further that class differences also shaped the way the Board delivered its message of economy, emphasising aspects of economy that were class-specific. A document that discusses the instructional advertisements of the Make Do and Mend campaign discloses that "the women's magazines appealing to the top end of the community have been excluded," presumably because they had no use for mending instructions.⁵¹ Despite Reynolds' assertion that the Make Do and Mend campaign addressed the growing need for upper-class women to mend their own clothes, it is evident that BoT officials assumed that these women would need advice on saving rather than mending.⁵² Yet while BoT staff directed mending advice to working-class women, these women had equally little use for instructions, since they were well versed in making-do practices, which for them was always a necessity, as Zweiniger-Bargielowska demonstrates.⁵³ Their reaction to these

⁵⁰ 'Do You Care for Clothes?' TNA, INF 2/98.

⁵¹ Minute titled 'Make-Do and Mend,' TNA, BT 64/3023.

⁵² 'Make and Mend Campaign and the Voluntary Organisations' Minute dated 5 August 1942, and 'Proposal Major Mend & Make Do Exhibition,' TNA, BT 64/3023. See conversely: Reynolds, "Your Clothes are Materials of War," 329-30.

⁵³ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 120-1.

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attempts to educate them about skills they already possessed brings to mind paternalistic pre-war initiatives to teach young working-class women home economy so they could better themselves, suggesting that class dynamics were embedded in these campaigns.⁵⁴

The campaign's instructional leaflets and advertisements reflected middle-class ideas about respectability in the context of thrift. The quality of the mending was highlighted in the campaign, which emphasised that darns and patches had to be "neat." An advertisement that warned of the danger of moths instructed readers to patch moth holes as soon as possible, explaining, "a neat darn is a work of art and it's well worth while to take a little time and trouble over the job."⁵⁵ A BoT leaflet titled "Deft Darns" advised "neat darns, done in time, can make things last without making them look shabby."⁵⁶ The idea was that clothes that were mended neatly did not wear down as quickly, and were not as conspicuously shabby as ones that were "cobble[d]" or neglected.⁵⁷ Neatness was significant both for the durability of clothes and for the morale of the wearers. As *Vogue* defined it in 1942, "we will be shabby if we must, but not shoddy – ever."⁵⁸ Even if clothes could not be new, they should have still looked new, or at least well-cared-for. This attitude was not confined to wealthy *Vogue* readers – the *Daily Mirror* Women's Page demonstrated the same attitude when it reproached women for neglecting their appearance, remarking that there isn't "anything specially patriotic about this lowering sight."⁵⁹ Comments about aspiring to neatness appeared throughout the austerity period in MO surveys about clothing habits, coming from men and women of all ages, but particularly

⁵⁴ Pilgrim Trust, *Men without Work*, 254-5.

⁵⁵ 'The Raiders,' dated October 1942, TNA, INF 2/98.

⁵⁶ Norman and National Archives (Great Britain), *Make Do and Mend*, 93. Other leaflets used similar language.

⁵⁷ Norman and National Archives (Great Britain), *Make Do and Mend*, 137.

⁵⁸ "Fashionable Intelligence," *Vogue*, October, 1942.

⁵⁹ "It's a New Kind of Swank," *Daily Mirror*, 26 November, 1941.

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from those engaged in white-collar work.⁶⁰ As discussed in Chapter One, and as will be further explored in Chapter Four, being “neat” or “tidy” connoted respectability, efficiency and organisation, making it a positive association in the context of white-collar employment.⁶¹ Unable to dress as they did before the war, and forced to make do with wardrobes of varying sizes, those who adhered to middle-class values preserved their respectability by taking care to be neat, even if their clothes were darned and worn.

This emphasis on neatness reveals ambivalent attitudes in Britain towards a shabby appearance despite declarations of its patriotic nature. As Chapter One explores, pre-war British society read class and status into clothes. Qualities like neatness, cleanliness and tidiness were used to judge the respectability of working-class families in need, and their efforts to climb out of poverty.⁶² In white-collar work environments, meanwhile, these qualities, alongside a certain degree of smartness, marked the standard of appearance that set apart the diligent from the sloppy workers. These social norms, which recognised newness and quality with higher social status, were in conflict with the new necessity and requests to make clothes last. Although it was inevitable that after several years of clothes rationing, personal sacrifice and declining production quality, clothes began to show signs of wear, the legitimacy of shabbiness was not self-evident. As the other chapters in this work will show, shoddiness and shabbiness still had negative social and personal associations in British society, regardless of the image that government propaganda promoted.

⁶⁰ Just to give a few examples: MOA, DR 3035, reply to September 1947 Directive [Female, former teacher, 54]; DR 3574, reply to June 1944 Directive [Female, library assistant, 19]; Male, metallurgist and former university student, 23, quoted in FR 2505.

⁶¹ Alan A. Jackson, *The Middle Classes, 1900-1950* (Nairn: David St John Thomas, 1991), 157-8. See also: MOA, DR 3361, reply to January 1943 Directive.

⁶² See for instance: Pilgrim Trust, *Men without Work*, 190-2.

The discomfort with shabbiness is apparent in wartime cartoons, which illustrate the confusion created by the incongruity between class and appearance.⁶³ An *Evening News* cartoon by Joseph Lee titled “Shabby Patriots” portrayed a middle-class man, irritated by a vagrant who spoke to him on the street, remarking “Allow me to inform you Sir, that I’m not your ‘chum’. I am a patriotic citizen wearing up old clothes and temporarily inconvenienced by the shortage of safety-razor blades.”⁶⁴ A similar popular theme was the suspicious, ridiculous or simply inappropriately shabby appearance of men whose wives had taken their coupons.⁶⁵ Like the shabby patriots theme, these cartoons played on the tension between how men of a certain status were supposed to look and how circumstances made them look. In one, a wife declares that “I’m afraid I’ll HAVE to let Henry have some clothing coupons. Horrid tramps keep mistaking this for a doss-house.”⁶⁶ These types of cartoons demonstrate that social standards and perceptions conflicted with contemporary circumstances and concepts of civic duty, complicating citizens’ response. These cartoons both conformed to and subverted gender norms, since the victims of shabbiness in those cartoons tended to be men. This marked women as frivolous buyers, who appropriated their

⁶³ Sidney ‘George’ Straube, “Garn, ‘e ain’t a guy – he’s just a patriotic gent,” *Daily Express*, 5 November 1942, British Cartoon Archive, accessed: 1 October 2020, <https://archive.cartoons.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=GS0654F&pos=232>.

⁶⁴ Joseph Lee, “Shabby Patriots,” Smiling Through series, *Evening News*, 6 February 1941. British Cartoon Archive, accessed: 1 October 2020, <https://archive.cartoons.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=JL1708&pos=160>.

⁶⁵ NEB (Ronald Neighbour), “Actually he is one of those few 6000 pound a year men...,” *Daily Mail*, 1 September 1942, British Cartoon Archive, accessed: 1 October 2020, <https://archive.cartoons.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=NEB1406&pos=228>; Joseph Lee, “Vagrant,” Smiling Through series, *Evening News*, 4 February 1942, British Cartoon Archive, accessed: 1 October 2020, <https://archive.cartoons.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=JL2028&pos=209>; Joseph Lee, “Exhibit,” Smiling Through series, *Evening News*, 19 November 1943, British Cartoon Archive, accessed: 1 October 2020, <https://archive.cartoons.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=JL2528&pos=255>.

⁶⁶ Joseph Lee, “Doss House,” Smiling Through series, *Evening News*, British Cartoon Archive, accessed: 1 October 2020, <https://archive.cartoons.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=JL2826&pos=276>.

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husbands' coupons, but also showed that men were more concerned with appearances than gender norms allowed.

The BoT was evidently concerned about the persistence of these social norms. The minutes of the Board's Publicity Committee reveal that in an early discussion of a clothing economy campaign, before the formal introduction of Make Do and Mend, the committee sought to "break down the idea of conventional clothes and encourage people to wear their old clothes."⁶⁷ This concerned both men and women in different ways. The committee felt that conventional advertising that used the allure of new fashions as a way of attracting customers would tempt women to use their coupons unwisely. The committee was similarly concerned about the habits of men doing office-work, whose insistence on maintaining their dress norms was marked as a rising problem.⁶⁸ The rise in sales of suits in response to rumours about standardisation, described in Chapter One, could have also alerted the government to men's high regard for dress norms. Government exhortations, however, held limited appeal for the British public, restricting the Board's ability to convey these messages.⁶⁹ On occasion, when questions of dress norms rose in public debates, Board officials took the opportunity to promote their view that these had no place in wartime. The case of clothing conventions among professionals and clerical workers is discussed in Chapter Four. The question of allowing women to wear trousers to the office similarly provided an opportunity for the Board to address the issue of dress norms. When rationing made stockings into a poor investment of coupons, some women preferred to wear trousers to work for warmth. The practice was not widely supported, leading to a public debate

⁶⁷ 'Minutes of the 29th Meeting of the Publicity Committee, Held on Friday 1st May 1942,' TNA, BT 64/3037.

⁶⁸ 'Publicity for Next Year's Ration,' TNA, BT 64/3037. I explore this issue further in Chapter Four.

⁶⁹ Henry Irving, "The Ministry of Information on the British Home Front," in Elliott and Wiggam, *Allied Communication to the Public during the Second World War*, 26-8.

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about dress codes. The BoT would not force firms to allow their women workers to wear trousers.⁷⁰ In an attempt to set the tone, officials took action by announcing that Whitehall removed this limitation on its women workers.⁷¹ Such incidents, however, were limited, leaving this subject fairly untouched by the BoT's propaganda efforts.

The Board of Trade's propaganda during the war concentrated, therefore, on helping citizens manage on limited resources, while the majority of national resources were poured into the war effort. The Board helped not only by providing advice and guidance, through official and unofficial channels, but also through the framing of these limitations. When the Board presented the various schemes the government introduced, it emphasised the importance of these controls to Britain's ability to win the war. By highlighting the way this sacrifice contributed to the war effort, Board officials hoped to influence citizens' attitude to the schemes and help consumers see clothes economy as their duty rather than an unwanted constraint. The language that the Board used in its propaganda created a code of conduct for citizens to follow, one which embraced frugality but maintained respectability, did not insist on established standards of appearance, and was very careful with resources. At the same time, the BoT also tried to present these policies as beneficial to the public, and thereby desirable. The next section will demonstrate the way Board officials promoted some of these policies as defending citizens from the consequences of wartime production.

Fair Shares and the Government's Responsibility

As a way of securing the cooperation of citizens, the BoT presented some of the schemes included in its clothing policies as ways to defend consumers. Price control, rationing and the Utility Scheme all embodied different aspects of government attention to

⁷⁰ "'Dear Mr. Dalton' Cannot Help Her," *Daily Mail*, 1 June 1943.

⁷¹ "Whitehall Bare Legs Ban Goes," *Daily Mirror*, 1 September 1941.

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citizens' needs. The introduction of these regulations, explained government officials, would keep citizens of all sections of the population clothed by distributing the available resources equally, and by ensuring access to reasonable quality in decent prices. The phrase "fair shares" was often used as a shorthand expression that conveyed the egalitarian properties of controls and emphasised the government's concern for the interests of ordinary citizens. While implying fairness, this language also obscured the ways these policies secured equality, opening the government to criticism over the limitation of these policies in defending citizens' interests.

The need to preserve citizens' wardrobes was not self-evident. In the case of food, the First World War set important precedents for control, and pre-war campaigns that supported citizens' nutritional rights helped highlight the need for food rationing.⁷² The case for clothing controls did not have the same level of compelling evidence.⁷³ Clothing regulations, particularly rationing and price control, did not earn immediate support within the British government.⁷⁴ In the case of rationing, Churchill famously voiced his reservations about the scheme, which he did not believe was necessary.⁷⁵ Attempting to persuade the War Cabinet to introduce this measure, the President of the Board of Trade warned of the "social consequences" that may occur in the event of acute shortages, hinting at the danger of civil unrest.⁷⁶ He then proceeded to emphasise the need "to secure a fair

⁷² Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 12-13; Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain*, 139-41.

⁷³ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 46.

⁷⁴ Howell, *Wartime Fashion*, 78.

⁷⁵ Howell, 86-7.

⁷⁶ TNA, CAB 66/16/28, "Rationing of Clothing, Memorandum by the President of the Board of Trade."

distribution” of clothes.⁷⁷ The Cabinet eventually agreed to the scheme in May 1941 and the Board of Trade introduced it in June that year.

The assertion that the clothes rationing scheme secured fair distribution and shielded the population from extreme inequalities was reiterated in many of the official communications about the scheme. In the radio address that introduced rationing, Lyttelton assured the listening citizens that the scheme was both necessary and fair.⁷⁸ The first Clothing Quiz declared that “Rationing is the way to get fair shares,” and that the scheme was meant “to defend you as a consumer and as a citizen.”⁷⁹ Although the next Quiz avoided mentioning this idea, the 1944 Clothing Quiz again maintained that rationing and price control ensured that “everybody has had his fair share.”⁸⁰ As Roodhouse argues, there was no public discussion of what exactly the BoT meant by “fair” and how (or if) the scheme delivered this fairness.⁸¹ The case of outsize consumers discussed in Chapter Five shows that the criteria of equity and “equality of sacrifice,” which Roodhouse suggests guided these assertions, were applied selectively and inconsistently, based on unspoken assumptions about who merited special consideration and who did not.⁸² Whether or not the scheme was fair, clothes rationing promoted the idea that the government was obligated to take care of its citizens’ interests as consumers of clothes. In contrast to the message that the Make Do and Mend and the National Savings campaigns delivered, the BoT’s emphasis on fair distribution constructed clothing as a necessity rather than a luxury. While an

⁷⁷ TNA, CAB 66/16/28.

⁷⁸ “Broadcast Speech by the Rt. Hon. Oliver Lyttelton,” TNA, BT 64/871.

⁷⁹ ‘Clothing Coupon Quiz’ [1941?], TNA, BT 131/37.

⁸⁰ ‘The 1944-45 Clothing Quiz,’ TNA, BT 131/37.

⁸¹ Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, 127-31.

⁸² Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, 128.

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unchecked access to clothes was a luxury that had no place in wartime, it was necessary to ensure that citizens had some, albeit limited, access to clothes.

Price control was similarly painted as a means to shield the public from economic instability. The Board of Trade introduced price control with the Prices of Goods Act 1939, later expanding the control of prices with the Goods and Services (Price Control) Act 1941. Although the war brought with it more limited supplies, higher wages and rising costs that increased the retail price of many commodities, it was within the government's powers to regulate these prices and improve citizens' access to essential goods. In the interim between the first and second Acts, emphasis on the responsibility of the government to secure accessible prices grew. As Hargreaves and Gowing note, the Prices of Goods Act 1939 was initially introduced with the view to reassure British citizens that their government will shield them from the unnecessary economic consequences of the war, rather than as a means of strictly controlling prices.⁸³ When he presented the Bill for a second reading in Parliament, Oliver Stanley, the first President of the Board of Trade during the war, conjured the shadow of First World War profiteers, painting the Bill as a way of making sure citizens will not have to suffer from the "unseemly" behaviour of their successors in the new conflict.⁸⁴ Although he presented the Bill as the prevention of profiteering, Stanley shied away from heavy-handed interference in the market, drawing attention not only to the dangers of profiteering but to its scarcity, and to the high likelihood of increased prices on legitimate grounds. The government, Stanley implied, was there to take care of consumers, but not at the expense of business owners.⁸⁵ The Bill was worth passing not necessarily because of a high likelihood of rackets, but because the *idea* of profiteering (rather than acts

⁸³ Hargreaves and Gowing, *Civil Industry and Trade*. 77-8.

⁸⁴ 352 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1939), cols. 1109-1110.

⁸⁵ 352 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1939), cols. 1109-1121.

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of profiteering) was “a really grave social danger” that threatened the continued cooperation of law-abiding citizens.⁸⁶ The model of good citizenship that emerged from his discussion of the problem of rising prices was of a rational consumer, who acknowledged the complex mechanism that controlled prices and understood that not every mark-up in prices was the work of a profiteer.⁸⁷ While Stanley promised to shield consumers to a certain extent, he simultaneously asked for their acceptance of the inevitable difficulties of war.

When Oliver Lyttelton, Stanley’s successor, introduced the next Bill to regulate prices in 1941, he did not discuss price control as a step taken to solve the specific practices of profiteering, but as part of an extensive government policy meant to meet the needs of the civilian population while keeping war production in full steam.⁸⁸ The new Bill, announced Lyttelton, “imposes a responsibility of a more direct nature upon the Board of Trade.”⁸⁹ Like his predecessor, he emphasised the limited number of traders who were dishonest. This general compliance, however, was the main reason he felt it was “the duty of the State to protect” honest traders as well as consumers.⁹⁰ One of the changes in the administration of price control was the way businesses were regulated. While in the first Bill regulation relied on citizens to report incidents of suspected profiteering, the second Bill relocated that responsibility to the Board of Trade, thereby emphasising the government’s duty over that of the citizen in securing compliance. Other than obeying the law, citizens no longer had an active role to play in the regulation of prices.

⁸⁶ 352 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1939), col. 1110.

⁸⁷ 352 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1939), cols. 1111-1114.

⁸⁸ 372 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1941), cols. 851-853.

⁸⁹ 372 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1941), col. 854.

⁹⁰ 372 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1941) cols. 855, 858.

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The second act of price regulation, therefore, marks a shift in both government rhetoric and policy from restrained intervention to an emphasis on the responsibility of the government towards its citizens. Its conjunction with other controls in the second half of 1941 emphasises that shift further. Other than rationing, which was introduced only a few weeks before the Goods and Services (Price Control) Act, the BoT implemented an additional scheme that served to defend citizens' access to clothes. As noted above, Utility clothes, which first appeared in shops in autumn 1941, made the price of quality fabrics more accessible to a wider public. Sladen shows that civil servants at the BoT developed this scheme with the intention to secure the production of cheap but durable goods to offset the effects of rationing on citizens' wardrobes.⁹¹ When officials commented on the scheme they emphasised its merits in supplying the clothing needs of the public.⁹² Reports in the press announcing Utility clothes marketed the scheme as a way of guarding consumers from trade practices. A *Daily Mail* report from July 1941 asserted that the scheme was meant "to prevent concentration by manufacturers on high-quality, high-priced goods" by diverting production to lower priced goods and dictating the quality of garments.⁹³ Newspapers announced that the scheme would increase supplies to the home market and highlighted the benefits of the scheme, which produced garments aimed at the majority of the population rather than its upper class.⁹⁴ In the context of the limitations the government placed on clothing consumption, these reports delivered the message that it was the responsibility of the government to mitigate some of the consequences of these limitations, by securing the production of garments that would withstand extended use.

⁹¹ Sladen, *The Conscripted Fashion*, 28.

⁹² "Shops Get More Clothes," *Daily Mail*, 29 August 1941.

⁹³ "63s. Will Buy Your Wife a Costume," *Daily Mail*, 31 July 1941.

⁹⁴ See for instance: "All Clothes Prices Controlled," *Daily Mirror*, 28 August 1941; "'Guarantee' Wear for Women Next," *Daily Mail*, 30 July 1941.

At the heart of the Board's attention to necessities was its Consumer Needs Section. The section was established to help the BoT monitor shortages of consumer goods in relation to citizens' needs. As Hilton shows, their surveys into the material needs of the population were meant to supplement controls by ensuring that the latter did not have any unintentional adverse effects.⁹⁵ Yet, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Five, while the Section was quickly marked as the "consumers' watchdog," it did not always defend citizens' interests, opting at times to keep the control system simple and workable rather than fair.⁹⁶ Moreover, the main preoccupation of the section – ensuring that production was in line with public needs and that essentials were properly distributed – demonstrates that to the Board of Trade, fair shares meant a distribution of resources that was economic and regionally (rather than individually) equitable. In other words, they were more concerned with the availability of consumer products than they were with citizens' ability to obtain them.

This was not, however, the way citizens viewed the suggestion of fairness and consumer protection. Both the critics and advocates of these aspects of clothing controls discussed them in terms of citizens' effective access to garments. The initial reaction of the *Sunday Pictorial* to clothes rationing praised Lyttelton for his ability to create a truly egalitarian scheme, which meant that every citizen, no matter their income, "will only be able to buy one suit a year," in contrast to Lord Woolton's food rationing scheme, which allowed the wealthy "to eat smoked salmon and roast chicken at the savoy."⁹⁷ The fact that the system allowed equal access to clothes, no matter their price, could also be criticised on

⁹⁵ Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain*, 141

⁹⁶ "Consumers' Watchdog," *Daily Mirror*, 11 October 1941. See also: W. B. Reddaway, "Rationing," *Lessons of the British War Economy*, ed. D. N. Chester, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 186-8.

⁹⁷ Stuart Campbell, "Stripped to the Waist – At Last!" *Sunday Pictorial*, 1 June 1941.

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the same terms. In December that year, the West Yorkshire County Association of the National Union of Teachers criticised the way rationing disadvantaged children from poor families, who suffered “from the poor quality of clothes that some parents are able to buy.”⁹⁸ They pressed that “the provision, price, and distribution of clothing for children should be controlled at such a level as will enable all children to be clothed adequately.”⁹⁹ In February 1942, William King-Hall, Member of Parliament for Ormskirk, suggested to the Board of Trade that rationing should be extended to ban those who made over £1,000 a year from buying clothes “thereby [...] applying more strictly to the principle of equality of sacrifice.”¹⁰⁰ This criticism can be found in the opinions of private citizens as well. A letter published in the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* in 1944 expressed the grievances of a working-class father with a large family, pointing out that “rationing does not always work out as equality of sacrifice,” since “some people [...] did not start on level terms with those who were in the habit of spending more on clothes.”¹⁰¹ These references to the fairness of rationing judged it by its capacity to equitably distribute resources to individuals in the population, ensuring that the burden of restricted access was evenly shared and that citizens were able to get the clothes they needed, but could not get more than necessary.

The idea that the government should assume responsibility for citizens’ clothing needs was embraced by citizens. While citizens appreciated the government’s commitment to fair shares, they did not always accept its “low standard of equity” as Brian Reddaway suggested.¹⁰² Where they believed the system did not deliver the fair shares it promised, they challenged the government’s concept of fairness by offering different interpretations.

⁹⁸ “Children’s Clothing: Teachers’ Views,” *Yorkshire Observer*, 15 December 1941.

⁹⁹ “Children’s Clothing,” *Yorkshire Observer*.

¹⁰⁰ “Equality in Clothing,” *Daily Mail* (Hull), 17 February 1942.

¹⁰¹ “Clothes Rationing,” What Our Readers Think, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 10 January 1944.

¹⁰² Reddaway, “Rationing,” 187.

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This will be evident in Chapter Five, which shows how outside consumers used the government's own language to hold it accountable for its promises of fair shares.

The way that government officials viewed their role as defenders of citizens' rights as consumers changed as Britain began the process of reconstruction. Despite the Labour government's emphasis on centralised economic planning, its post-war campaigns highlighted citizens' role in securing prosperity and preventing scarcity. The government's role in this context was the role of the facilitator and instructor who helped citizens transform austerity into affluence.

From Scarcity to Plenty

The end of the war did not mean the end of all clothing controls. In the final months of the war, the need for frugality was still urgent. In October 1944, Hugh Dalton wrote to the voluntary organisations involved in the Make Do and Mend campaign to thank them for their work and to encourage them to keep helping women even after the war was won, since "even then industry cannot quickly be switched from the production of munitions of war to civilian goods, and the need for economy and saving will continue."¹⁰³ Shortly before the end of the war Dalton warned his listeners at a Labour party meeting that it will take years before supplies will enable the removal of restrictions, when Britain could transition "from scarcity to plenty."¹⁰⁴ In his announcement to the press after VE day, on 22 May, he made clear that, as stocks of clothes had dwindled, immediate improvement in the

¹⁰³ Letter from Hugh Dalton to the voluntary organisations represented in the Women's Group for Public Welfare, dated 7 October 1944, The Women's Library (TWL) at the London School of Economics (LSE), Records of the Women's Forum and Its Predecessors (WFM), 5WFM/B/10, "Make-Do and Mend Sub-Committee."

¹⁰⁴ "Shortages after Victory," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 9 April 1945.

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ration was unlikely, and future improvement would be slow.¹⁰⁵ Although the war in Europe ended and a victory in the Pacific was approaching, clothing economy was unlikely to disappear soon.

While it took four more years for clothes rationing to end, the campaign directing citizens to be frugal beyond the ration only lasted another year. In July 1946, at the Make Do and Mend Advisory Committee, Simmonds announced that “as supplies improved there was no longer such an urgent need, from the Board’s angle, for the campaign.”¹⁰⁶ The instructional side of the campaign, led by the women’s voluntary organisations and the Local Education Authorities, continued to operate under the Board of Education, but the publicity and leaflets the BoT produced were no longer deemed necessary.¹⁰⁷ Without the pressing demands of the war effort on Britain’s workforce and shipping space, citizens were no longer asked to be excessively frugal in their consumption of clothes.

The supply position, improved as it was, was not good enough to increase the clothes ration, which in mid-1946 was still less than four coupons a month, and only rose by half a coupon per month in the next rationing period. But whereas previously the intensity of the war effort accounted for the lack of goods in the shops, the new post-war situation was different. As Alec Cairncross argues, the sudden end of the war in Japan left Britain in a precarious financial position. In order to reach financial stability, imports had to be maintained at the wartime level, while exports had to be increased significantly. This was a problem in a country that imported most of the raw materials used to manufacture its

¹⁰⁵ Press Notice A.T. 526, G.P. 247, dated 22 May 1945, TNA, BT 131/39, “Clothes Rationing: Press and Broadcast Announcements on Rationing of Clothes, Cloth and Footwear. 1st June 1941-1945.”

¹⁰⁶ Minutes of the Make-Do and Mend Advisory Committee and Panel Held at IC House, Wednesday, 10th July, 1946, TWL at LSE, WFM, 5WFM/B/10.

¹⁰⁷ Minutes of the Make-Do and Mend Advisory Committee, 10th July, 1946, TWL at LSE, WFM, 5WFM/B/10.

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exported commodities. Regulations on commodities therefore had to be maintained. The complex considerations that caused this situation were not readily understandable to British workers, who had been waiting for the end of the war to bring an end to controls so that they could make full use of their improved incomes.¹⁰⁸ According to William Crofts, the optimistic way that Clement Attlee presented the situation to the public did not help in persuading workers of the pressing needs of the economic crisis.¹⁰⁹ Their support and cooperation were needed not just for political stability, but because those workers were necessary for the production of export goods.

This was the backdrop for the British government's post-war campaigns, which focused on explaining the export position and encouraging British citizens to increase their productivity in various ways. Although these campaigns were not concerned specifically with clothes, as I will discuss below, they demonstrate that clothes and clothing consumption remained topics of debate that the government wanted to direct. Garments remained important for two reasons. Instead of a target for curtailing household expenditure, clothes in post-war Britain were the prize of citizens who worked to pull the country out of financial instability. In the early campaigns, workers' productivity was implicit, due to the negative associations productivity campaigns acquired after the First World War.¹¹⁰ The clue for citizens' role was in the slogan "Fill the Ships and We Shall Fill the Shops," which marked workers as those who filled the ships; and kept the supply of export goods flowing. This message became progressively clearer towards the end of the decade, when government campaigns began putting explicit pressure on workers to increase

¹⁰⁸ Alec Cairncross, *Years of Recovery: British Economic Policy 1945-51* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 3-15.

¹⁰⁹ William Crofts, *Coercion or Persuasion? Propaganda in Britain after 1945* (London: Routledge, 1989), 35-6.

¹¹⁰ 419 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1946), cols. 2115-7.

the volume of production. This was where clothes gained an additional role as a primary export commodity. Clothing was therefore both the commodity workers needed to produce as a means for reaching prosperity and their reward for their productivity, marking this commodity as a luxury that belonged in an era of affluence.

That reward, however, was not for immediate attainment. As Crofts poignantly argues, the campaign writers were accustomed to writing for a middle-class audience, and the messages they crafted tended to reflect middle-class norms and beliefs.¹¹¹ These were similar to the messages imparted in wartime campaigns, emphasising individual sacrifice, patience and effort for the greater, or future, good. A campaign advertisement from mid-1946 told citizens that “exports pay [...] for all the cotton and nearly all the wool for our clothes,” but asked them to “be patient if we have to go short for a bit longer while we get back the export trade upon which better times depend.”¹¹² Citizens had to produce more goods so that at some point in the future they could have their share of affluence – and it was their duty to be diligent and patient. Convincing the British public that they should defer their dreams of a plentiful wardrobe was not an easy task. When BIPO asked in January 1944, what commodities apart from food people would buy if they could, clothes were the most frequently mentioned item among respondents.¹¹³ In December 1944, the Ministry of Information’s (MoI) weekly reports marked clothing difficulties, particularly for children, as “the chief preoccupation” on the Home Front.¹¹⁴ This mood was prevalent throughout the latter half of 1944. The invasion of Normandy in June and subsequent

¹¹¹ Crofts, *Coercion or Persuasion?* 36-7.

¹¹² “The More We Send Abroad... the More We Can Bring In,” *Daily Herald*, 25 May 1946.

¹¹³ J. Hinton et al., “British Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup) Polls, 1938–1946,” Economic and Social Data Service deposit SN 3331 (1996), <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-3331-1> [Accessed 21 September 2019], survey dated January 1944.

¹¹⁴ MOI Digital, Ministry of Information (MoI), Home Intelligence Weekly Report no. 219, 14 December 1944, accessed 22 October 2020, <http://www.moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-special-reports-inf-1-292-2-c/idm140465714060784/>.

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reports in the news of conditions in liberated France aroused bitter commentary in Britain, as it seemed to British citizens that people in France were more “well-fed and well-clothed” than they expected.¹¹⁵ The situation aggravated after the appearance of newsreels showing fashion parades in Paris in August, which, according to the intelligence reports, made British women “infuriated.”¹¹⁶ Rumours that precious textile resources were being sent to Europe to aid its recovery at the expense of the home market, persisted until 1946.¹¹⁷

This meant that the government perceived clothes as a sensitive issue in the immediate aftermath of the war, which had to be utilised carefully during the export campaign. An advertisement titled “The More We Send Abroad, the More We Can Bring in,” originally included “Fashions” as one of the goods exported out of Britain.¹¹⁸ In its published version, however, “Fashions” were replaced with “Cutlery.”¹¹⁹ While this ad avoided mentioning the export of clothing and textile goods, the export campaign tended to mention them as significant imports. One ad showed how bicycles manufactured in Britain were exchanged for cotton.¹²⁰ Another mentioned wool and cotton as two of the raw materials that kept British factories at work.¹²¹ One ad even featured a pair of hands knitting wool, while stating that “For making clothes, blankets, knitting wool and many

¹¹⁵ MOI Digital, MoI, Home Intelligence Weekly Report no. 194, 22 June 1944, accessed 22 October 2020, <http://www.moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-special-reports-inf-1-292-2-c/idm140465680645184/>.

¹¹⁶ MOI Digital, MoI, Home Intelligence Weekly Report no. 207, 21 September 1944, accessed 22 October 2020, <http://www.moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-special-reports-inf-1-292-2-c/idm140465681454128/>. This newsreel was probably similar to the ones that aroused women’s anger: *Paris Today* (1944), Movietone: The Digital Newsreel Archive, accessed: 8 July 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/jwntyme>.

¹¹⁷ “Between You and Me,” *Woman’s Own*, 21 September 1945; “Between You and Me,” *Woman’s Own*, 8 March 1946.

¹¹⁸ ‘The More We Send Abroad, the More We Can Bring In!’, TNA, INF 2/130, “Road to Recovery Campaign.”

¹¹⁹ “The More We Send Abroad, the More We Can Bring In...,” *Daily Herald*, 25 May 1946.

¹²⁰ “How Can Cycles Sent to Africa... Fetch Us Cotton from U.S.A.?,” *Daily Herald*, 17 October 1946.

¹²¹ “Exports Buy the Raw Materials to Keep Up Full Employment,” *Daily Herald*, 5 November 1946.

other things needed in the home, we must import raw wool,” and informing the readers that the amount of wool imported was 16,000 tons a month.¹²² This campaign tried to convey the message that if British workers will help with the export drive, the government will be able to increase the supply of these coveted commodities.

While the campaign portrayed textiles as imports, it did not leave the impression that textile goods were more significant imports than they were exports. Crofts observes that people tend to ignore messages that do not chime with their beliefs and embrace those that do.¹²³ This is certainly visible in Britons’ understanding of the relationship between textile goods and exports. Between October and December 1946, the government’s Social Survey department conducted a survey into the campaign’s success in educating the population about exports. Although clothing and footwear represented only 4 percent of the national income from exports, 33 percent of respondents mentioned it as an exported commodity, making it the second most frequently mentioned item after motor cars.¹²⁴ Shoes were mentioned by a further 9 percent. Women were nearly twice as likely to mention clothes as men were, regardless of economic group, reflecting, according to the report “the preoccupation of women with clothing difficulties.”¹²⁵ As will be discussed in Chapter Four, however, the civilian menswear market’s more visible threat at this point was demobilisation. With regards to imports, the answers respondents gave reflected the campaign’s highlighting of textiles, even if this did not represent accurate knowledge of the facts. When asked about commodities imported into Britain, 12 percent mentioned cotton,

¹²² “Britain Imports 16,000 Tons of Wool a Month,” *Daily Herald*, 31 January 1947.

¹²³ Crofts, *Coercion or Persuasion?* 115.

¹²⁴ MOI Digital, WSS, RG 23/91, “‘Fill the Ships’: An Inquiry into Public Attitudes towards Export and the Export Campaign, 1947,” accessed 22 October 2020, <http://www.moidigital.ac.uk/reports/wartime-social-survey/the-social-survey-rg-23-91/idm140133747653584/>.

¹²⁵ MOI Digital, WSS, RG 23/91.

and 8 percent mentioned wool, although both commodities together represented only about 7 percent of Britain's retained imports for 1946. Here, less women than men mentioned textiles.¹²⁶ The surveyor's conclusion was that knowledge about imports was lacking and that "attention needs to be given to telling the population [...] what is not exported as well as what is exported."¹²⁷

It is probable, however, that citizens' perception of clothing as a major export commodity came from the high profile that export garments were given rather than citizens' preoccupation with clothing shortages and controls. The "Britain Can Make It" exhibition, which opened its doors in September 1946, featured the fashion and textile industry as a significant portion of the event, covering a quarter of the exhibition space.¹²⁸ The women's fashions and dress fabrics section covered nineteen pages in the exhibition survey *Design '46*, with six additional pages devoted to children's and menswear; no other commodity received such a lengthy survey.¹²⁹ In addition, since not enough space was available to display all garment models, a separate fashion parade was organised, promising to make Britain "lead the world in fashions," thereby highlighting the export value of British garments.¹³⁰ While the parade was a small event, the exhibition attracted large crowds and was widely reported in the press.¹³¹ The notion that clothes were being exported out of the country was supported by reports about British designers' fashion

¹²⁶ Central Statistical Office (CSO), *Annual Abstract of Statistics No. 85, 1937-1947* (London: HMSO, 1948), 167, table 196, 168, table 197.

¹²⁷ MOI Digital, WSS, RG 23/91.

¹²⁸ Mary Schoeser, "Fabrics for Everyman and for the Elite," in *Design and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain: The Britain Can Make It Exhibition of 1946*, eds. Patrick J. Maguire and Jonathan M. Woodham (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), 70.

¹²⁹ Council of Industrial Design, *Design '46*, 45-63, 63-4, 73-6, respectively.

¹³⁰ "Britain Gives 150 Proofs that We Lead the World in Fashions," *Daily Mirror*, 26 September 1946.

¹³¹ Jonathan M. Woodham, "Britain Can Make It and the History of Design," in Maguire and Woodham, *Design and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain*, 19. See also: BT/60/23/4, "Document 34: Draft Letter from the President of the Board of Trade to the King," in Maguire and Woodham, *Design and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain*, 197.

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shows, whose models were “for export only.”¹³² This focus on British fashion as an important export commodity could have created the impression that clothes were a large part of Britain’s export trade.¹³³ It did not help that retailers were telling consumers that certain essential clothing goods, like baby gowns, were only made for export.¹³⁴ Reports about textile exports would have therefore confirmed their belief that textile goods were not available because of exports. It is also likely that, given the shortages and strict rationing, people paid more attention to news about the export of quality garments than to any reports about Britain’s largest export commodity, machinery, which had little impact on private consumers.

While this spotlight created a skewed impression of the monetary worth of export garments, the export of garments and textile goods did have significant implications for the domestic availability of clothes. Textiles were an important export commodity.¹³⁵ Although garments did not represent a significant part of Britain’s export revenue, the proportion of export garments out of the total amount of garments made in Britain was not negligible. Out of the bulk of cotton piece goods made in Britain in the third quarter of 1946, 35-40 percent were exported.¹³⁶ The numbers for the last quarter were similar.¹³⁷ Although not all of the goods included in those numbers were garments, it did mean that the export drive affected the availability of clothing on the home market. This was despite assertions from the Board of Trade that “people here are not being sacrificed for export needs.”¹³⁸ The spotlight on fashion as an export commodity therefore threatened to weaken public support

¹³² “Three Ordinary People,” *Womansense*, *Daily Herald*, 3 August 1946.

¹³³ “Spring Coat Has Export Look – Utility Price,” *Daily Mirror*, 26 March 1946. See also: “Cripps Told ‘Wipe Out Squalor in Slum Factories’,” *Daily Mirror*, 27 March 1947.

¹³⁴ “Export,” *Live Letters*, *Daily Mirror*, 16 March 1946.

¹³⁵ Crofts, *Coercion or Persuasion?* 111.

¹³⁶ “More Clothes by Two-Way Plan,” *Daily Herald*, 23 August 1946.

¹³⁷ 428 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1946) cols. 1043-4.

¹³⁸ “Increase in Coupons – More to Buy,” *Daily Mirror*, 19 February 1946.

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for the export drive, making citizens impatient for the day they will be able to buy this coveted commodity. The highlighting of clothing as goods that were sent out of the country undermined the government's message that the export drive increased the amount of clothes and other consumer goods available in the shops.

Despite this conflict between the visibility of clothing exports and the government's agenda, clothes were not a main concern for citizens while the government ran the export campaign, between May 1946 and April 1947. A BIPO survey from January 1947 shows that clothes rationing was low on the list of problems citizens thought the government needed to solve.¹³⁹ It is possible that this was the result of an improvement in Britain's textile position towards the end of 1946. In the 1946-1947 rationing period citizens received 62 coupons, an average of 4.4 coupons a month, and nearly two thirds more than they received in the previous rationing year. This increase was possible because clothing production had improved despite significant difficulties.¹⁴⁰ Considered alongside significant shortages in other commodities, particularly food, it is clear why clothing controls featured less prominently in citizens' concerns.¹⁴¹

The improvement in clothing supplies, however, was short-lived. The next rationing period, set to begin in November 1947, brought ambivalent news. On the one hand, the BoT was able to release the new ration books a month earlier, in October, a benefit that Stafford Cripps attributed to "remarkable efforts by the textile workers to keep production going."¹⁴² On the other hand, however, the ration was significantly smaller, with 20

¹³⁹ George Gallup (ed.), *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls, Great Britain, 1937-1975*, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1976), 1:148-9.

¹⁴⁰ "Coupons Windfall," *Daily Mirror*, 20 June 1946. See also: Crofts, *Coercion or Persuasion?* 110-21, 153-67.

¹⁴¹ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 83, 214-17.

¹⁴² "Oct. 1 is Coupon Date," *Daily Herald*, 9 July 1947.

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coupons meant to last until March 1948, or only 4 coupons per month. Only two days before Cripps made his announcement, John Belcher, the Parliamentary Secretary for the Board of Trade, announced that the clothing position in Britain was worse due to the need for 100,000 additional textile workers.¹⁴³ The clothing trade press in this period complicates the picture further. The end of 1947 saw a stagnation in clothing sales due in part to the low ration and in part to the change in women's fashion that some sections in the womenswear trade wanted the government to ban.¹⁴⁴ In September 1947, a BIPO survey showed that clothes were first on the list of personal items Britons wanted to buy.¹⁴⁵ This result may be skewed due to the fact that September was the last month in the old rationing period, before a new ration was due, when it is likely most people would have exhausted their old ration. A government survey from December 1947 shows clothes were not necessarily a primary preoccupation among consumers, but as they were the fourth most frequently mentioned problem, more pressing than housing or fuel, they did occupy people's minds.¹⁴⁶

While clothes were becoming less accessible at the end of 1947 than they were when the year began, a new governmental campaign highlighted the way citizens could work to alleviate clothing shortages. The government launched the campaign with the slogan "We Work or Want." It focused on the need for more workers to join key industries – coal, textile and agriculture. As part of this message, the campaign created a link between consumers' personal problems and the employment gap in those industries. One ad directed the reader to choose between "a new house," "a new pair of sheets," "a new tea-set," and "a

¹⁴³ "Must Speed Up Pit Recruiting," *Daily Herald*, 7 July 1947. See also: Crofts, *Coercion or Persuasion?* 110-21.

¹⁴⁴ "Dressmakers Seek Skirt Length Restriction," *Drapers' Record*, 20 December 1947. See Chapter Three of this thesis for a discussion of the New Look.

¹⁴⁵ Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, 162-3.

¹⁴⁶ TNA, RG 23/92.

new suit,” only to show that each of these commodities depended on the availability of coal, which was in short supply.¹⁴⁷ Another reminded women that the “new costume” of which they were dreaming could be available if they only joined the workforce to work in the textile industry.¹⁴⁸ These ads placed in citizens’ hands the responsibility for their standard of living. If they wanted to improve it, they had to work harder. As Crofts shows, this shifting of responsibility undermined the campaign, which was read as the government’s attempts to deflect the blame for low production rates from its own sphere of responsibility – the availability of fuel and raw materials – to workers.¹⁴⁹

Towards the end of 1947, the campaign was dropped in favour of one that emphasised the prominent place of textiles in the country’s export trade. The campaign, titled Report to the Nation, focused on the need for British workers to invest more effort so that the nation could meet its export targets, and celebrated workers who were doing so. It incorporated the messages of the earlier campaign, concentrating on employment gaps, but expanded it to include a general call for increased productivity on every level of production. Until production improved, consumers could not have all the goods they wanted. This was particularly important for Britain’s key industries – the textile industry among them – and affected the clothing ration directly. The nineteenth Report, published in June 1948, explained:

Cotton yarn and cloth are among our best exports and biggest dollar earners. All over the world people are short of them. The more we produce, the more food and other necessities we can buy from other countries – and

¹⁴⁷ ‘Take Your Pick,’ TNA, INF 2/74, “Productivity Campaign.”

¹⁴⁸ ‘Your New Costume,’ TNA, INF 2/74.

¹⁴⁹ Crofts, *Coercion or Persuasion?* 40-5.

the more curtains and cloth, sheets and dresses we shall have for ourselves.¹⁵⁰

REPORT TO THE NATION  No. 13

WHO'LL KILL INFLATION?

I says John Bull,
"I speak for the nation—
We'll work with a will
And we'll thus kill Inflation."

WHO'LL STRIKE THE FIRST BLOW?
"I," says the Director,
"I'll keep prices low
And dividends down—
I'll strike the first blow."

WHO'LL SEE IT DIE?
"I," says the Housewife,
"For if I don't buy
Things I don't really need,
Then I'll soon see it die."

WHO'LL RING THE BELL?
"I," says the Worker,
"I'll make more to sell
And not ask for a rise
Till I have rung the bell!"

WHO'LL BE CHIEF MOURNER?
"I," says the Spiv,
"If I can't make a 'corner'
In goods that are short,
Then I'll be chief mourner."

WHO'LL DIG ITS GRAVE?
"We," say the people,
"We'll work and we'll save.
By getting together
We'll all dig its grave."

Credit Column

THE Electric Lamp Manufacturers' Association, representing most of the industry, have reduced prices of electric bulbs by 5% to 12% according to size.

SAINSBURY'S home counties grocers, have reduced prices of certain foodstuffs by 6% to 25%. All Jaeger non-utility woollen clothing prices have dropped 10%.

"SOMETHING DONE"
Fully illustrated, it describes some post-war achievements of the British people. It is on sale at booksellers everywhere, 1/6.

TUBE Investments engineering group have reduced prices of electrically welded tubes by 24%. New managerial methods have increased production in many of their factories by 20% to 30%.

Issued by His Majesty's Government

Figure 7 - Government advertisement assigning roles to workers on all levels and to consumers, mirroring the individual efforts and the collective goal. *Sunday Pictorial*, 4 April 1948.

¹⁵⁰ "Report to the Nation No. 19," *Yorkshire Post*, 23 June 1948.

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An abundance of food and clothing symbolised a general improvement in the standard of living – the ultimate goal of the export drive.¹⁵¹ Alongside this optimistic vision for the future, the campaign ads were clear that if more workers were not recruited for the textile industry and textile production did not improve – “we must go shorter than ever.”¹⁵² By putting food ahead of textile products in the ad’s script, the campaign also marked a hierarchy of necessities. Food was unquestionably needed. Clothes, however, were a luxury to be obtained only when production improved significantly. Citizens’ appearance was therefore in their own hands – if they supported the export drive, they would be able to replace their shabby wardrobes sooner.

This call for action echoed similar wartime calls for citizens to make a personal effort – by mending, saving and making do – to promote the collective goal, but this time the personal benefit was promoted alongside the national one. “The national problem” explained the first Report, “is a personal problem for every one of us.”¹⁵³ That problem required “extra *personal* effort [...] from everyone,” including citizens who worked for the export trades, but also citizens who avoided spending unnecessary money.¹⁵⁴ Ads like the thirteenth Report, presented the personal efforts of various individuals as an integral part of the collective effort of “the people” (Figure 7). The national expenditure problem in this campaign was presented alongside personal problems of wages, the cost of living and shortages of food and clothing to create a parallel between individual problems of home economy and the broader problems of the national economy. The solution to these

¹⁵¹ “Report to the Nation, No. 17,” *Sunday Pictorial*, 30 May 1948.

¹⁵² “Three Minute Report to the Nation, No. 5,” *Sunday Pictorial*, 14 December 1947.

¹⁵³ “Three Minute Report to the Nation, No. 1,” *Western Morning News*, 16 October 1947.

¹⁵⁴ “Report to the Nation, No. 7,” *Sunday Pictorial*, 11 January 1948 [Emphasis in the original].

problems was likewise presented as an effort that was both collective and personal, and that, in the long run, would benefit the individual just as it benefitted the nation as a whole.

As Zweiniger-Bargielowska argues, shortages and rationing were particularly hard on housewives.¹⁵⁵ The British government acknowledged the need to communicate information and guidance to these women separately and launched, alongside the general campaign, a special campaign directed specifically at them.¹⁵⁶ The Report to the Women of Britain campaign dealt with the way these problems affected housewives, constructing a clear way for them to react to and handle the difficulties that the economic crisis and prolonged austerity created. The second Report suggested that women can

Help in the factories, yes, but help in the home, too. By scraping and contriving and keeping at it, and, hardest of all, by keeping themselves and their families cheerful in spite of coupons, economies and queues, women provide the driving force of the nation's effort.¹⁵⁷

Once more, women were expected to make do, buying only essential items. These ads encouraged women to save coal and to postpone the buying of sheets and extra clothes so that more materials were available for export.¹⁵⁸ They tied this saving directly to the availability of other, more essential, products like food (Figure 8).¹⁵⁹ Two courses of action were outlined for women: joining the workforce, with the textile industry as the main target, or “saving and mending and working to see Britain through.”¹⁶⁰ Saving and mending were still required of the conscientious citizen, even if they did not represent the same level of frugality as in wartime. Unlike wartime campaigns, here there was acknowledgement of

¹⁵⁵ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 117-19, 121-4.

¹⁵⁶ Crofts, *Coercion or Persuasion?* 91-109.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Report to the Women of Britain, No. 2,’ TNA, INF 2/74.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Report to the women of Britain, No. 5,’ TNA, INF 2/74.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Report to the women of Britain, No. 9,’ TNA, INF 2/74.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Report to the women of Britain, No. 12,’ TNA, INF 2/74.

the difficulty involved in managing on prolonged shortages, but this acknowledgement served to instruct women on how they could act to change that situation. If women wanted to have more textile goods to buy, they had to join the textile industry and increase production.¹⁶¹ Clothes were a luxury for which only those who worked hard could hope.

Womens Journals, April, 1948

REPORT
TO THE WOMEN OF BRITAIN  No. 9



**'I'd give anything
for more
clothing
coupons—'
...but would you?**

OF COURSE you're tired of having to manage on four coupons a month—we all are. But would you be willing to give up your own food or your children's, to get more? We've no other choice—it's the extra clothes we'd like or the food we can't do without.

TEXTILES EARN OUR HOUSEKEEPING MONEY

BBRITISH fabrics and the clothing made from them, are in big demand all over the world. And they fetch good prices. This is not true, unfortunately, of all our manufactured goods—yet it's only with our manufactures that we can pay for the food and raw materials that we *must* buy abroad.

All right—our woollens and cottons, silks and rayons give us something to bargain with when we go shopping overseas. Then why not make enough to supply export demands *and* the home market?

OVER 50,000 REASONS . . .

SSHORTAGE of textile workers—that's the main thing that stands in the way of increased production. There are 31,000 immediate vacancies for women and men in the cotton industry and over 18,000 in wool. During the war 37 out of every 100 workers left these trades—and up to last September only 15 out of the 37 had returned or been replaced. So last year we couldn't export even half the textiles we sold abroad ten years ago.

**WOMEN
TO THE RESCUE**

THANKS to women mainly, the present outlook is brighter. In the last three months of 1947, thousands of women answered the call for help. Many of them are now doing full-time jobs in textiles; many more half-day or evening shifts. But 50,000 more workers, men and women both, are needed, *and needed at once*, unless our present allowance of coupons is to be endangered and the chance of getting more put off indefinitely.

Cotton on to this!

With summer coming, many of us will be asking why we can't have more curtains, sheets and frocks. But if everyone were to have just one extra coupon to spend on cotton goods, it would take 16,000 workers a whole year to produce enough to go round.

 **Credit Column
for Women**

MRS. ALICE JENNINGS is champion bobbin winder of the Nicholas Worsley, Haslingden, (Lancs.), cotton mill. She produces 1,200 lbs of prepared yarn a week—half as much again as the average.

WHILE their children are at school, 20 Burnley mothers work a 7-hour shift at Thomas Burrows' cotton mill, Burnley, increasing production by 15%.

PRODUCTION of children's woollen clothing by the women employees of Fraser Knitwear, Glasgow, was half as much again as in the corresponding month last year, due to increased efficiency of the workers. January exports, alone, equalled half the total for all 1947.

IMPROVED methods, better working conditions and an output bonus for the workers, mainly women, have nearly doubled the output of clothing at the Spensley and Gough works, Leeds, over the past two years.

Issued by His Majesty's Government

Advt. No. 9

Figure 8 – Campaign advertisement directed specifically at women, published in April 1948. The ad explained that more clothes sold on the home market inevitably meant less clothes exported, and less food imported as a consequence. The solution was more women coming to work in the textile industry. TNA, INF 2/74.

¹⁶¹ 'Report to the women of Britain,' nos. 9-14, 16, TNA, INF 2/74.

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This campaign lasted until November 1948, and there is evidence to suggest that Britons were aware, and at least to some degree responsive to its messages. In an ongoing survey into the knowledge and opinion of the population about the economic situation and the government's requests concerning it, respondents were asked what the government wanted its citizens to do to help overcome the crisis. The most frequent answers between December 1947 and November 1948 were "work harder" and "save money, buy less."¹⁶² Although, throughout this period, the number of respondents who could give any answer to that question fell from 81 to 71 percent, a high percentage consistently showed awareness of the need to "make a special effort" to overcome the crisis.¹⁶³ The objective promoted by these campaigns – increasing production to keep up with the demands of exports and the home market – was slowly being reached. This allowed for a slow removal of restrictions from the consumption and production of clothes over the course of the period, derationing certain articles of clothing or changing their coupon pointing to a lower rate.¹⁶⁴ This process culminated with the abolition of clothes rationing in March 1949. Although several restrictions remained thereafter – most importantly price control and the Utility scheme – this ended the bulk of regulations restricting the clothes trade.

While production rates were an important factor in allowing the removal of rationing, the decision was based on a number of considerations. The balance between these considerations demonstrates that despite the continued relevance of the government's image as a protector of consumer rights, this image was no longer a priority for the government. In November 1948, Harold Wilson voiced his intentions to discard with as

¹⁶² TNA, RG 23/103, "Survey of Knowledge and Opinion about the Economic Situation, November 1948."

¹⁶³ Between 72 and 84 percent. TNA, RG 23/103.

¹⁶⁴ 457 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1948), cols. 113-9. See also: TNA, RG 23/140, "Clothing and Coupon Expenditure, May – July, 1948."

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many controls as possible, a process he had begun earlier that year, while emphasising the necessity “to retain some of the controls which ensure that there is a sufficient proportion of inexpensive goods of sound quality on the home market,” thereby drawing attention to the Board of Trade’s continued responsibility towards consumers.¹⁶⁵ The need to improve the balance of payments by increasing exports, which all post-war campaigns discussed to some degree, remained a primary reason for retaining controls as well.¹⁶⁶ In his biography of Wilson, Ben Pimlott emphasises more political considerations: the need to gain positive public opinion in a race that was increasingly determined by attitudes towards commodity controls.¹⁶⁷ These three considerations, prices, availability of goods for export and the

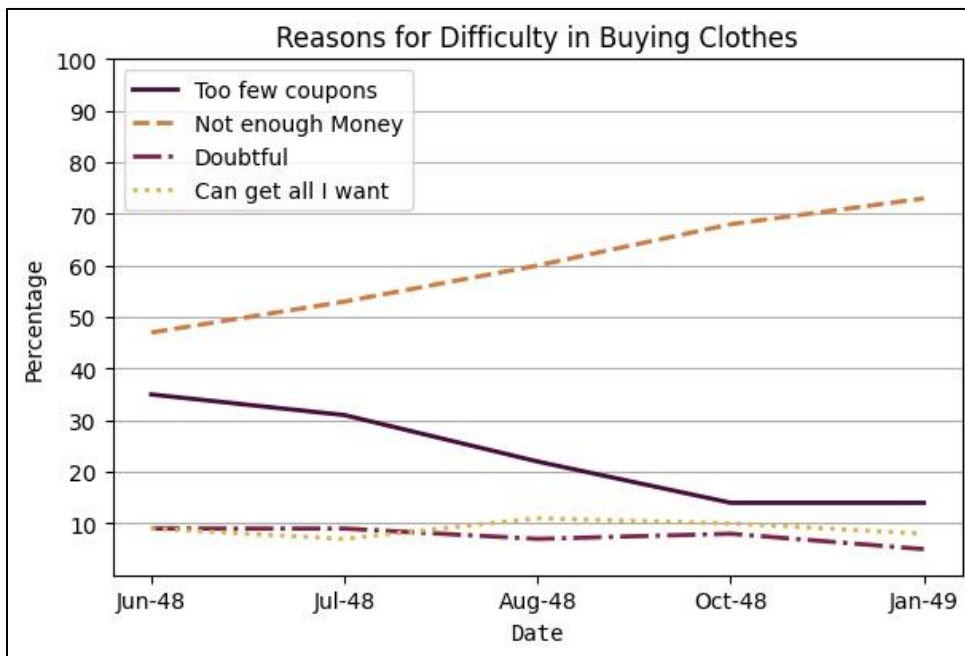


Figure 9 - Replies in response to the government's Social Survey question "In getting the clothes you want is your main trouble too few coupons or not enough money?" asked between June 1948 and January 1949. The number of people who thought they could get all the clothes they wanted picked at 11 percent in August 1948. Source: TNA, RG 23/104.

home market and public opinion about controls, were intertwined in various ways. Some increase in production was essential to allow for the removal of rationing, to avoid shortages that might affect the poorest populations, without having to divert resources from

¹⁶⁵ 457 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1948) col. 114.

¹⁶⁶ 457 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1948) col. 114.

¹⁶⁷ Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), 126-8.

the export drive. However, as far as the government was concerned, supplies had to rise to a level that, rather than meeting consumer needs, would meet consumer demand, a factor which was governed by prices as well as needs. From the beginning of 1948, a rise in clothing prices had been gathering speed, rising more steeply than other items on the Cost of Living Index, and significantly affecting consumers' ability to purchase clothes.¹⁶⁸ A survey of clothing difficulties, undertaken between June 1948 and January 1949 demonstrated that high prices were increasingly becoming the main reason consumers delayed buying garments (Figure 9).¹⁶⁹ A more elaborate survey about coupon expenditure conducted in mid-1948 showed that high prices were also consumers' main complaint when they purchased clothing.¹⁷⁰ This was probably made worse by the removal of subsidies on Utility clothes in early 1948.¹⁷¹ The cost of living was becoming an increasing concern for Britons, becoming more prominent towards the end of 1948, a subject I discuss further in Chapter Four.¹⁷² As a result, demand for clothes was low, but it was low because consumers could not afford to spend money on their clothing needs rather than because they were short on coupons. It meant that production had reached a high enough rate to remove rationing without the considerable risk that consumers would storm the shops, creating shortages. At the beginning of March 1949, a Board of Trade memo about the intended abolition of clothes rationing noted that "His Majesty's Government has always taken the view that clothes rationing was a restriction irksome to the public, cramping in its effect on initiative and enterprise and wasteful of manpower [...] and that [...] it should be

¹⁶⁸ Department of Employment and Productivity (DEP), *British Labour Statistics: Historical Abstract 1886-1968* (London: HMSO, 1971), 172, table 90. See also: Figure 12.

¹⁶⁹ TNA, RG 23/104, "Survey of Knowledge and Opinion about the Economic Situation, January 1949."

¹⁷⁰ TNA, RG 23/140.

¹⁷¹ 'Note on Clothes Rationing,' dated 3 March 1949, TNA, BT 64/4272, "Papers Relating to the Abolition of Clothes Rationing in March 1949."

¹⁷² TNA, RG 23/103.

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removed as soon as supply and demand came into balance.”¹⁷³ This step, which Harold Wilson believed to be in line with public opinion, was now possible. Rationing on all woollen garments was removed at the beginning of February 1949, and the system of rationing was cancelled on 14 March. The effects of these steps were minor. As Pimlott points out, by the time rationing was abolished, most garments were no longer under rationing, due to the gradual removal of controls throughout 1948 and early 1949.¹⁷⁴ In the run-up to March, Wilson repeatedly emphasised that he would not take the final step until he was satisfied that there was no risk of an increase in consumption that may lead to shortages.¹⁷⁵ While this rhetoric highlighted the government’s responsibility towards consumers, bringing an end to rationing when consumers could not afford to buy clothes due to the rise in prices demonstrated that the other considerations received priority over this responsibility.

This issue was not overlooked by politicians of both parties, who questioned Wilson on this subject during his announcements to Parliament in January and March. This reflected the concerns of the public. In addition to the high proportions of consumers who were affected by the rise in prices, a survey taken in January showed that only 32 percent of the adult population believed that the government succeeded in keeping prices down.¹⁷⁶ In January, George Chetwynd, a Labour MP, asked Wilson if he will “ensure that rationing by price will not replace rationing by coupon.”¹⁷⁷ This issue was picked up again in March by Oliver Stanley, a Conservative MP.¹⁷⁸ As Wilson announced the removal of woollen

¹⁷³ ‘Note on Clothes Rationing,’ dated 3 March 1949, TNA, BT 64/4272.

¹⁷⁴ Pimlott, *Harold Wilson*, 128.

¹⁷⁵ 460 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1949) col. 1386.

¹⁷⁶ TNA, RG 23/104.

¹⁷⁷ 460 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1949) col. 1387.

¹⁷⁸ 462 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1949) col. 1741.

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garments from the rationing system in January, Lucy Middleton, a Labour MP, asked if he “can assure the House that in those classes of goods which are to be derationed, he will retain the utility ranges for the people who cannot afford the high prices of non-utility garments?”¹⁷⁹ In March, a few members of the Labour party sought reassurance that the decision to cancel rationing will not disproportionately harm the poor because of rising prices.¹⁸⁰ Stanley Awbery even demanded that prices be brought back down to their level before the war.¹⁸¹ The view Wilson presented to Parliament was that, while the Board was doing all it could, prices were mostly out of their hands. He emphasised the high prices of imported raw materials as the main factor that was bound to determine price levels and that the Board could not control.¹⁸² He also highlighted the responsibility of the clothing trade in keeping prices lower than the maximum prices determined by price control, thereby deflecting the responsibility for this issue away from the government. While he promised to intervene if retailers did not show social responsibility in pricing their goods and reassured his audience that price controls and the Utility scheme will assist in keeping prices down, as well as, Wilson no longer drew attention to the Board’s role in defending consumers from the consequences of the post-war economic crisis.

Although production had reached a stage that allowed for the removal of rationing, the government was still pressing for higher output that had the potential to relieve shortages and improve the economic condition of the country. In a campaign that lasted from October 1948 to March 1949, the government attempted to impress upon the population the need to increase productivity by streamlining production and making it more

¹⁷⁹ 460 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1949) col. 1388.

¹⁸⁰ 462 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1949) cols. 1742-3.

¹⁸¹ 462 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1949) col. 1743.

¹⁸² 460 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1949) col. 1387.

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efficient. Similarly to previous campaigns, this campaign created parallels between an individual's circumstances and the nation's broad economic goals. The emphasis of the campaign was on the efficiency of workers, using an example from the conduct of an individual and applying a similar principle to the larger machineries of production — the shop, the factory or the trade. Two advertisements introduced early in the campaign featured the efficiency of housewives in the making of garments at home. One advertisement showed how to improve productivity in knitting, by slightly changing the common technique (Figure 10).¹⁸³ The other suggested that it was possible to achieve the New Look with a small amount of cloth by cutting it economically.¹⁸⁴ These ads conveyed the message that “the rules for raising productivity hold good whatever you do,” and apply to anyone: housewife, worker or manager.¹⁸⁵ The ads in this series developed this idea using a structure that progressed from the small scale of the individual, to the wide application of the principle demonstrated in their work and concluded with the wide benefit that economy and efficiency can have: “Higher productivity in Britain means increased prosperity for Britons.”¹⁸⁶

Like previous post-war campaigns, responsibility for future plenty was in the hands of citizens. Addressing production, this campaign did not press people to work harder or longer, concentrating instead on “getting any job done more quickly and efficiently without using more effort or material.”¹⁸⁷ The seeds for this message were sown in the later part of the previous campaign, but while the small print of the Report suggested that the industry needed more efficient methods, the emphasis of the slogan was “more production,”

¹⁸³ ‘Productivity with Knitting Needles,’ TNA, INF 2/74.

¹⁸⁴ ‘I’ve Got a Pattern for Productivity,’ TNA, INF 2/74.

¹⁸⁵ ‘I’ve Got a Pattern for Productivity,’ TNA, INF 2/74.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Productivity with Knitting Needles,’ TNA, INF 2/74.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Productivity Solves a Knotty Problem,’ TNA, INF 2/74.

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obscuring the message of efficiency.¹⁸⁸ In the new campaign, by contrast, production and efficiency were front and centre. It encouraged citizens to think creatively about ways in which they could produce more without investing more effort, using the available materials, and their full working hours, to produce as much as possible. While each ad used an individual as its starting point, the campaign did not necessarily advocate individual creativity, rather it pressed the idea that productivity meant “better methods, a full week’s work, co-operation.”¹⁸⁹ In other words, it implored citizens to pull together, across stages of production, borrowing ideas from other fields and rethinking processes in order to make full use of their working hours. The benefit was again put in terms of consumer plenty: “the more we make, and the more efficiently we make it, the more we can put in our home shops, *and* at lower prices.”¹⁹⁰ In the same way that a housewife could get the New Look without using the material and time it would normally require, the nation could get the commodities it wanted by organizing its production in a more efficient manner.

While the campaign did not advocate for individual productivity, it placed a positive spotlight on individuals who were productive. In the context of the campaign, other members of the nation were meant to follow the example set by these individuals. Although the direct message of the campaign did not address the need to save on clothing and textile materials, the prominence of garment- and footwear-making examples in the campaign suggests that these fields continued to be associated with the need for thrift even as production increased enough to allow the removal of controls.

Citizens’ awareness of the messages of the campaign and the need for increased productivity were measured twice, the first investigation taking place in November 1948

¹⁸⁸ See for instance: “Report to the Nation No. 25,” *Daily Mail* (Hull), 15 September 1948.

¹⁸⁹ This message appeared on all the ads in the campaign, see: TNA, INF 2/74.

¹⁹⁰ ‘Did YOU Have Productivity All Buttoned Up?’, TNA, INF 2/74.

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and the second in May 1949.¹⁹¹ The first survey examined people's opinions about methods of increasing production, its effects and their general understanding of what the word meant. It demonstrated that most people were not, on the whole, aware of the campaign's message. When asked how they thought production could be increased, only 15 percent of respondents suggested "increased efficiency, better organization," a further eight percent answering "more or better machinery," two answers relating to the messages of the campaign. The most frequent answer given was "working harder or longer hours," with 28 percent of replies, an answer that went against the ideas of this campaign, but, as the writer of the report pointed out, chimed with ideas presented in earlier campaigns, like "Work or Want."¹⁹² A more directed question, giving the respondents a choice between three ways to increase productivity, showed that respondents most frequently thought the best way to increase productivity was to work harder, despite receiving an explanation about the meaning of the word in the context of the campaign beforehand. Only 30 percent thought "arranging things better," which was the main message of the campaign, was the best way. The writer found this result encouraging, pointing out that "the possibilities of this method of increasing productivity are fairly widely appreciated, and publicity on the subject is likely to be less uphill work than publicity advocating harder work or longer hours."¹⁹³ The writer's optimism can be understood, considering that the campaign had been running only five weeks when the survey was conducted. As the second survey demonstrated, it is possible that his optimism was premature. Though the questions in the second survey were different, and therefore incomparable to those in the first survey, they do not suggest that

¹⁹¹ TNA, RG 23/103; TNA, RG 23/106, "Survey of Knowledge and Opinion about the Economic Situation, May 1949."

¹⁹² TNA, RG 23/103.

¹⁹³ TNA, RG 23/103.

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the campaign's messages gained wider support. The idea that workers, employers and the government should pull together to improve production, which was prominent in the campaign, was only supported by 25 percent of respondents. In a question about the role each of these entities had in increasing production, the concept of efficiency gained similar or lower support, suggesting that the campaign had not succeeded in spreading the message of productivity.¹⁹⁴

ADVERTISEMENT No. 1
appearing in Revolving Panel
between October 10th, 1940 and January 22nd, 1940

PRODUCTIVITY



with Knitting needles!



THE OLD WAY



A QUICKER WAY

Mrs. Brown knits as her mother taught her—the way shown in the upper diagram here—and she's a fast worker. But there's a far quicker way of knitting which some women know—see lower diagram. Holding the wool in the other hand saves a whole movement! The hands don't work harder—but the results are quicker. And that's really what higher productivity means!



But I can't knit anyway—so what?

Just as there are simple but unusual ways of turning out more knitting without working harder, so there are quicker and more productive ways of making machines, or building ships, or weaving cloth. We in Britain have got to find these ways—and it helps if workpeople and management get together, think things out and talk them over, with good will and helpfulness on both sides.



What will more productivity do for Britain?

Higher productivity is the only quick and certain way to bigger output—and, therefore, to putting more goods in our shops and more money in the pay packet to buy them with. Higher productivity also means more success in our export drive—and that means more raw materials to keep the factories busy, and more food for our larders.

The firms that have tackled the problem of higher productivity—and they are only a small proportion—have had spectacular results. They've proved that the job *can* be done, and that until all the new machinery can come along, this is the right way to do it. Higher productivity in Britain means increased prosperity for Britons!

BETTER METHODS, A FULL WEEK'S WORK, CO-OPERATION—
that'll get us somewhere!

REPORT TO THE NATION Issued by His Majesty's Government

Figure 10 - Advertisement from the Productivity campaign featuring an example from knitting. The ad moves from the particular example of knitting, to the implication of this example to other types of work and onto its wider meaning for the nation. With five out of the 14 campaign ads, garment- and footwear-making was one of the most prominent fields used for examples in this campaign. The other prominent field was sports, also featuring five ads. TNA, INF 2/74.

¹⁹⁴ TNA, RG 23/106.

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That is perhaps the reason productivity continued to be on the agenda of government campaigns until 1952. These campaigns continued to make use of clothes as an example for economical production as well as an example for the affluence that productivity enabled. Ads and leaflets gave examples from the textile and clothes trades to encourage the wider application of productivity. In a leaflet titled *Productivity Pays*, published in mid-1949, the efficient use of material was illustrated by an image of a housewife, attempting to cut fabric for a sewing pattern in the most efficient manner, while an ad from the same period referenced the New Look as a symbol for the affluent shopper.¹⁹⁵ Efficiency in the home was also promoted as part of the general drive to improve production. Government Campaigns continued to court women by showing them how better productivity could improve the standard of living, but also by continuing to emphasise the need to “put a bit aside in savings,” and “repair things where possible instead of buying new.”¹⁹⁶ These campaigns outlined the conduct of the good citizen in similar ways to the wartime campaigns – by emphasising the primacy of the nation’s material needs over those of the individual’s and the positive outcomes of frugality. These campaigns formalised, to a certain extent, the association between efficiency and industriousness – and the appearance of the respectable, law-abiding citizen.

As fears about the war in Korea began to emerge, towards the end of 1949, the Board of Trade began preparing for the possibility of imposing clothes rationing once more. These plans evolved over the next few years, eventually preparing for the possibility of

¹⁹⁵ See copy of *Productivity Pays*, in TNA, INF 2/74; “Productivity Campaign ’49 (P.C. 49 to You) Helps with the Shopping,” *Western Daily Press*, 11 May 1949.

¹⁹⁶ See copy of *What’s All This?* in TNA, INF 2/74.

damage from atom bombs.¹⁹⁷ In the event of another war, the scheme was viewed as an unavoidable solution, which would allow the government to defend its citizens from want. Government responsibility for citizens' wardrobes, it seems, was confined to wartime.¹⁹⁸

Conclusion

The language of government rhetoric, whether in propaganda or in other communications with the public, brought to the fore the duties of citizens as well as the government's responsibility towards them. As an item that was regarded as both a luxury and a necessity, clothes occupied a problematic position in the construction of citizens' rights and duties. In the context of government responsibility, clothes were a necessity, and as such, the government had a duty to ensure citizens had access to them. In the context of citizens' duties, however, clothes were a luxury on which citizens had to save. The language surrounding rationing during the war epitomized the exchange between citizens and state: citizens had to economise as much as possible, saving precious resources for the war effort, and in return, the government made sure all citizens had access to clothes.

This exchange held true for the immediate aftermath of the war. Citizens were prepared for a slow return to normal, while human and material resources were diverted from war production to civilian industries. But their patience was finite and as the war grew distant and material conditions failed to improve, public opinion began to shift. The significant shift in attitudes towards clothing controls happened in late 1947 but it cannot be understood without the larger context of prolonged post-war shortages, and the stricter

¹⁹⁷ 'Defence Transition Committee, Proposal for the First Stage of Clothes Rationing in Time of War,' dated 20 April 1954, TNA, BT 64/756, "Provisional Scheme for Clothes Rationing in War-time."

¹⁹⁸ Minute signed by M.D. Kennedy, dated 14 September 1949, TNA, BT 64/756.

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controls over food in the preceding year. When the Board of Trade reduced the clothes ration in late 1947, the public was already agitated from years of making-do.

Just as public opinion changed gradually, so did the message that government propaganda produced. The need for economy, along with the complex set of actions and strategies this economy denoted, persisted, but citizens' more urgent duty was to increase production for export, which helped with alleviating the economic crisis. Clothing remained a luxury that was portrayed not as the immediate, but as the future possession of the conscientious citizen. While British citizens were asked to defer their clothing desires, they were implored to participate in the production of clothes that the government depicted as "in big demand all over the world" (Figure 8). Citizens were bound to be reluctant to accept shortages and restrictions at home when the goods they desired were thought to be sent out of the country.

While government propaganda continued to demand citizens' cooperation through thrift and labour, it downplayed its own role with respect to citizens' wardrobes. Citizens were now the makers of their own sartorial fates. Appropriately, the introduction to the 1947 Clothing Quiz does not discuss the government's role in securing fair shares, but the need for citizens to make "a determined and sustained effort to overcome all obstacles and to increase production" as the way to "ultimately bring clothes rationing to an end."¹⁹⁹ This was no longer "your scheme – to defend you as a consumer and as a citizen."²⁰⁰ Rather, it was a necessary nuisance, which citizens must work to bring to an end. While being clear on citizens' duties, the government's post-war responsibility became vaguer than it was during the war. Its campaigns did not discuss it directly, but the instructional tone of the

¹⁹⁹ 'The 1947 Clothing Quiz,' TNA, INF 13/153.

²⁰⁰ 'Clothing Coupon Quiz' [1941?], TNA, BT 131/37.

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campaigns posited the government as a guide who directed the efforts of citizens and helped them improve their own position. The resurfacing of the rhetoric of government responsibility in the run-up to the abolition of clothes rationing can be read as a way of obscuring the abandonment of egalitarian policies in favour of the arguably more popular free market. As I will show in the subsequent chapters, different groups in the population felt differently about this transition from government responsibility to free market. As will become evident, those who embraced wartime messages of fair shares and the mutual balance of duties between citizens and the state, tended to continue to do so after the war. This meant that they still performed their duties as citizens, but also that they expected the government to continue to embrace its responsibility over the clothing market.

Government propaganda communicated to citizens what they were expected to do and what they were entitled to demand, but it did not determine what they did and what they believed they were entitled to. The social perceptions of appearance, discussed in the previous chapter, underpinned the creation, presentation and reception of clothing controls. They are evident in the middle-class values embedded in the Make Do and Mend campaign as well as post-war campaigns that advocated for frugality and efficiency. As I will show in Chapter Five, they were also embedded in the way the rationing scheme was planned and run. The way citizens engaged with the government's messages was a result of a complex set of circumstances and preconceptions. Who they were, how they thought about clothes, appearance and civic duties before the war and how regulations affected them personally were all factors that influenced their behaviour and opinions in relation to clothing controls. This specificity means that any attempt to discuss the reaction to clothing controls and engagement with this form of state intervention while considering all citizens as a

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homogenous group will suffer from an excessive flattening of the details. Therefore, the following chapters discuss three case studies that examine the ways specific populations interacted with controls, shortages, duties and rights. These chapters will explore the ways these citizens thought of clothes in the context of their relationship with the state and how this fitted with their understanding of the function of clothes in British society.

Chapter 3: “Is This the Way We Should Be Treated?”: Young Working-Class Women,
Glamour and Citizenship¹

As the first year of war was coming to a close, the *Daily Mirror* published two columns that berated the behaviour of young women in war-related work. The first, published in July 1940, told the tale of a soldier, who was in despair over the way the war changed his girlfriend. Alice, he grumbled, was not a stranger to make-up and cigarettes when she was a parlour maid before the war, but now that she worked in a munitions factory, she “plastered” her make-up on, spent four times as much on her stockings (“you couldn’t tell the difference”), and has “gone in for gin.”² In response to this story, the writer concluded that “it is criminal to buy non-essential things,” and thought it was the duty of managers to instruct their employees to save.³ The second column, which was part of a series of columns titled “The Seven Deadly Sins in Wartime,” written by Reverend George Braithwaite, was published on 1 August 1940. In the column, Braithwaite dealt with pride and its new wartime meaning. He recounted the story of a mother, whose daughter Mary was unemployed before the war. Since Mary found work at a shadow factory, she began buying “expensive clothes that she can’t possibly pay for,” and styling herself in a way that was reminiscent of Hollywood starlets: a painted face and “newly acquired blonde hair.”⁴ Braithwaite also emphasised the criminality of conspicuous consumption and concluded that war work needed to be done “not for personal gain or prestige – but for the common cause.”⁵ Both stories framed young working-class women’s

¹ I would like to thank the participants in the Modern British History Workshop for their comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

² John Boswell, “But Now It’s Gin!” *Daily Mirror*, 10 July 1940.

³ Boswell, “But Now It’s Gin!”

⁴ Reverend George Braithwaite, “The Seven Deadly Sins in Wartime,” *Daily Mirror*, 1 August 1940.

⁵ Braithwaite, “The Seven Deadly Sins in Wartime.”

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investment in their appearance as an affront to patriotism – the first as a crime against serving men, and the second as a sin against all other members of the nation. By doing so, these two stories reflect the way that young women’s glamourised appearance conflicted with ideas about good citizenship both during and after the war. Young working-class women’s consumption practices visibly marked them as unpatriotic.

As discussed in the previous chapter, from 1941, the British government began explicitly stressing that buying clothes was only appropriate when necessary and that conspicuous consumption was unpatriotic. The first chapter demonstrated that in some ways, this was not new: extravagant dress had negative connotations in British society before the war, when it lacked respectability in middle-class culture. Young women’s self-fashioning through make-up and dress was also present, and criticised, before the war, although, as the above passages suggest, fewer working-class women had the funds to invest in their appearance then. Only the few who had well-paying employment could follow the latest Hollywood-inspired trends that caused J.B. Priestley to observe in 1933 that young working-class women looked “like actresses.”⁶ The transition of both style trends and criticism into wartime raises several questions. How did these pre-war norms and conceptions about glamour inform the way that young working-class women and their critics understood and made sense of government appeals to curtail consumption? Why did young working-class women sport a style that copied Hollywood glamour, despite government exhortations to economise, and how did those who criticise them understand that choice?

Several studies recognise the pressures placed on women during the war. As a large and available workforce, young women had a central role in the collaborative civic effort

⁶ J.B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: William Heinemann and Victor Gollancz, 1934), 401.

during the Second World War, a role that placed them under close public scrutiny. Sonya Rose demonstrates that the urgent need for their participation was accompanied by anxieties about the liberties that this increased participation in the public sphere entailed.⁷ This meant that young women, especially young working-class women, attracted criticism that centred on their role as citizens, a role that was often portrayed in contrast to their sexuality and femininity. Discussing all women, Rose and Pat Kirkham show how glamour was a problematic issue for women during the war: Rose focuses on the pressure placed on women to groom so as to reinforce their gender in the masculine environments they were thrust into during the war and Kirkham illustrates how, despite wartime austerity, women were expected to continue to look as they have always done. Both suggest that this regulation of women's appearance predated the war and can be seen as part of the elite's efforts to teach working-class women good grooming, yet the nature of this connection is not fully explored.⁸

Although Kirkham and Rose demonstrate a trend that contrasted the two *Daily Mirror* columns above, other studies emphasise the disappearance, rather than persistence, of glamour. Particularly interesting in this context is Mark Glancy's study of *Picturegoer* magazine. Glancy posits the magazine as one that appealed to young working-class women as the most prominent group interested in the cinema.⁹ He argues that despite the ongoing appeal of glamour as a subject of fantasy, reflected in the magazine's choice of cover photography, wartime atmosphere meant that the magazine treated glamour as a taboo

⁷ Rose, *Which People's War?* 110, and more generally Chapters 3 and 4.

⁸ Rose, *Which People's War?* 131-4; Kirkham, "Fashioning the Feminine," 166.

⁹ Mark Glancy, "Picturegoer: The Fan Magazine and Popular Film Culture in Britain during The Second World War," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 31, no. 4 (2011): 456-7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2011.620834>. I would like to thank Peter Mandler for making me aware of this article.

within its pages, emphasising instead “the qualities of duty, sacrifice and pulling together.”¹⁰ Juxtaposing it with the lack of access to clothes and cosmetics, Glancy implies that the magazine’s position indicates young women’s lack of ability to openly admire Hollywood glamour and to actively seek to imitate it during the war.¹¹ As I will show below, however, young working-class women continued to do both those things throughout the austerity period, despite constant criticism from middle-class observers, whose views were more in line with the magazine’s position. In this I aim to expand on the discourse analysis offered by Rose, Kirkham and Glancy.

While the middle-class criticism I will discuss in this chapter concentrated on young women’s spending habits, it borrowed from discourses about leisure, cinema and civic responsibilities developed in the interwar period. Since the 1920s, social reformers and youth workers have been commenting on the negative influence cinema had on British youth, emphasising increased sexual urges and mounting preoccupation with appearances and material goods as aspects that were detrimental to the good character of young women.¹² Feminine preoccupation with clothes and romance had long been associated with frivolity and questionable morals.¹³ But cinema was highlighted for making its viewers passive and unthinking. This was interpreted as dangerous since the expansion of the vote meant that all young British men and women would one day assume civic duties, and must therefore be prepared for the task. As Penny Tinkler notes, during the interwar period youth leaders, social investigators and educational figures began stressing the importance of

¹⁰ Glancy, “*Picturegoer*,” 464, 459-70.

¹¹ Glancy, “*Picturegoer*,” 464.

¹² Fowler, *The First Teenagers*, 125-7; Penny Tinkler, “Cause for Concern: Young Women and Leisure, 1930-50,” *Women’s History Review* 12, no. 2 (2003): 246-7.

¹³ Jill Greenfield et al., “Gender, Consumer Culture and the Middle Class Male, 1918-39,” in *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle Class Identity in Britain 1800-1940*, eds. Allen J. Kidd and David Nicholls, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 190.

leisure in the formation of citizenship. The right form of leisure could build the right kind of citizen. Films, they thought, cultivated the wrong kind of character: passive, selfish and materialistic.¹⁴ Critics interpreted the admiration young working-class men and women demonstrated for the cinema and their imitation of it as blind adherence to the values that Hollywood films promoted; these values did not coincide with their ideas of good citizenship. The *Daily Mirror* columns and the discussion in Chapter Two demonstrate that the circumstances of austerity measures made these debates about good citizenship particularly relevant because of the increasing demands the British state placed on its citizens. The critique of cinema-goers was particularly apposite, because much like the government's austerity propaganda, it associated luxury and glamour with selfishness and the negligence of civic duties.

This chapter will show how middle-class criticism of the appearance of young working-class women merged these views about glamour and its Hollywood inspiration with the new government language about clothing economy. This hybrid discourse interpreted young women's attempts at glamour as evidence of questionable morality in any of their roles: as women, as consumers, as workers and as citizens. In order to understand what made young women such attractive targets for this criticism, the chapter will first examine how young women's position changed as a result of the war, highlighting the aspects that made their appearance and consumption habits into the focus of middle-class criticism. It will show how young women dealt with austerity measures, which actively curtailed their consumption. It will then move on to middle-class criticism of young women and, using a variety of public and private writings about and for young women, will show how ideas about glamour continued to resonate with middle-class observers well after the

¹⁴ Tinkler, "Cause for Concern," 238-9.

war. By looking at both criticism of young women and attempts to improve their ways I hope to demonstrate the didactic class dynamic to which Rose and Kirkham allude. After establishing middle-class criticism, I will analyse young working-class women's reaction to these attempts to regulate their appearance and consumption practices. Like their middle-class observers, working-class women understood their civic role through a mix of pre-war cultural norms and wartime propaganda. They differed, however, in what they viewed as their rights and duties and in how they constructed the relationship between the two.

Work, Leisure and Spending

Over the course of the 1940s, the economic position of young working-class women in British society improved. By the end of the decade, most of them had more money at hand and, with the exception of rationing restrictions, more freedom to spend it how they wished. Changing employment patterns also increased their spare time, and therefore, opportunities for leisure. A significant portion of that leisure time was spent at the cinema, which inspired them to fashion themselves after the styles they saw on screen. These changes came alongside greater pressure on young women to work and, during the war, greater restrictions on where they worked. Yet, before I describe these changes, it is worth specifying whom I include in this group of young working-class women.

Defining class is always a problematic issue. Contemporary surveys tended to define it by occupation and income levels, with those earning wages beneath £250 a year defined as working-class. This system was the preferred market research approach, although some contemporary social researchers saw it as limited and unreliable, since it overlooked cultural factors.¹⁵ As discussed in Chapter One, cultural cues were central to

¹⁵ Vernon, *Hunger*, 138.

social investigators' assessments of class. Rising wages due to the war, and stagnating salaries, further problematize applying this definition to the 1940s.¹⁶ Historians choose different approaches to solve this issue. As noted in Chapter One, McKibbin argues that class can best be defined by culture and social behaviour: education, dress and prospects.¹⁷ Geoffrey Field uses a simpler definition, identifying the working-class as those "engaged in manual labour."¹⁸ Since this chapter discusses women, it is worth noting Zweiniger-Bargielowska's approach, who avoids the issue altogether and looks at gender as a class-crossing category, arguing that class is less useful when examining political attitudes in austerity Britain, since "women do not fit easily into essentially male categories based on income and employment patterns."¹⁹

While that may be true for housewives (Zweiniger-Bargielowska's focal point), young women most often worked themselves, and the financial and social status of their family had significant influence on their own spending abilities. In her study about young working-class women, Selina Todd suggests further that shared experience and personal circumstances were important factors in class affiliation.²⁰ Employment patterns of young women from working-class homes in this period moved away from manual forms of employment, strengthening the need to look at background rather than employment type.²¹ For the purpose of this study, and borrowing from McKibbin's and Todd's approaches, I use the age they left school and entered employment to distinguish working-class adolescents from their middle-class counterparts: while young working-class women began

¹⁶ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 44-5. See also: Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 251-2.

¹⁷ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 45.

¹⁸ Field, *Blood, Sweat and Toil*, 5.

¹⁹ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 251.

²⁰ Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England*, 9-10, 75, 85-95.

²¹ Pilgrim Trust, *Men without Work*, 198. See also: Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, 89-90.

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contributing to the family income at 14, young middle-class women finished their education at 16 or later, and only then might seek employment.²² Therefore, young women who were in employment from the age of 14 or 15 are considered working-class for the purposes of this study. While this group did not include all young working-class women, it most likely only included young women from a working-class background.²³

While statistical data supports capping this group at 18, culturally, it makes more sense to include young women in their twenties.²⁴ Throughout the period, women tended to get married in their twenties.²⁵ The most popular marital age during the war years was between 21 and 24, but after the war the proportion of women who married in their late twenties was equal to that of women who married in their early twenties.²⁶ Women who were already at work but not yet married were more likely to have at least a certain amount of freedom over their earnings, especially after the age of 16.²⁷ While not all young women stopped spending money on themselves after marriage, they were less likely to be able to continue to do so. As Claire Langhamer demonstrates, upon marriage, women would assume the duties of housework and, later, child rearing, which allowed for less time, and less legitimacy, for personal enjoyment and carefree leisure activities.²⁸ They were also

²² Penny Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood: Popular Magazines for Girls Growing up in England, 1920-1950* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1995), 27. See also: Agnes Pearl Jephcott, *Girls Growing Up* (London: Faber and Faber, 1942), 52.

²³ Some young women stayed at home after leaving school to help with home management, while others were able to continue their education with the aid of scholarships. See: Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England*, 60. It is also worth pointing out that after the war, the school leaving age was changed to 15, thereby changing the age these young women began to work.

²⁴ See for instance: DEP, *British Labour Statistics*, 116, table 49.

²⁵ Agnes Pearl Jephcott, *Rising Twenty* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), 70-1.

²⁶ CSO, *Annual Abstract of Statistics No. 88, 1938-1950* (London: HMSO, 1952), 34, table 34. See also: Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, 116.

²⁷ Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England*, 218-20; Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, 93.

²⁸ Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, 133-8.

likely to have less money to spend.²⁹ Agnes Pearl Jephcott, a social investigator working with young working-class women in the 1940s, asserted that the majority of these women did not expect to continue working outside the home after they married.³⁰ This expectation may have been somewhat out-dated: in 1943, 43 percent of employed women were married, and by 1951 this proportion had not changed. This was, however, a dramatic change from 1931, when only 16 percent of working women were married, which reflected government appeals to married women to return to work during and after the war.³¹ At the same time, even if they did eventually work as married women, they were less likely to work in the early years of marriage, as these were dedicated to building a home, making the transition between single to married life significant in terms of spending patterns.³²

Whether working-class women went on working after marriage or left their employment to make a home, the expectation to stop working dictated their choice of employment. Many of them spent their early working years doing unskilled work that required very basic training, as well as some level of dexterity, patience or vigour.³³ Jephcott argues that wages were an important factor in attracting young women to their workplace.³⁴ Alternatively, David Fowler notes that it is likely that what attracted young women to their work was the atmosphere of the workplace.³⁵ Other considerations were also at play: recently, Eleanor Murray suggested that gaining domestic skills was also a

²⁹ Langhamer, 159.

³⁰ Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, 72-3.

³¹ See: Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1989), 196, table B.3. This percentage dropped after the war, but rose back towards the end of the 1940s, see: Field, *Blood, Sweat and Toil*, 177.

³² Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, 73.

³³ Jephcott, *Girls Growing Up*, 83; MO, *War Factory: A Report* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1943), 56.

³⁴ Jephcott, *Girls Growing Up*, 75.

³⁵ Fowler, *The First Teenagers*, 63-7. Langhamer's section of workplace sociability supports this argument, see: Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, 91-3.

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factor, one which made dressmaking particularly appealing.³⁶ A MO survey of teenage girls from 1949 found that young women preferred their work to be interesting.³⁷ This means that the nature of the job had some significance. It is likely that all of these considerations had some place in influencing choice of employment, their relative importance determined by personal circumstances. A career, that is the long-term prospects of a position, was not a primary consideration, however.

During this decade, young women benefitted from several social and economic changes, some of which began in the interwar period. It was suggested above that employment patterns changed in this period. More specifically, the prevalence of domestic service employment declined in favour of retail, office work and the light industries.³⁸ This meant a new level of freedom for young women, since working as a live-in domestic servant restricted access to leisure due to long working hours and controlling employers.³⁹ This new freedom was complicated during the war. On the one hand, from the end of 1941, unmarried young women above the age of 18 were considered mobile workers, whose employment was largely controlled by the needs of the Ministry of Labour and the National Services.⁴⁰ In some cases, the direction of labour could have negative effects on young women's freedom. Langhamer notes that work during the war could be exhausting for young women, potentially restricting their leisure time.⁴¹ One wartime observation of a

³⁶ Eleanor Murray, "Children's Conceptions of Careers, Parenting and the Future in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain," (paper presented at the Social History Society Conference 2019, 11 June, 2019).

³⁷ MOA, FR 3150, Teen Age Girls, August 1949.

³⁸ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 49; Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth Century Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13-14; Field, *Blood, Sweat and Toil*, 130; Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, 89-90.

³⁹ Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England*, 36-7; Pilgrim Trust, *Men without Work*, 260-1.

⁴⁰ Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 45, 70n1.

⁴¹ Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, 91.

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directed factory worker called Peggy, a former cinema usherette, recorded that she “disliked the work” in the succession of factories to which she was sent by the Labour Exchange, and demonstrated contempt to working hours and the factory management.⁴² This young woman’s frequent transfers and her attitude about work are an example of how the direction of labour could be interpreted as “a considerable intervention into the realm of private life,” as Penny Summerfield puts it.⁴³ Yet, as Summerfield suggests, in other cases, labour direction could also provide women with an opportunity for greater freedom away from the watchful eyes of parents or an unpleasant and restricting work place.⁴⁴

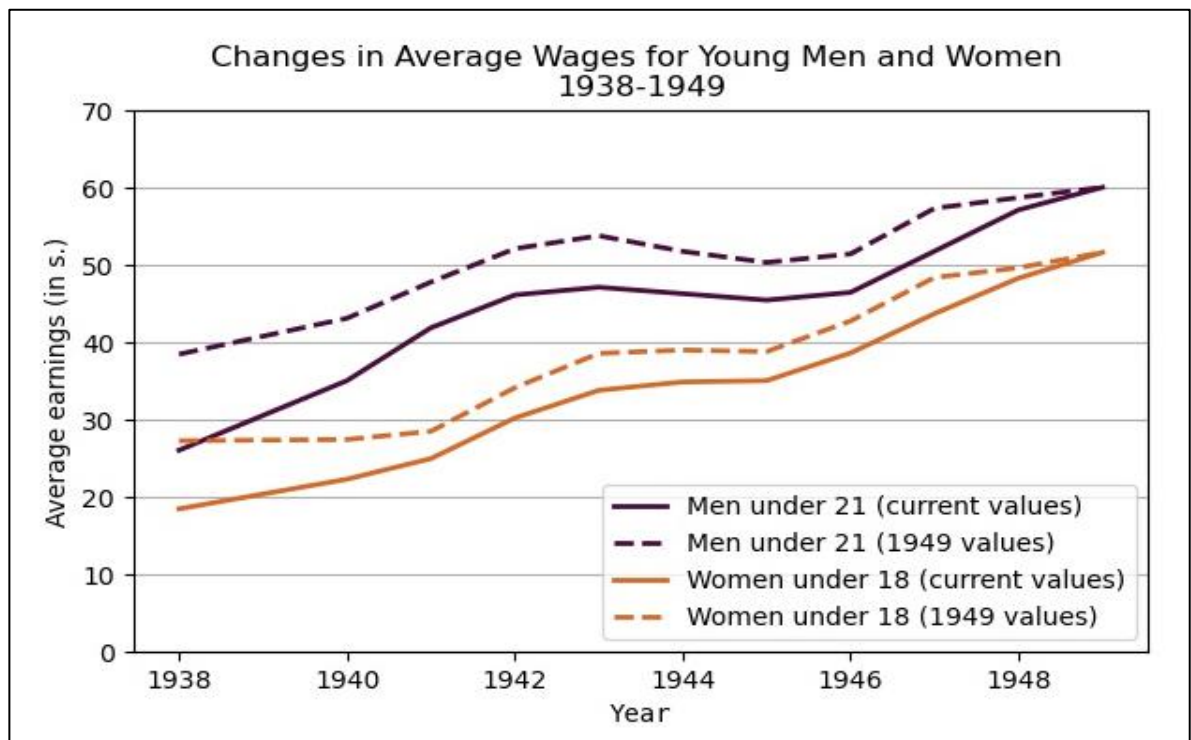


Figure 11 – Changes in wages for young men and women in current and real values. Real wages for young women under 18 years nearly doubled from 1938 to 1949: from 27s. 3d. (18s. 6d. in current values) to 51s. 8d.. While the gap between young men and women’s wages increased in current values by 10s., in real terms it actually decreased by 2s. 6d. Sources: DEP, *British Labour Statistics*, 116, table 49; 172, table 90; CSO, *Annual Abstract of Statistics No. 85*, 244, tables 285-6.

⁴² MO, *War Factory*, 33-4. See also: 41.

⁴³ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives*, 45. See also: *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 36-7.

⁴⁴ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives*, 87, 89.

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For young women under the age of 18, wages rose as well from a pre-war average of 18s. 6d. to an average of 35s. 1d. by the end of the war, increasing by a further 16s. 7d. by the end of 1949, reaching an average of 51s. 8d. (or £2 11s. 8d.).⁴⁵ These averages make wartime panic reports about the high wages of young women reaching as much as £30 hard to believe, but they do demonstrate an improvement in pay rates.⁴⁶ Alongside improved wages, changes in the economic behaviour of working-class families also improved the position of young working-class women. While at the beginning of the war, most adolescent women would hand over all their wages to their parents, receiving in return a small allowance, by the late 1940s a pattern began to emerge in which older girls from more affluent households were allowed to keep a greater part of their wages, while giving their parents something towards housekeeping.⁴⁷ Young women's wages improved both independently and in comparison with the wages of their male counterparts. While there was a consistent gap over this period between young women's wages and those of young men, the difference between average earnings fluctuating throughout, by the end of the 1940s, the gap was smaller in real terms than it had been at its beginning (Figure 11).⁴⁸ The 1940s saw a significant rise in the cost-of-living index alongside wage rises, so it is necessary to discuss changes in real terms to fully assess these them. In this case, despite the rise in the cost of living, the increase in young women's wages was substantial: wages had nearly doubled over this period.⁴⁹ Although young men were more likely to get to keep

⁴⁵ DEP, *British Labour Statistics*, 116, table 49.

⁴⁶ Last, *Nella Last's War*, 156; "Thoughtless Spending Alarms Ministry," *Daily Mail*, July 16, 1942; Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, 138.

⁴⁷ Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England*, 74-5; Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, 100-3; Jephcott, *Girls Growing Up*, 93. C.f.: Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1870-1960: Gender, Class, and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 46.

⁴⁸ See: DEP, *British Labour Statistics*, 116, table 49.

⁴⁹ For Cost of Living Index figures, see: DEP, *British Labour Statistics*, 169-71, table 89; 172, table 90.

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a larger portion of their wages, young women's increased wages, and the general improvement in working-class wages likely meant that the spending money available to young working-class women increased over the course of the 1940s both in absolute terms and in comparison to other populations.⁵⁰ This would have been particularly significant in areas plagued by unemployment before the war.

Despite having more money to spend than the previous generation of young women had had, their ability to spend it was restricted. Clothes rationing and a market for consumer goods limited by restricted access to raw materials meant that while wages went up, choices for spending were disappearing. The cinema was a relatively cheap and popular expense. Several surveys show that the cinema was the most common leisure activity for both sexes in London.⁵¹ As mentioned above, Glancy recognises young women as the majority of cinema audiences during the war.⁵² Two government surveys of cinema audiences undertaken by Kathleen Box demonstrate that this was not solely a wartime trend – the earlier survey, undertaken in 1943 shows a lower proportion of women than the later survey, undertaken in 1946, indicating that women's attendance only rose after the war.⁵³ Some young women certainly spent a lot of their time and money on frequent visits to the cinema. One of Langhamer's interviewees remembered spending all the money she was allowed to keep out of her wages on cinema visits.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ For young men's greater independence see: Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, 102.

⁵¹ H. D. Willcock, *Report on Juvenile Delinquency* (London: The Falcon Press, 1949), 37, 44.

⁵² Glancy, "Picturegoer," 456-7; Annette Kuhn makes a similar observation about the 1930s, see: Kuhn, "Cinema Culture and Femininity in the 1930s," 178. See also: Jephcott, *Girls Growing Up*, 114-20.

⁵³ J.P. Mayer, *British Cinemas and Their Audiences: Sociological Studies* (London: Dennis Hobson, 1948), 262 [Kathleen Box's 1943 survey, reproduced in Mayer's book]; Mass Observation Archive (MOA), FR 2429, "The Cinema and the Public: An Inquiry into Cinema Going Habits and Expenditure Made in 1946," by Kathleen Box. See also: Sue Harper, "Fragmentation and Crisis: 1940s Admissions Figures at the Regent Cinema, Portsmouth, UK," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 26, no. 3 (2006): 372.

⁵⁴ Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, 102.



Figure 12 - Changes in clothing retail prices, 1939-1950, according to the 1947 Cost of Living Index (1947=100). Retail prices for clothes doubled in this period, with significant increases at its beginning and end, while remaining stable in the interim at 161 percent of 1939 prices, due to price control. Sources: DEP, *British Labour Statistics*, 172, table 90; CSO, *Annual Abstract of Statistics No. 85*, 244, tables 285-6.

Despite rationing, clothes were another commodity that dominated young women’s expenses. In a MO survey of London youths in 1943, 12 out of the 29 young women who answered mentioned regular visits to the cinema, while 13 of them mentioned either clothes or stockings as their main expense. Clothes were the most frequently mentioned item among young women.⁵⁵ Clothes probably dominated young women’s expenses because they were more costly, with prices rising considerably throughout the 1940s (Figure 12).⁵⁶ The amount of money young women spent on them depended on many factors: their wages, the ability and willingness of their parents to assist in such purchases, the needs of their job and their own personal preferences.⁵⁷ Langhamer’s research of leisure patterns shows that cinema visits were considered a personal leisure expense, paid for from young women’s personal allowance, whereas clothes were bought from the family budget as long as young

⁵⁵ MOA, TC Youth, 51/3/G, “Youth Questionnaire, June 1943 – Paddington.” See also: MOA, Directive Reply (DR) 3583, reply to June 1944 Directive.

⁵⁶ DEP, *British Labour Statistics*, 169, table 89, 172, table 90.

⁵⁷ Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, 139. See also: MOA, DR 3583, reply to June 1944 Directive.

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women gave the bulk of their wages to their parents.⁵⁸ This suggests that, within the family economy, clothes were considered a necessity, while cinema visits, as an indulgence, were less restricted by parents' interventions. Cinema visits were therefore a far more accessible commodity – cheaper and with fewer restrictions. Young women probably went to the cinema more often, expenses likely accumulating to high sums, while clothes cost significant sums, which were either paid for by parents, or, if expenses fell on young women's pockets, were purchased at large intervals. As Langhamer notes, women who kept most of their wages were often expected to pay for expenses like clothes, which perhaps allowed them more freedom to choose their style but could also make this purchase into a greater burden.

Young women's frequent visits to the cinema influenced their tastes in clothes and other aspects of appearance. As discussed in Chapter One, studies into youth culture in the interwar period have already shown that copying on-screen styles and mannerisms was a trend growing in popularity among young working-class men and women in the late 1930s.⁵⁹ During the 1930s, magazines directed specifically at film fans included articles encouraging young women to imitate Hollywood styles.⁶⁰ By the 1940s, such articles were also included in the more widespread women's magazines such as *Woman* and *Woman's Own*, which were popular among young working-class women, as well as in daily newspapers, indicating that the trend was as widespread as it was in the previous decade, if not more so.⁶¹ In 1944, Len England, an active member of the MO team of observers, who was later to become the organisation's acting director, remarked that the influence of

⁵⁸ Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, 100-2.

⁵⁹ Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, 94-5.

⁶⁰ Kuhn, "Cinema Culture and Femininity," 185.

⁶¹ Hobson and Henry, *The Hulton Readership Survey*, 45, table 25.

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Hollywood on fashion was beginning to exceed that of Paris.⁶² All of this suggests that Glancy's claim that Hollywood glamour could not be pursued or openly admired by young British women during the war is overstated. In fact, Hollywood glamour was still present and beauty columns were constantly using film stars as inspiration.⁶³ As clothes became scarcer, fashion columns adapted to economy not by putting glamour to one side, but by helping women find ways to realise on-screen styles within the new limitations. Some began suggesting how to create styles seen on screen for daily wear using the clothes women already had in their wardrobes.⁶⁴ Others instructed women on how to utilise sewing skills to make these styles.⁶⁵ As may be expected, the clothing industry also encouraged this practice by emphasising the connection between certain fashions and certain actresses.⁶⁶ Nella Last, although neither working-class nor young, wrote in her diary about how a sales assistant tried to convince her to consider buying a hat in one of the new "Hollywood styles," a suggestion Last found ludicrous, but which nonetheless demonstrates how widespread this influence was.⁶⁷ Articles that discussed screen styles even appeared in clothing trade magazines such as *Tailor & Cutter*.⁶⁸

⁶² Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan, eds., *Mass Observation at the Movies* (London: Routledge, 2014), 297.

⁶³ "Making the Most of the Twenty Coupons," *Gloucester Journal*, 11 September 1943; "An Idea from a Star," *Sunday Pictorial*, 16 April 1944; Ursula Bloom, "Refresher Course," *Building Up Beauty, Woman's Own*, September 28, 1945; Ursula Bloom, "Autumn Bride," *Building Up Beauty, Woman's Own*, October 26, 1945; Ursula Bloom, "Smart Secrets," *Building Up Beauty, Woman's Own*, November 16, 1945; Veronica Scott, "Match yourself to your fitting foundation," *Woman*, March 22, 1947.

⁶⁴ See: "With Help from Hollywood," *Woman's Own*, January 26, 1945, 9; "Learn from Hollywood," *Woman's Own*, February 9, 1945, 11; Ursula Bloom, "Young and Lovely," *Building up Beauty, Woman's Own*, March 22, 1946.

⁶⁵ "An Idea from a Star," *Sunday Pictorial*.

⁶⁶ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (Oxon: Routledge, 1994), 181-2; "Making the Most of the Twenty Coupons," *Gloucester Journal*.

⁶⁷ Last, *Nella Last's War*, 192-3.

⁶⁸ "Cinema Silhouettes," *Tailor & Cutter and Women's Wear News*, December 25, 1947.

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As Glancy notes, there is plenty of evidence that young women looked to Hollywood for their style inspiration.⁶⁹ Jackie Stacey's study of British women's spectatorship, focusing on interviews with women who came of age in the 1940s and 1950s, shows how these women aspired to emulate the film stars they adored.⁷⁰ There is also evidence that young women did their best to style themselves after their favourite stars, to varying degrees of success, rather than only admiring them from a distance. The practice is often mentioned in contemporary studies of youth, as well as cinema surveys.⁷¹ Doris White, who worked in an aircraft factory during the war, described how she and other factory workers used to try "hopefully to emulate Rita Hayworth or some other glamour girl" when they went out dancing.⁷² White's portrait from this period shows her sporting a very similar hair and make-up style to that of her idol. Her outfit, a broad shouldered coat with a large, decorative element attached to the lapel, is not quite glamorous, but her frequent mentions of clothes in her memoir demonstrate that she was quite flamboyant about her appearance from the neck down as well.⁷³ Naturally, not everyone was as successful as White. Of the thirty-two young women whose cinema-attending reports appear in J.P. Mayer's *British Cinemas and their Audiences*, twenty expressed the wish to copy some aspect of screen styles.⁷⁴ Only fourteen, however, managed to do so – whether

⁶⁹ Glancy, "Picturegoer," 463-4, 470.

⁷⁰ Stacey, *Star Gazing*, 151-2.

⁷¹ Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, 61-2; Henry Durant, *The Problem of Leisure* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1938), 134; Mayer, *British Cinemas*, 14.

⁷² Doris White, *D for Doris, V for Victory* (Milton Keynes: Oakleaf Books, 1981), 59, see also: 19, 63.

⁷³ See for instance: White, *D for Doris*, 19, 22. Her portrait appears with the illustrations between pages 44 and 45.

⁷⁴ Mayer, *British Cinemas*, 15-143, See documents numbered: 2, 3, 11, 13, 14, 17, 20, 21, 25, 26, 29, 30, 33-36, 41, 45, 48 and 58.

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copying clothes, hairstyles or accessories.⁷⁵ Their lack of success could be a matter of a lack of experience, financial difficulty or just low self-esteem that kept them from trying.⁷⁶ As this survey and White's portrait suggest, waived hair and heavy make-up contributed to the Hollywood look to which young women aspired. These aspects of film glamour should not be disregarded, since they were often more achievable than the imitation of dress and, as we shall see, could be equally important in creating the right or wrong impression.⁷⁷ According to an investigation conducted as part of the Hulton Readership Survey in 1947, women between the ages of 16 and 24 were most "beauty conscious" among all classes. Beauty consciousness was defined by the surveyors as the frequent use of at least one cosmetic preparation. While working-class women were found to be least likely to be beauty conscious, this did not apply to young working-class women, who were as beauty conscious as their more affluent counterparts.⁷⁸ Young women were most likely to use lipstick and face powder as part of their grooming routine and as we will see, it was the excessive use of these two items that dominated unfavourable descriptions of young working-class women.⁷⁹ Although many obstacles stood in young women's way to imitate cinematic glamour, many made an effort to do so, an effort which, as will be discussed below, attracted commentary from contemporaries.

By the end of the decade, young working-class women had access to more money, but for most of it they were restricted in the way they could use it. The cinema was one of the most common ways in which they spent their allowance. This form of entertainment

⁷⁵ Mayer, *British Cinemas*, 15-143, See documents numbered: 2, 11, 13, 14, 17, 20, 29, 30, 33, 35, 36, 41, 45 and 58.

⁷⁶ Mayer, *British Cinemas*, 15-143, see for instance documents numbered: 25, 34 and 26.

⁷⁷ Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, 61-2.

⁷⁸ Hobson and Henry, *The Hulton Readership Survey*, 43.

⁷⁹ Hobson and Henry.

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inspired them to style themselves after the example of glamorous actresses, an occupation in which they invested time and money. Hollywood styles were the height of fashion during this decade, despite the government's message of economy and despite considerable restrictions on the products that allowed young women to achieve them: clothes, cosmetics and hair products. The next section will deal with the consequences of these restrictions for young women.

The Effect of Austerity Measures

Young working-class women's ability to wear what they wanted was significantly curtailed due to government restrictions on the consumption of clothes. Wardrobe problems had several aspects. First, unlike other forms of rationing, it mattered greatly what families had accumulated before the commencement of controls.⁸⁰ Secondly, austerity regulations also meant the government controlled the quality, quantity and for a short while the patterns of clothes available for purchase due to production constraints.⁸¹ Yet this did not mean young women were entirely unable to invest in their appearance. In fact, they were encouraged to do so. In this section, I will discuss the ways these problems affected young working-class women and how they reacted to and dealt with them.

Contrary to the propaganda image of "fair shares" for all, clothes rationing presented a greater burden for the lower classes. The main issue was that their wardrobes tended to be smaller at the onset of rationing, containing items of lower quality that did not last long. As discussed in Chapter One, one way of solving cash-flow problems was joining clothing clubs, which for a monthly or weekly fee would allow women to purchase clothes in instalments. The problem with this method was that the buyer would often pay much

⁸⁰ TNA, INF 1/292, "Home Intelligence Weekly Report no. 127, 2-9/3/1943."

⁸¹ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 45-6, 48-51.

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more than a garment's worth.⁸² While some working-class women who shopped for their families were careful to buy the best they could – knowing that mending and re-purposing would be necessary – the clothes they could afford would often not be worth the effort.⁸³ Once rationing was enacted, quality became significant not only for new purchases, but for existing items as well – since they now had to last longer in light of fewer future purchases. As a result, those who had plenty of good quality clothes at the onset of rationing were significantly better off than those who had few and of lesser quality.

Rationing presented a greater problem for those entering into adulthood. One young woman who answered an MO questionnaire about clothing habits in 1944, described how she only began gathering a wardrobe in November 1940. At that point, she did not have enough money herself to buy clothes, and her mother helped her. By the time she was already earning enough money to purchase her own clothes, rationing began, strictly limiting her ability to do so. She recorded her reaction at the time as resentment, observing that “it seemed like some nasty mean plot to stop me ever amassing a wardrobe.”⁸⁴ This problem seemed to be class-crossing, affecting middle-class adolescents as much as it did working-class teenagers.⁸⁵ The transition from school to work was partially mitigated by a concession for “growing children.” This provided young Britons between the ages of 16 and 18 with 10 or 20 additional coupons. This concession allowed for the fact that, though they were regarded as children by the state, young men and women in their late teenage years were already wearing adult sizes, which had a higher coupon price. This concession

⁸² McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 179.

⁸³ Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, 139; TNA, INF 1/293, Home Intelligence Special Report no. 35, “The ‘Mend and Make Do’ Campaign.”

⁸⁴ DR 3574, reply to June 1944 Directive. Although she recorded her profession as Library Assistant, this respondent noted that her family was very poor when she was still in school. See also: Mayer, *British Cinemas*, 64.

⁸⁵ Edith Milton, *The Tiger in the Attic: Memories of the Kindertransport and Growing up English*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 184.

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was later stopped by the Board of Trade. Children younger than that who were already wearing adult sizes (often referred to as outsize children), received 30 additional coupons. In 1943, this made outsize children's ration higher than the normal ration by nearly 70 percent.⁸⁶

Teenagers' ability to buy new clothes when they left school had social and cultural significance. Todd demonstrates how the purchase of new clothes formed an important part of the initiation process into the world of adulthood for working-class children as they entered employment.⁸⁷ While, as Todd notes, this practice did not stop at the onset of rationing, controls necessarily would have restricted the amount of clothes bought, and young people's ability to "amass a wardrobe" was impaired. As discussed in Chapter One, there is evidence that in their late teens and early twenties, working-class youths took particular care of their appearance. Post-war surveys demonstrate that young people were still more likely to worry about clothes than other populations.⁸⁸ Where young women were concerned, the desire to look nice was bolstered by advertisements and women's magazines, which carried on exhorting women to maintain a groomed feminine appearance throughout the austerity years, as noted at the beginning of this chapter.⁸⁹ Whatever motivated young working-class women to do so, they invested time and money in their personal appearance. The adolescents in MO's youth survey demonstrated preoccupation with appearances, spending their money on "clothes more than anything," but also on make-up and hair appointments.⁹⁰ Like White, who continued to wear make-up and

⁸⁶ 'The 1943-1944 Clothing Quiz,' TNA, BT 131/37.

⁸⁷ Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England*, 199.

⁸⁸ TNA, RG 23/92.

⁸⁹ Rose, *Which People's War?* 131-4; Kirkham, "Keeping Up Home Front Morale," 206. Both of these studies address the wartime period, but the phenomenon existed in the post-war years as well.

⁹⁰ MOA, TC Youth, 51/3/G.

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fashionable clothes, the young women in Mayer's survey continued to model themselves after movie stars.⁹¹ Young women continued to look to Hollywood as the prototype of femininity against which they measured their appearance (Figure 13).⁹²

It was certainly more difficult for young women to find the "right" clothes to recreate on-screen styles under austerity. One adolescent MO respondent complained that because she did not have enough clothing coupons "I never seem to be able to get what I want."⁹³ But this did not mean that young women did not try to recreate these looks. One of Stacey's subjects remarked:

[...] it was not really until the war started, when we were teenagers, Hollywood female stars became models for us, to copy hairstyles, clothes, whenever possible with clothes rationing. I distinctly remember my friends and I knitting the beanie hats, mitts and scarf in rabbit wool as worn by Deanna Durbin [...] [who] seemed to be [...] wearing the sort of clothes I would have given my eye teeth to have worn.⁹⁴

These adolescents, who came of age during the war, had a difficult time imitating Hollywood styles because they were even less available to them than before. While Hollywood continued to be glamorous during the war, women's ability to imitate that glamour was problematized since controls limited their access to clothes and cosmetics.⁹⁵ But what is also evident from this quote is that they tried: by knitting, by copying hairstyles and as seen in other sources, by wearing make-up.

⁹¹ See note 75 above.

⁹² Pat Kirkham, "Fashioning the Feminine," 166.

⁹³ MOA, DR 3583, reply to June 1944 Directive.

⁹⁴ Stacey, *Star Gazing*, 214-15.

⁹⁵ Kirkham, "Fashioning the Feminine," 157, 161.

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Home sewing was another solution to this problem. This seems to have been a common practice. Many of Stacey's subject made their own clothes.⁹⁶ Contemporary social studies – from Jephcott to Mayer – also present evidence that women could either model their own sewing and knitting after Hollywood or have clothes made by friends or relatives in the desired styles.⁹⁷ As discussed in Chapter One, before the war, home sewing was an economic way for women from poverty stricken households to meet their and their families' clothing needs. This strategy could be adapted to rationing by renovating old garments rather than making new ones, or by using unrationed but unconventional materials like blankets and rugs, which could be used for coats, or dust sheet material, which could be used for dresses.⁹⁸



Figure 13 - Lana Turner, modelling the heavy make-up that became a source of imitation among young working-class women. The picture appeared in an issue of the American magazine *Modern Screen*, February 1943.

⁹⁶ Stacey, *Star Gazing*, 215.

⁹⁷ Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, 61-2; Mayer, *British Cinemas*, 20, 39, 42, 43, 51. See also: J. P. Mayer, *Sociology of Film: Studies and Documents* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946), 148-9, 159-60.

⁹⁸ See for instance: MOA, D 5239, March 1943; D 5261, 14 October 1943; "Coats from Rugs," *Daily Mirror*, 6 June 1941; "'Dust Sheet' Racket," *Daily Worker*, 9 August 1943.

This solution did not work for everyone and some young women had little ability in that area. One of Langhamer's interviewees remarked "I used to attempt to make my dresses [...] you could tell they'd been made by me."⁹⁹ The adolescent MO respondent above, who was unable to get what she wanted, stated that she was "unfortunate in being useless with a needle," and coupled with her coupon shortage, felt like she never looked smart.¹⁰⁰ One of Mayer's cinema-goers, a seventeen-year-old teenager, wrote that she has "certainly envied Rosalind Russell's and other film-stars' clothes, but under present day conditions I have never yet managed to get new material, or felt justified in altering something else in order to copy."¹⁰¹ Both of the latter young women neglected their appearance in despair of achieving the desired look. Instead, they concentrated on looking "comparably tidy."¹⁰² This seemingly minor remark carried with it numerous connotations. The previous chapters demonstrated the association between the descriptor "tidy" as applied to personal appearance and middle-class notions of respectability, and how its integration into the language of clothing economy instructed citizens to care for their clothes in particular ways. This integration of the language of respectability into citizens' guidelines for the correct handling of their wardrobes linked the appearance of respectability to the appearance of good citizenship. When these young women emphasised their tidiness, they asserted, at the same time, their respectability and their patriotism. Neglect was just as problematic as glamour.

When young women did insist on maintaining a fashionable appearance, they were able to come up with creative solutions. White described how she and her friends used

⁹⁹ Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, 88.

¹⁰⁰ MOA, DR 3583, reply to June 1944 Directive.

¹⁰¹ Mayer, *British Cinemas*, 64.

¹⁰² DR 3574, reply to June 1944 Directive. See also: DR 3583, reply to June 1944 Directive, who testified that she is "incurably untidy" although she "would like to look smart and tidy."

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sugar water to curl their hair instead of the wave-set products that were no longer available on the market.¹⁰³ A letter to *Woman's Own* from 1946 mentioned (in horror) the use of talcum powder as a makeshift make-up powder.¹⁰⁴ These “do-it-yourself” methods were not new, and pre-war accounts mention flour as a powder substitute used by teenage girls who could not afford to buy the real thing.¹⁰⁵ For those less handy, but with access to good wages, there were also less legitimate options. Here too, White’s memoir offers some insight, as she tells about the “risks we took to be up to date,” including buying coupons from the woman who let her and her mother’s rooms and buying clothes without coupons in the market.¹⁰⁶ While black market activity was not as prevalent in Britain as it was elsewhere in Europe, a black market in clothing coupons was one of the more widespread in Britain throughout the period.¹⁰⁷ Cosmetics attracted their own share of illicit trade, and propaganda attempts to dissuade women from buying those products assumed the buyers were young women and used newsreels, which young women would have seen at the cinema.¹⁰⁸ It is difficult, however, to believe that many young women used the black market without inhibitions, especially when easier options existed. Peggy, the factory worker mentioned above, for instance, got her additional coupons from her brother, and as Maggie Wood demonstrates, “within families, elderly relatives would gladly give up their own coupons to a young niece or grand-daughter.”¹⁰⁹ In short, young women who were keen to imitate a certain look or follow the fashion had multiple routes they could follow.

¹⁰³ White, *D for Doris*, 62-3.

¹⁰⁴ “Schoolgirl Make-up,” Readers Say, *Woman's Own*, 7 June 1946.

¹⁰⁵ Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, 105.

¹⁰⁶ White, *D for Doris*, 22, 43.

¹⁰⁷ Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, 20, 47.

¹⁰⁸ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 186-7, Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, 92.

¹⁰⁹ MO, *War Factory*, 34; Wood, ‘*We Wore What We'd Got*’, 8.

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Some of these ways around rationing and controls were not in line with the legislation and presentation of consumer regulations. As Roodhouse argues, Black Market dealings were socially unacceptable, but that could not be said about the grey market, which was far more acceptable and widespread: gifts, barter and other exchanges with family, friends and acquaintances.¹¹⁰ It is clear why White thought her habit of shopping for

clothes without coupons was “risky,” and required that both she and the seller cooperate in pretending that the transaction was legal.¹¹¹

Neither of them would have wanted to be caught by a representative of the law or a nosy shopper.

Peggy’s use of her brother’s coupons, however, was perfectly legal – pooling together of coupons within the family was officially sanctioned in the clothing quizzes that the BoT published – but taking those coupons so that she could be careless

with her clothes was clearly marked by the clothing economy campaigns as unpatriotic. As

explored in Chapter Two, government campaigns

constructed clothing controls throughout the austerity period around the concept of “fair

shares,” emphasising citizens’ responsibility to economise on their own purchases to support the nation’s political or economic goals. Waste, as well as acquiring more than



Figure 14 - Wartime National Savings campaign conveying to women that mending was a part of the war effort. *Manchester Guardian*, 4 August, 1943.

¹¹⁰ Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, 50-76.

¹¹¹ White, *D for Doris*, 22.

one's allocated ration, clearly fell outside government definitions of good citizenship, even if they were not legally banned.

This construction of clothing controls viewed women as consumers that needed to be restrained. The government's National Savings campaign directly targeted factory workers and fashion conscious women. The ad in Figure 14, a Squander Bug ad that encouraged women to mend rather than spend, featured a young woman, whose waved hair and dark lipstick marked her as fashionable. White, who defined herself as fashionable, had remarkably similar hair and make-up.¹¹² Another ad featured a woman whose identity was marked by her place of work – a factory. Although it did not deal with clothing economy directly, it encouraged those who had money to spend it wisely, on items that made economic sense (Figure 15). This ad, as well as the evidence discussed in Chapter Two, suggest that government officials targeted working-class women and their newly improved income in particular, since they thought they were spending more than was beneficial to the national economy.¹¹³ After the war, government campaigns continued to target women's spending by warning them that if they did not economise on consumer goods, they might cause inflation (Figure 16).

This message came alongside other messages about appearances. Clothing economy meant taking good care of existing wardrobes as well as holding off making new purchases. The Make Do and Mend campaign gave advice about a range of methods to take care of clothes, and women's magazines followed suit with similar advice.¹¹⁴ A good clothing-care routine meant mending and carefully washing clothes regularly, brushing and folding them

¹¹² See her portrait in White, *D for Doris*.

¹¹³ "Thoughtless Spending Alarms Ministry," *Daily Mail*, July 16, 1942. See also: "Repot to the Women of Britain No. 2," *Woman's Own*, January 2, 1948.

¹¹⁴ See various advice in: *Make Do and Mend*. 1943. Facsimile of the first edition (London: Imperial War Museum, 2007).

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at the end of each day.¹¹⁵ This could make young women feel guilty if their working hours made it difficult for them to keep up this routine. One young factory worker complained to a MO investigator that she had “no time even to do any mending. I don’t like to put it on Mother, but I can’t help it. I just haven’t time.”¹¹⁶ Work responsibilities did not always enable young women to be neat and tidy.



Figure 15 - Wartime National Savings poster, targeting women factory workers. Imperial War Museum, Art.IWMPST15457.

¹¹⁵ Ursula Bloom, “Beautifully Groomed,” Building Up Beauty, *Woman’s Own*, March 9, 1945

¹¹⁶ MO, *War Factory*, 87.

Womens Journals, February, 1948

Report

No. 4

TO THE WOMEN OF BRITAIN

FEATHERS

in our caps

Good news for us all! More food grown here at home. More coal dug, more steel produced, more power on hand to run the factories. More manufactures to pay our way abroad . . . We've got much to be proud of, certainly—and for a great deal of it, we've got the women of Britain to thank.



For good things not so easily measured, too, it's the women of this country who are responsible. For the warmth that comes not from coal but from courage. For resourcefulness in the face of food cuts. For the urge to help that has made busy housewives take on part-time jobs.

Good Work! LET'S KEEP IT UP

We're not out of the wood by a long way. Great difficulties, even greater sacrifices, may still be ahead of us—but also great rewards. A prosperous way of living for ourselves, security and comfort for our children—a better Britain for us all. So much depends on our efforts now. Let's tackle our three main jobs with new energy.



To earn our keep as a nation, let's send MORE goods overseas to pay for the countless things we must buy. Even our farmers aren't self-supporting when you come to think of it—much of the food for their livestock must come from abroad.



Let's put all we've got to the best possible use—our coal and power, our land, our manufacturing skill. Let's switch off instead of switching on at home whenever we can, so that the factories can keep going full-time.



And don't let's bring our pounds, shillings and pence down in value sending them chasing after goods that won't go round. Money can become almost worthless if this happens. It has happened in other countries—it can happen here. But it won't if we buy essentials only, put anything that's over into National Savings, and keep it there.

Issued by His Majesty's Government.

Advt. No. 4

Figure 16 - A campaign advertisement from February 1948, requesting that women will make do with "feathers in their caps" rather than new garments as long as the country's exports fell short of paying for its essential imports. Notice the group of women huddled around a "Sale" sign next to the bottom paragraph. TNA, INF 2/74.

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Even if they could invest the time in their appearance, being neat and tidy was not enough. Kirkham argues that austerity did not mean the end of feminine glamour and that both contemporary media and the British government pressured women to maintain a smart and groomed appearance to a greater degree than in pre-war years.¹¹⁷ This pressure continued into the post-war years, as advertisers and beauty columnists used the anticipated return of soldiers to urge women to look their best for their demobilised men.¹¹⁸ One factory operated a beauty competition between its workers and advertised its intention to open a beauty parlour in an attempt to encourage workers to look their best.¹¹⁹ The importance of women's appearance in the post-war era was highlighted in their own demobilisation as well. While demobilised men had a limited choice of suits from the government's demobilisation depots, so as to ensure they would be decently clad, a subject I explore in the following chapter, women were allowed coupons and a choice of clothes from everything British stores had to offer.¹²⁰ It was important that women would be able to choose their own clothes, since individuality was considered central to femininity.¹²¹ Although women were entrusted with making themselves up after leaving the forces, they were also carefully guided to choose the right kind of appearance. For young women, this meant a modest and 'natural' beauty, one which chimed with pre-war middle-class notions of respectable femininity.

¹¹⁷ Kirkham, "Keeping Up Home Front Morale," 206. See also: Peter McNeil, "Put Your Best Face Forward": The Impact of the Second World War on British Dress," *Journal of Design History* 6, no. 4 (1993): 289. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/6.4.283>.

¹¹⁸ Ursula Bloom, "Girl Meets Boy," Building up Beauty, *Women's Own*, February 15, 1946; Fairy Dyes Advertisement, *Woman's Own*, September 21, 1945.

¹¹⁹ "In Brief," *Daily Mirror*, November 27 1946.

¹²⁰ Alan Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home After the Second World War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 119-22; Elizabeth Wray, "Coming Out?" *Woman's Own*, April 20, 1945.

¹²¹ Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948* (London: Routledge, 2006), 108, 131.

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For young women, all of this made the construction of their appearance into a moral catch-22: looking polished and groomed made women suspect of overspending and looking shabby made them suspect of neglect, while choosing the wrong kind of grooming could also attract commentary about their character and behaviour. Commentary often came from middle-class individuals who either came into contact with young working-class women or observed them from a distance. In their observations, new ideas about the national importance of clothes were integrated with old ideas about clothes, morality and respectability. As the intellectual middle-class observed young working-class women, they judged them according to standards the roots of which can be found in pre-war notions, but which were dyed in patriotic colours during the crisis. In the next section I will explore how these ideas formed and how they informed middle-class criticism of young women's imitation of Hollywood glamour.

Middle-Class Observers and the Discourse of Citizenship

Middle-class views of young working-class women's appearance can be demonstrated in two ways – their direct comments about the young women they saw, and their advice on how young women should construct their appearance. As I will show, when they wrote about young women, their comments were mostly negative, focusing on glamour and the replication of Hollywood styles as mindless and suggestive of irresponsible behaviour. The main complaint against young women was that they placed themselves above the common good, a judgement which placed emphasis on their appearance. In their attempts to guide young women on how to improve their appearance, middle-class commentators focused on simple lines that moved away from the popular Hollywood style. This simplicity, which was presented as the 'right' look for young

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women, was supposed to create an impression of cleanliness and efficiency, or in other words, the appearance of respectability. This image contrasted with that of the bored, over-made-up, materialistic and morally lax working-class in her teens or early twenties, who was either reluctant to help her country or harming it through her careless consumer practices. In this section I will explore middle-class perceptions of young working-class women's appearance, as well as the reasons that Hollywood styles received particularly negative responses, and show how these styles were interpreted as bad civic behaviour.

Beauty columnists in magazines like *Woman* and *Woman's Own* and in the *Daily Mirror* Woman's Page provided a plethora of advice for women, some of it directed specifically at their younger audience. I mentioned above that a good clothing care routine involved a considerable amount of work. The following column from *Woman's Own*, which describes a "beautifully groomed" woman, illustrates what was involved in a beauty routine that created the "right" look:

Her stocking seams were dead straight, her suspenders clipped in the right position, her shoes were clean back as well as front, and her heels properly set up. [...] Her underclothes fitted, and lay flat; she did not bulge where she shouldn't, or turn them in with a safety pin hoping it wouldn't show, and not worrying too much if it did. [...] She washed her gloves *before* they needed it, not *when* they did.[...] She never took off a pair of shoes and put them away without first putting in shoe trees, or stuffing them with paper, and she brushed her coat *after* wearing, not waiting until the next time she needed it. [...] Can you wonder that she looked chic?¹²²

Written in 1945, well before the disappearance of rationing, this image must have seemed unachievable, as most women had learned to make-do with underclothing that they "would

¹²² Ursula Bloom, "Beautifully Groomed," Building Up Beauty, *Woman's Own*, March 9, 1945.

not have dreamt of wearing” before rationing.¹²³ While *Woman’s Own* took a positive approach, instructing women on what to do, the *Daily Mirror* included descriptions of what women should not do, depicting “sluts” or “slatterns” as women who were too lazy to take care of their appearance and who used the war as an excuse to do so.¹²⁴ Whether positive or negative, such advice, which echoed the BoT’s Make Do and Mend instructions, placed emphasis on the need to look well-put-together despite restrictions.

Beyond this rigour, these papers’ general line on young fashion promoted a very simple style for young women which was a juvenile take on contemporary fashion for women (Figure 17). *Woman’s Own* promoted Fair Isle sweaters for young women and boleros alongside paper patterns they could buy or knitting patterns they could copy, made specifically in teen sizes.¹²⁵ The *Daily Mirror* advised similarly simple styles, emphasising the need to have an individual appearance that was young and simple rather than sophisticated.¹²⁶ In one article, the writers used a quote from a 16-year-old model to communicate to teenagers that they should wear age-appropriate styles:

I think teen-age girls should always look their age [...] A lot of English teens wear styles much too old for them. I think they can look young and still be smart.¹²⁷

Looking one’s age was also the advice *Woman’s* writers gave their teen readers.¹²⁸

¹²³ MOA, DR 2989, reply to April 1943 Directive.

¹²⁴ Pearcey and Silvain, “Being Shabby Doesn’t Help At All,” *Daily Mirror*, 23 September 1940; “We Protest,” 2 June 1941.

¹²⁵ Jill McBain and Diana Day, “Be Your Age, Girls,” *Woman’s Own*, 10 January 1947.

¹²⁶ “The Clothes She Wears,” *Daily Mirror*, 9 November 1949; “Oh You Lucky Jean,” *Daily Mirror*, 5 July 1949; “Don’t Be a Beany Slave,” *Daily Mirror*, 22 August 1949.

¹²⁷ “From Schoolgirl to Model in 3 Months,” *Daily Mirror*, 9 November 1949.

¹²⁸ Helen Temple, “The TA Look,” *Woman*, 29 January 1949.



Figure 17 - Film star Jean Simmons in a simple, modest, unglamourised look young women were encouraged to copy. *Woman's Own*, 22 March 1946.

Advice about hair and make-up for young women often concentrated on dissuading them from applying too much make-up and from bleaching or ‘perming’ their hair. Ursula Bloom, the beauty columnist for *Woman's Own*, commented that young women should not use a perm to curl their hair, since it may ruin it.¹²⁹ She also thought that excessive make-up on young women was like “painting the lily.”¹³⁰ She repeated this point often in her columns.¹³¹ Letters from the magazine’s older readers agreed that heavy make-up hid “the natural beauty of youth.”¹³² This message was common in publications aimed at a working-class readership.¹³³ It was also in line with middle-class perceptions of the use of make-up

before the war. In MO’s April 1939 survey about personal appearance, several middle-class women wrote that they used make-up daily, but they emphasised that they applied it to create a ‘natural’ look, or to “help nature.”¹³⁴ While the use of make-up in moderation was recommended for young as well as older women, on young women, bold make-up was far less acceptable. Heavy make-up still bore the connotation of criminality and transgressive femininity. Julia

¹²⁹ Ursula Bloom, “Young Loveliness,” Building up Beauty, *Woman's Own*, 20 April 1945.

¹³⁰ Ursula Bloom, “Young and Lovely,” Building up Beauty, *Woman's Own*, 22 March 1946.

¹³¹ Ursula Bloom, “Rhyme and Reason,” Building up Beauty, *Woman's Own*, 1 February 1946; Ursula Bloom, “Young Loveliness,” Building up Beauty, *Woman's Own*, 20 April 1945.

¹³² “Teenage Make-up,” Readers Say, *Woman's Own*, 8 March 1946. See also: “Young Health and Beauty,” Readers Say, *Woman's Own*, 14 June 1946; “Schoolgirl Make-up,” Readers Say, *Woman's Own*, 7 June 1946.

¹³³ “The TA Look,” *Woman*, 29 January 1949; Elizabeth Sykes, “Beauty Bureau,” *Daily Mirror*, 15 August 1946.

¹³⁴ DRs 1002, 1009, 1039, 1040, replies to April 1939 Directive.

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Laite argues that in mid-twentieth-century London, flashy clothes and heavily applied make-up were the common attributes of prostitutes.¹³⁵ Even a more fashionable magazine like *Woman*, which was always at the vanguard of feminine advice, and boldly declared that “colourless faces are out,” warned women against excess.¹³⁶ The writers quoted a man who wrote to the magazine, saying, “Too often women either overdo make-up or apply it badly, with the result that they look like waxen dolls dipped in a flour bag and paint pot!”¹³⁷ In a later article, the magazine asked four famous men about women’s appearance – all of whom specified that make-up should be applied in moderation.¹³⁸ The *Daily Mirror* had a similar agenda, instructing young women that young men did not want them to overdo their make-up, since “if a girl is quiet and refined [...] she shows it in her clothes, make-up – everything.”¹³⁹ The underlying message was not simply that excessive use of beauty enhancers was ugly and unhealthy for young women, but that men disliked it, and women should therefore shun it.

This message was in line with guidance for young women before the war. An article in the *Daily Mirror* Woman’s Page, offering advice on how to be the perfect woman that any man would seek offered advice about clothing and appearance that could have just as easily been published at the height of austerity. Kathleen Pearcey, who wrote the section covering advice about clothing, as well as the regular fashion column under austerity, emphasised a clean, neat and tidy appearance that was smart but inconspicuous, beautiful but not extravagant. The “Beauty Editress [*sic*],” though she remained anonymous, offered

¹³⁵ Julia Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London, 1885-1960* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 39-40. Willcock’s report, discussed below, supports that image, see: Willcock, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 79.

¹³⁶ “Men about Make-up,” *Woman*, January 25, 1947.

¹³⁷ “Men about Make-up,” *Woman*.

¹³⁸ Helen Temple, “A Young Man’s Fancy,” Helen Temple’s Beauty Parlour, *Woman*, February 15, 1947.

¹³⁹ “Is This Girl You?” *Daily Mirror*, 2 May 1940.

the same advice that the Page continued to promote in the next decade: “no man really wants to escort a flour mill out to dinner, and thick rouge and heavy eye-black are unpleasant things to come up against.”¹⁴⁰ The similarity of advice suggests that attempts to regulate young working-class women’s beauty practices were not the product of the war or austerity, but reframed to fit new public concerns and the new language of appearances.

These publications framed young women’s appearance as particularly important in the context of employment. In order for young women to find the right job and get ahead in the world, their appearance had to give the impression that they would be good workers. In an editorial from 1947, the editor of *Woman’s Own* highlighted one of her young writers, emphasising that she knows that “the way to be efficient in her job is to make the best of her looks.”¹⁴¹ At the same time, she also found it important to remind her readers that good looks are nothing “without good taste.”¹⁴² Two years earlier, the editor wrote about a manager, who promoted the idea of equal pay, but insisted that “employers [need] to be very wise and selective in taking on women staff,” and that he would never hire “the type who at sixteen is fiddling with her hair all day – and at eighteen can be trusted to be fiddling with lipsticks, new hats, hair-dresser dates – all in a vague cloud of wool-gathering!”¹⁴³ The message was that a girl who took too much care with how she looks, took very little care with her work. Another manager, interviewed in the *Daily Mirror* a couple of months earlier, remarked that the girl who “turns her face into a blank mask with cosmetics [and] copies the walk and manner of some glamorous film star [...] may be a

¹⁴⁰ “You Are My Heart’s Delight,” *Daily Mirror*, 14 January 1938.

¹⁴¹ “Between You and Me,” *Woman’s Own*, January 10, 1947.

¹⁴² “Between You and Me,” *Woman’s Own*, January 10, 1947.

¹⁴³ Constance Holt, “Between You and Me,” *Woman’s Own*, April 6, 1945.

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most industrious worker — but she doesn't give that impression.”¹⁴⁴ An excessively feminine appearance was considered inappropriate in the office, since it was not within the bounds of respectable appearance and since, as noted in Chapter One, femininity was not considered compatible with serious work. Neglect, young women were reminded in another article, could be just as off-putting, and the perfect appearance was clean, neat and stylish, without excessive make-up or fussy clothes.¹⁴⁵ These articles bring to mind pre-war associations between respectability and work discussed in Chapter One; they chime with middle-class commentary about the need to keep a respectable appearance at work, but also with the observations of social investigators who thought young working-class women's neglectful appearance harmed their chances of employment. In 1941, Jephcott made similar comments about young women's shortcomings when it came to neatness and tidiness.¹⁴⁶ The ideal young woman worker communicated an efficient and organised character through neat, clean and tidy clothes without displaying intense interest in fashion.

These articles promoted the idea that work was an important part of any citizen's duty, and that the girl who is preoccupied with clothes and make-up is not likely to be a good worker. The journalists who wrote these articles, the managers who expressed these opinions in interviews and the editors who devoted plenty of space to the question of employment for young women all thought work should be young women's purpose in life and their central role in British society until they became wives and mothers. Jephcott's main complaint against the young women she studied was what she interpreted as their lack of interest in their work.¹⁴⁷ Although she noted that they were more involved in their

¹⁴⁴ Cicely Fraser, “Step through the Door Marked ‘Private’,” *Daily Mirror*, February 27, 1945.

¹⁴⁵ “Looking for Your First Job?” *Daily Mirror*, 15 November 1940.

¹⁴⁶ Jephcott, *Girls Growing up*, 73.

¹⁴⁷ Jephcott, *Girls Growing up*, 74-5; Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, 123-4.

employment during the war, employment was an urgent concern throughout the austerity period.¹⁴⁸ As demonstrated at the beginning of the chapter, and as explored in Chapter Two, the war and post-war reconstruction charged what was once work for personal profit with national importance. While the state urgently needed working hands to produce weapons and consumer products for export, production levels continuously remained lower than desired, never achieving the national goals. As a problem of national concern, the ability of workers to be efficient and prolific gained attention, and since their appearance was considered indicative of their character, advice about style promoted a respectable look that projected these desirable qualities.

According to observations made by members of the middle-class, some young working-class women were not following this advice. One stereotypical character that repeats itself in diaries, social reports, newspaper articles and literary works that include observations about young women is the over-glamourised working-class girl. In *One Fine Day*, Mollie Panter-Downes' novel that takes place in the post-war period, Laura, the main character, dismissively refers to the young women who imitated Hollywood styles as "little tuppence-coloured girls [...] cheap imitations of somebody's hair and bosom and lips on the movies."¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Kathleen Church-Bliss and Elsa Whiteman, two middle-class women who volunteered at a factory making aircraft components during the war, wrote in their joint diary about the "ghastly looking wantons with long golden locks [...] and enamelled

¹⁴⁸ Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, 124.

¹⁴⁹ Mollie Panter-Downes, *One Fine Day* (London: Virago, 2003) [originally published in 1947], 91, see also: 158. This term, referring to young women's made-up faces (and not to the colour of their skin), was in common use at the time, see for example: "Men and Make-up," Readers Say, *Woman's Own*, 24 May, 1946.

faces,” who “sprout out of skintight jumpers” and were always “conscious of one thing only – their exceeding beauty, charm, and glamour.”¹⁵⁰

Another description along those lines appears in the juvenile delinquency report H. D. Willcock published in 1948. Willcock was a prominent figure in MO, and its acting director for most of the 1940s.¹⁵¹ His report on juvenile delinquency was a response to growing anxieties about the impact of the war on British youth,¹⁵² and contains street observations of young people – mostly young men, but occasionally also young women – whom he considered to be potential delinquents or exhibiting the behaviour he believed led to delinquency. Willcock’s description of young women who might fall into a life of crime highlighted their appearance, drawing attention to attributes such as their “heavily made up” face, “dyed blonde hair” or “extra thick lipstick applied carelessly.”¹⁵³ In all of these examples, young women’s glamourised appearance is connected to negative qualities such as loose morals and a self-serving agenda. Panter-Downes wrote about the young women in connection to an unequal marriage between a working-class girl and a newly rich merchant. Beyond the overt comment about the aping quality of their appearance, there is covert commentary about the way these young women used it to improve their material situation. Elsewhere in the novel, they are also marked as morally loose, as one of them revels in the attention of the heroine’s husband.¹⁵⁴ Willcock’s report also suggests imitation alongside promiscuity. Heavy make-up and unnatural blond hair were both associated in the public’s mind with the imitation of American cinema, and are reminiscent of popular British

¹⁵⁰ Private Papers of Miss K. Church-Bliss, diary entry for July 25, 1942, Imperial War Museum (IWM), Catalogue reference: Documents.1354. For this entry in the edited and published form of the diaries, see: Sue Bruley (ed.), *Working for Victory: A Diary of Life in a Second World War Factory* (Gloucestershire: The History Press), 56.

¹⁵¹ Hinton, *The Mass-Observers*, 170, 350.

¹⁵² See for instance: Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, 194-207.

¹⁵³ Willcock, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 39, 40.

¹⁵⁴ Panter-Downes, *One Fine Day*, 158-9.

impressions of American women in the interwar period.¹⁵⁵ His note about the careless application of make-up highlights the intricacies of a respectable, and correct, appearance. While properly applied make-up would not have been worthy of comment, imperfection was a sign of neglectful practices, and therefore of neglectful character. Together, heavy make-up and carelessness were obvious signs of young women's transgression, as he deemed them important enough to include in his description.¹⁵⁶ His judgement reflected a middle-class perception of appropriate feminine appearance, which, as Langhamer notes, did not tolerate the neglectful application of make-up.¹⁵⁷ The only other descriptions Willcock offered are of their flirtation with boys in their gang and loud laughing and singing – all signs of transgressive femininity.¹⁵⁸ His description highlighted indications of young women's potential delinquency, which, as Tinkler argues, was primarily a matter of sexual transgression.¹⁵⁹ Willcock aligned young women's appearance with their conduct, linking the Hollywood inspired look and neglect with promiscuous sexual behaviour that he associated with the deteriorating morals of youth. In their diary, Church-Bliss and Whiteman's criticism of the young women with whom they worked created a similar link between sexual promiscuity and irresponsibility. Beyond the sexual undertones of their description of these young women, they also pointed out that their beautification process was done "hidden away in the Women's Cloaks [...] at Morrisons' expense."¹⁶⁰ The

¹⁵⁵ George Harmon Knowles, *The Jazz Age Revisited: British Criticism of American Civilization During the 1920's* (Stanford CA.: Stanford University Press, 1955), 76; Dilys Powell, "Has Hollywood Spoiled Peggy Cummings?" *Picture Post*, 31 August 1946.

¹⁵⁶ He includes the same commentary on young men as well, see for instance: Willcock, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 41. For a discussion of male criminality and dress see: Roodhouse, "In Racket Town."

¹⁵⁷ Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: the Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013), 84.

¹⁵⁸ Eve Dexter, "We Wish Women Would Stop This Sort of Thing!" *Daily Mirror*, 15 December 1939.

¹⁵⁹ Tinkler, "Cause for Concern," 242-3.

¹⁶⁰ Church-Bliss, diary entry for 25 July, 1942; Bruley (ed.), *Working for Victory*, 56.

implication was that these young women prioritised their appearance over the national effort.

This construction of young working-class women as both vain and unpatriotic echoes the *Daily Mirror* articles that opened this chapter. This approach continued to accompany descriptions of young women in the *Mirror* later in the war. A news report from 1944 included the following description about a group of young women:

They avoid work by staying at home during the day to look after invalid mothers – but when night falls, on go the pretty clothes, the powder, and the lipstick, and out go the girls – to become good time partners of American soldiers.¹⁶¹

These young women's clothes and make-up played a central part in their unruly conduct and their shirking of national duty. The description of their excessive, glamourised appearance served to construct an image of irresponsible and over sexualised young women, while the fact that they were performing their familial duty of care was given little weight in the report.¹⁶² Their consumption practices, signified by their appearance, undermined their performance of duty and marked them as unpatriotic citizens. Young women's spending continued to be viewed as extravagant and unpatriotic as late as 1949.¹⁶³ In a similar context, Rose shows how young women who took advantage of the war to enjoy a new sexual freedom were chastised in the press for being irresponsible citizens, who were incapable of controlling themselves.¹⁶⁴ Restraint was the trait of the good citizen and a modest appearance was the sign of sexual restraint as well as of moderate

¹⁶¹ "Gang of Girl Work Dodgers 'Look after Mother' by Day – but at Night Catch Train to 'Good Time Land'," *Daily Mirror*, 2 August, 1944.

¹⁶² See also: "Girls in Bid to Get a Soldier Out," *Daily Mirror*, 26 August, 1946.

¹⁶³ "Girls' Wages," *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 7 May 1949.

¹⁶⁴ Rose, *Which People's War?* 89-91.

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consumption. When young women failed to show the appropriate restraint, they were judged as avoiding their duties – as workers and as consumers.

Social commentators saw the behaviour of young women as directly affecting Britain's ability to meet production goals. The problem was young women's lack of responsibility, declining morals and materialism. During the war, a firm involved in the war-effort hired MO to write a report about the elements holding back production in its factory. In his introduction to the report, Tom Harrisson suggested that the main aspect of the investigation that could be applied to the general problem of productivity, and was not peculiar to the specific factory investigated, was the mental state of young women. "The results" he pointed out

[...] are in line with other recent work, – for example on political apathy, passive leisure, youth morality. Underlying the life of young working women to-day there is a background of aimlessness, irresponsibility and boredom. [...] these factory girls emphasise *the dangerous decline in positive citizenship*, especially among the young.¹⁶⁵

Harrisson's linking of "political apathy, passive leisure" and "youth morality" was not incidental. In the minds of his contemporaries, these three aspects of civic life influenced, if not determined, each other. A few years earlier, the pioneering opinion pollster Henry Durant suggested that leisure was a major factor in promoting moral conduct and producing industrious workers.¹⁶⁶ As a social scientist from a working-class background, who was researching at the London School of Economics before being recruited to manage BIPO, Durant was both at the forefront of social science and uniquely placed to comment on a

¹⁶⁵ MO, *War Factory*, 8-9 [emphasis in the original].

¹⁶⁶ Durant, *The Problem of Leisure*, 19-20; Fowler, *The First Teenagers*, 124-8.

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culture to which he still felt he belonged.¹⁶⁷ His study expressed growing concern about working-class youths' leisure. In her study of young women's leisure in this period, Tinkler demonstrates how youth leaders and social commentators emphasised the role of leisure in shaping the future citizenship of youth. From their perspective, spare-time activities did not have to directly relate to civic practice in order to mould youths into good citizens, but they did have to stimulate the participants and lead them down a moral and industrious path.¹⁶⁸

In this context, watching films was a form of what Harrison termed "passive leisure," and social commentators considered the culture surrounding the cinema as encouraging negative behaviour. Durant, writing about the rising influence of the cinema at the end of the 1930s, was particularly worried that films were promoting self-indulgence and encouraging young people to be more self-centred and less concerned with their communities.¹⁶⁹ He and others considered cinema-going to be a passive recreational pastime, and therefore a problematic activity, since it lead youth to accept what was portrayed before them rather than make a positive contribution to their communities.¹⁷⁰ As seen above, middle-class descriptions of young working-class women's appearance tended to emphasise the imitative nature of it. Even Jephcott, who admired her subjects' appearance, qualified her admiration for the young women's taste by writing that they "show a tendency to be as alike in hair-style, make-up and eyebrow shaping as the eleven angels in the Wilton diptych."¹⁷¹ The same commentary was used to criticise Hollywood actresses, who were the model young women were said to imitate.¹⁷² By categorising the

¹⁶⁷ Roodhouse, "'Fish-and-Chip Intelligence'," 227-9.

¹⁶⁸ Tinkler, "Cause for Concern," 250-1.

¹⁶⁹ Durant, *The Problem of Leisure*, 126-31, 137-9.

¹⁷⁰ Durant, *The Problem of Leisure*, 19-20; David Fowler, *The First Teenagers*, 122.

¹⁷¹ Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, 61.

¹⁷² Powell, "Has Hollywood Spoiled Peggy Cummings?" *Picture Post*.

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girls' appearance as apish rather than inspired by a certain style, middle-class commentators made clear that they viewed it as mindless and passive. The war and the economic crisis which followed it made these issues more explicitly relevant to the conduct of citizens, who were expected to make do without consumer goods, while contributing time and effort to protect and reconstruct the country.

The additional vice associated with both Hollywood styles and Hollywood films was sexual laxity. Social investigators, both before the war and during the 1940s, were concerned that the cinema encouraged an unhealthy preoccupation with sex and romance.¹⁷³ Addressing these concerns, J. P. Mayer asked in his 1945 survey of cinema-going what audiences thought was the influence films had on their lives, specifically referring to sex, romance, occupation, mannerisms and appearance.¹⁷⁴ He found that films created excitement in many of his subjects, but that they did not, as a rule, become sexually promiscuous as a result of watching films.¹⁷⁵ This did not prevent the public from thinking that films "teach young people nothing but prostitution."¹⁷⁶ Neither did it prevent Church-Bliss and Whiteman from judging their fellow workers in the factory according to their Hollywood style appearance. Their inherent assumptions about appearances are demonstrated in their surprise at the fact that one of their colleagues, who looked "like a tart," was in fact quite conservative.¹⁷⁷ In another entry, they described the young woman's appearance as "usually" looking "like a dragged film star with her white face & large red mouth and lustrous black eyes and long greasy black locks."¹⁷⁸ This description associated

¹⁷³ Tinkler, "Cause for Concern," 245-6. See also: Mayer, *Sociology of Film*, 165.

¹⁷⁴ J.P. Mayer, *British Cinemas*, 13-15.

¹⁷⁵ Mayer, *British Cinemas*, 29.

¹⁷⁶ MOA, D5261, Diary for December 7, 1944.

¹⁷⁷ Church-Bliss, diary entry for May 4, 1942; Bruley (ed.), *Working for Victory*, 27.

¹⁷⁸ Church-Bliss, diary entry for March 7, 1942; Bruley (ed.), *Working for Victory*, 9.

the young woman's film-inspired appearance with dirt and neglect, clear signs that she lacked respectability.

The negative influence of the cinema on the conduct and appearance of young Britons was conceptualised in the interwar period as the Americanisation of British youth. For British intellectuals, the popularity of American films and young Britons' tendency to imitate them were signs of the deteriorating popular taste.¹⁷⁹ Films, interwar critics thought, did not realise their potential to become an art form, and since profit was the main motive behind Hollywood productions, they set a low bar that failed to elevate public standards.¹⁸⁰ Concerns about the replacement of "authentic" British working-class culture with an American standardised culture borrowed from the cinema, born in the 1930s, gained more traction after the Second World War.¹⁸¹ This American influence was exacerbated by the presence of American soldiers in Britain during the war.¹⁸² McKibbin demonstrates the prevalence of this influence in the language used by working-class youth.¹⁸³ But it was also embodied in young women's appearance, in their tendency to imitate the hair, make-up and fashion shown in Hollywood films. In the eyes of middle-class observers, young women's appearance marked the influence of American culture, with its connotations of materialism and a lack of individuality, on their body. The suggestions of beauty columnists that young

¹⁷⁹ Chris Waters, "Introduction, Beyond 'Americanization': Rethinking Anglo-American Cultural Exchange between the Wars," *Cultural and Social History* 4, no. 4 (2007): 451-459. <https://doi.org/10.2752/147800407X243451>.

¹⁸⁰ D.L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 325-6.

¹⁸¹ For pre-war concerns see: LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, 326. For post-war debates, see: Dominic Strinati, "The Taste of America: Americanization and Popular Culture in Britain," in *Come on Down? Popular Media Culture in Post-War Britain*, eds. Dominic Strinati and Stephen Wagg (London: Routledge, 1992), 48-9, 65-6.

¹⁸² David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), xxvii-xxix.

¹⁸³ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 511-13.

women should concentrate on individuality should be read in this context of anti-American sentiment.

Youth clubs and societies were often marked as a positive influence that countered the negative effects of cinema culture. They offered an alternative to imitation by teaching young women how to choose “suitable and attractive clothes,” be “wellgroomed” [*sic*] and build up “an attractive wardrobe.”¹⁸⁴ Such curricula were organised alongside a variety of activities that would make young women into good citizens and prepare them for their role in society. Young women’s role was imagined as a combination between home-making and civic and political involvement. A training scheme designed by the Girls’ Friendly Society, a long-standing organisation that provided education for young women of limited means, is a good example for this. The 1943 curriculum included cookery, clothes making and mending, childcare, first aid, basic household repairs and local government.¹⁸⁵ These lessons were meant to prepare young women to do their civic duties during the war and they reflected expectations of young women as workers and consumers put forward by government propaganda. After the war, these schemes were repurposed to provide “national service and education for citizenship.”¹⁸⁶ They encouraged young working-class women to be active and respectable citizens.

The role of respectability was significant. Before the war, the Pilgrim Trust report noted the need to teach young women how to dress and take care of their appearance as a way to “equip them for life,” since if young women took care of their appearance they were

¹⁸⁴ The Women’s Group on Public Welfare Modern Home Making Committee, Suggested Syllabus for Home Making Courses, TWL at LSE, WFM, 5/WFM/B/12, “Modern Home Making committee papers, 1947-8.”

¹⁸⁵ Girls’ Friendly Society War Training Scheme, TWL at LSE, Girls’ Friendly Society (GFS), 5/GFS/02059, “War Training Scheme: Syllabuses and Examination Papers, 1943.”

¹⁸⁶ Victoria Stevenson, “Young Eyes on the Future,” *Women at Work, Woman’s Own*, 27 April 1945.

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more likely to keep an efficient, respectable looking home when they grew older.¹⁸⁷ Some post-war educational initiatives were designed to teach young women how to dress and apply make-up correctly, focusing on appearances as a part of what made women into good citizens. The Women's Voluntary Service, for instance, discussed the need for a national training scheme that would teach women proper Home-Making, including lectures on "The Woman in Her Home," "The Choice and Care of Clothing" and "The Family's Place in the Community."¹⁸⁸ The idea was that the scheme would teach women who would later instruct other women – in schools and youth clubs. They sought to use the momentum of wartime mobilisation to educate young women, moulding them into active citizens.¹⁸⁹ In mid-twentieth-century Britain, good citizenship in the eyes of middle-class commentators was active, and active citizenship meant participating in the democratic process and being involved in improving the community.¹⁹⁰ Passivity, apathy and self-indulgence, which middle-class observers saw in young working-class women's appearance, were the vices of the bad citizen.¹⁹¹

Middle-class observers judged the character of young working-class women according to what they looked like, expecting their appearance to coincide with their character in certain ways. Excessive make-up and fashionable dress were for them the signs of bad citizenship, as they suggested that these women indulged in excessive consumption and sexual promiscuity while avoiding their work duties. Their appearance marked them as

¹⁸⁷ Pilgrim Trust, *Men without Work*, 252-3.

¹⁸⁸ The Women's Group on Public Welfare Modern Home Making Committee, Suggested Syllabus for Home Making Courses, TWL at LSE, WFM, 5/WFM/B/12, "Modern Home Making committee papers, 1947-8."

¹⁸⁹ Lady Stella Reading in a letter to Miss Caroline Haslett of the Electrical Association of Women, dated 1st April, 1947, TWL at LSE, WFM, 5/WFM/B/12, "Modern Home Making committee papers, 1947-8."

¹⁹⁰ Tinkler, "Cause for Concern," 238.

¹⁹¹ Siân Nicholas, "From John Bull to John Citizen: Images of National Identity and Citizenship on the Wartime BBC," in Weight and Beach, *The Right to Belong*, 45-6, 54.

immoral, and the transgression of moral imperatives, as discussed in the introduction, put into question their membership in the national community, or at least suggested that they were unworthy members. The good citizen did not indulge herself – she made an effort for others. She worked hard to promote Britain’s economic growth, bought little to reduce the need to import materials and stuck to the moral values of modesty and moderation. She was industrious and patriotic – in her choice of appearance, in her consumption practices as much as in her work and personal moral conduct. Yet this perfectly aligned ideal did not necessarily materialise. The next section will explore young women’s awareness of these expectations of their conduct and appearance and seek to understand why young working-class women modelled themselves after Hollywood starlets despite attempts to dissuade them from doing so.

Young Working Women Make Themselves Up

It is difficult to unearth the motivations that brought young working-class women to dress the way they did. There are few accounts written by young working-class women themselves and most evidence we have, oral history accounts and memoirs written many years after the fact, is necessarily affected by time. Other sources give accounts that are mediated by a third party, as in the case of middle-class observers who discuss working-class girls. These sources have little to say explicitly about intentions. Most, in fact, show very little, if any, interest in what young women thought about their appearance, preferring instead to impose their own assumption on young women when they observed them. Yet, examining young women’s actions and reactions in light of the advice they were given and the criticism they encountered can give us insight into their motives and priorities. These

indicate that young women's style choices should be read in reference to social norms and conditions that predated austerity.

The efforts of upper-class and middle-class observers to instruct young women on how they should construct their appearance suggest that they interpreted the excess and neglect they saw in young working-class women's appearance as the result of inexperience and limited guidance. Suggestions to include beauty lessons in schools and in clubs for young working women expressed this connection explicitly. Discussing the importance of such classes, one official observed "Many, through lack of knowledge, appeared in remarkable colour schemes which had an unfortunate effect," and thought that learning "the tricks of make-up will do them a world of good."¹⁹² A woman writing to *Woman's Own* readers' section thought that helping young women to achieve beauty through education would help them feel good about themselves.¹⁹³ The inclusion of such schemes in factories suggests that working-class women were the focus of paternalistic efforts to improve appearances.¹⁹⁴

Inexperience is evident in observation both from within and from outside the working-class. In 1946, two mothers exchanged thoughts about make-up for young women on *Woman's Own* readers' section. One of them wrote to complain about her twelve-years-old daughter's appalling experiments with make-up when she visited friends.¹⁹⁵ The second mother, who recently experienced a similar problem, explained that when her own daughter tried on make-up and put it on too heavily, instead of scolding her for this, she simply showed her how it was done properly. The result was that both mother and daughter were

¹⁹² "He is Blue about Dabs of Pink," *Daily Mirror*, 27 September 1945.

¹⁹³ "Lessons in Beauty," Readers Say, *Woman's Own*, 9 March 1945.

¹⁹⁴ "In Brief," *Daily Mirror*, 27 November 1946.

¹⁹⁵ "Schoolgirl Make-up," Readers Say, *Woman's Own*, 7 June 1946.

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happy with the girl's appearance.¹⁹⁶ Both mothers approved of make-up to a certain degree, but neither wanted her daughter to look "painted." They assumed that their daughters wanted to style themselves in a manner that their mothers understood as beautiful, but they lacked the experience to achieve this style. An outsider's perspective could be far less forgiving for such early attempts to achieve beauty. One MO middle-class diarist described a young woman who had made a good impression on her from afar, but seeing her from a shorter distance changed the impression. Her description condemned the young woman's mismatching clothes and accessories and her excessive and badly applied make-up. She concluded by attributing these to her lack of experience:

Conscious of many defects, immaturity and insignificance but determined to outdo nature and time with the result contrary to one intended. Instead of attractive, she was repulsive. [...] She was too young and inexperienced to carry it. I've seen dozens of young factory girls with paint as thick, but they've never looked as out of character as this girl did.¹⁹⁷

While the diarist felt sorry for the young woman, it is clear from the contrast she made with other young women wearing excessive make-up that she did not consider the lack of confidence or experience a widespread phenomenon. Her use of the phrase "paint as thick" indicates that although more experienced young women, who wore heavy make-up, were redeemed by the confidence they demonstrated, their appearance was still, in her eyes, unattractive. This suggests that, although young women did experiment with clothes and make-up, which occasionally resulted in what others considered a flawed appearance, this was not the reason they were condemned by observers.

¹⁹⁶ "Schoolgirl Make-up," Readers Say, *Woman's Own*, 12 July 1946.

¹⁹⁷ Simon Garfield, *Our Hidden Lives: The Remarkable Diaries of Post-War Britain* (Reading: Ebury Press, 2005), 385.

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Middle-class accusations about young women's imitation of Hollywood can be similarly refuted. In 1947, when Christian Dior's New Look with its long, voluminous skirts, nipped-in waists and rounded shoulders began its ascendance to fashion dictatorship, Hollywood took a long while to follow suit. To a certain extent, this was a technical problem that testified to the amount of time that elapsed between production and release of films. In October 1947, Hollywood studios were already concerned about films beginning to age because of the change in style.¹⁹⁸ However, some Hollywood costume designers did not approve of the new style and wondered "who gave Paris the right to dictate," causing additional delay in Hollywood's adaptation to the latest fashion.¹⁹⁹ Alongside the heavy taxation on American films that delayed the release of some films in Britain, Hollywood films displaying the New Look only began appearing on British screens well into 1948.²⁰⁰

By that point, British retailers were already frustrated with the stocks of knee-length skirts and coats they felt unable to sell to consumers. In December 1947, the editor of *Tailor & Cutter* complained that "The stocks of ladies' outerwear in the old knee length have accumulated into a great stock pile of unwanted garments [...]. If [the manufacturers] do not get rid of these before the end of January, there is little chance they will sell them at all."²⁰¹ *Drapers' Record* had also addressed the problem of immobile stocks and asserted that consumers refused to buy the old styles.²⁰² Retailers like Marks & Spencer were already selling dresses with a New Look silhouette before 1947 came to a close (Figure 18), and the economic controversy that longer skirts evoked had mostly faded out in October of

¹⁹⁸ "Put the Blame on Dames," *Variety*, 1 October 1947; "Battle of the Skirts," *Manchester Guardian*, 1 October 1947.

¹⁹⁹ "Film Praisers Squawk on Getting Caught Short on Those Long Hemlines," *Variety*, 7 October 1947.

²⁰⁰ "Tax on American Films: Mr. Atlee's Explanation," *Times*, 11 September 1947.

²⁰¹ Editorial, *Tailor & Cutter*, 26 December 1947.

²⁰² Jean Guest, "Medium Priced Merchandise That Helps Harassed Buyers," *Drapers' Record*, 29 November 1947; "Fashion Prophecies for 1948," *Drapers' Record*, 3 January 1947.

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that year.²⁰³ In an advertisement film the Newcastle shop Turners shot in 1947, most women on the street are already seen as wearing longer skirts if not exactly in the style Dior introduced. In a shot taken inside the store, both shop assistant and customer wear their skirts far below the knee – the young assistant’s skirt is even longer than that of her customer.²⁰⁴ While the styles seen on the street are a far cry for the extravagance of the New Look (most of the skirts use considerably less fabric than the original), they do demonstrate an attempt to change clothes in old styles to resemble the new silhouette – at least in length. Such adaptations were in line with suggestions from women’s magazines, which helped their readers think of ways to make versions of the fashion within austerity constraints.²⁰⁵ They were also in line with the solutions found by the British fashion industry.²⁰⁶

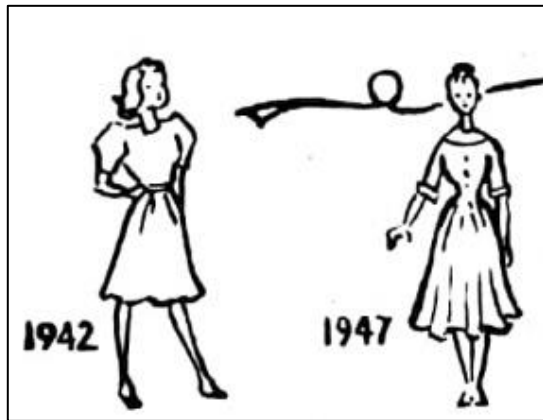


Figure 18 - Illustration of changing silhouettes for women, appearing in the *Marks and Spencer Training News Bulletin*, December 21, 1947, The M&S Company Archive, ref: HO/3/2/2/4/16. Printed with permission from the M&S Company Archive.

The relatively quick adoption of this adapted version of the New Look by young British women was not in line with the economic interests of the state. Stafford Cripps, who had stepped down as President of the Board of Trade just as the New Look was gaining momentum in Britain, thought the longer skirts were wasteful and “idiotic” and

²⁰³ See: “The Long and Short of It,” *Manchester Guardian*, 5 September 1947; “The Little More,” *Manchester Guardian*, 9 September 1947. See also: MOA, Directive Questionnaire for September 1947.

²⁰⁴ “Turners 1947,” Yorkshire Film Archive, NEFA 13470, 07:31, retrieved on 2 January 2019.

²⁰⁵ “Transformation Scene,” *Woman*, 6 December 1947; “Make Yourself the New Skirt,” *Woman’s Own*, 2 January 1948.

²⁰⁶ For the most recent analysis of the process of adoption see: Bethan Bide, “Austerity Fashion, 1945-51: Rebuilding Fashion Cultures in Post-War London,” (PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2017), 70-98.

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that the change was harmful to the national economy.²⁰⁷ His supporters hurried to announce the new skirts “spiv-length.”²⁰⁸ Middle-class MO respondents to a directive about the New Look insisted that “the vast majority of honest English women will go on wearing the styles of 1943,” while “women dressed in the height of fashion must of necessity deal in the black market.”²⁰⁹ These opinions did not stop young women from adopting the new length, and adapting old clothes as much as possible.²¹⁰ The New Look controversy perpetuated the association between fashionability and bad citizenship in circles that adopted the message communicated by government campaigns.



Figure 19 - A young employee at Gleniffer Laundry in Catford with bold lipstick, carefully shaped eyebrows and a meticulous hairdo. Imperial War Museum, Ministry of Information Second World War Official Collection, D 23266.

²⁰⁷ “Letting Down the Hem,” *Manchester Guardian*, 20 September 1947; “Case for Short Skirts,” *Manchester Guardian*, 26 September 1947.

²⁰⁸ “The Little More,” *Manchester Guardian*, 12 September 1947. See also: MOA, DR 1313, reply to September 1947 Directive.

²⁰⁹ MOA, DR 4178, reply to September 1947 Directive.

²¹⁰ MOA, DR 4179, reply to September 1947 Directive.

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Although there is no evidence to suggest that young women were fully aware of the national implications of this style, there is evidence that young women's awareness of the way their appearance was interpreted did not necessarily stop them from glamourising themselves. Rather, they chose whether or not to consider the judgement of others in constructing their appearance. One way in which young women demonstrated this was through the assumed connection between appearance and romance. It was noted above that advice for young working-class women was often constructed around men's preferences. Young women absorbed these messages, whether from published advice or from their own encounters. Jephcott's research subjects thought that if a girl wanted a boyfriend, she should not "over-do make-up" or "dress flash" and that men cared a great deal about a woman's appearance.²¹¹ White mentioned negative remarks from men about her appearance in two places in her memoir. One comment came from a young man she had gone on a date with, who referred to her make-up as "muck" and asked why she used it.²¹² Another comment came from one of her co-workers, an older man, who, while watching her and her friends glamourise themselves to go dancing, "muttered 'But there's not a virgin amongst yer.'"²¹³ Neither of these incidents caused her to change her appearance, not even when she started seeing the man she eventually married. Instead, she and her friends defined the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable appearance in their own terms. For instance, they "shunned any idea of wearing earrings or high heels with trousers," so as not to be considered "common."²¹⁴ Their boundaries were not those communicated to them by men in their environment. In fact, men featured very little in

²¹¹ Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, 17, 64.

²¹² White, *D for Doris*, 36.

²¹³ White, 15.

²¹⁴ White, 64.

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young women's comments on their wishes to look glamorous, which tended to focus on what it meant to them rather than the effect it had on their environment.²¹⁵ In one instance when a young woman did discuss the comparative effects make-up might have on her chances to attract a partner at a dance, she contested the notion that men did not appreciate make-up: her experience was that "girls who shun lip-stick, powder, mascara and all the rest of the glamourisers, [men] designate as frumps."²¹⁶ Although young working-class women were aware that their glamourised appearance may be romantically disadvantageous, they did not take this advice at face value and continued to construct their appearance how they saw fit.

They were similarly aware of the way their appearance was perceived when applying for a job. There is evidence that young women implemented advice about the correct appearance when needed. A working-class adolescent whose narrative opened Jephcott's *Girls Growing Up*, felt her interview at the local hospital for a nurses' training programme went badly, but she did not know why. What she did know was that "it wasn't my appearance," since her clothes were "plain tailor made" and she "had no make-up," clear signs to the interviewing committee that she was a responsible and respectable person.²¹⁷ She knew what these external cues meant to middle-class employers, and made sure that she adhered to them, since she wanted to be accepted for the training programme. This acknowledgement and use of external interpretations of appearance is reminiscent of

²¹⁵ White, *D for Doris*, 19; "Wishing upon a Star..." Readers Say, *Woman's Own*, 29 March 1946.

²¹⁶ "Men and Make-up," Readers Say, *Woman's Own*, 24 May 1946. See also: "Experiment," You Write This..., *Woman's Own*, 21 February 1947.

²¹⁷ Jephcott, *Girls Growing Up*, 29. See also her story about another interview: Jephcott, 31.

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the findings of nineteenth century studies about working-class partial adoption of middle-class notions of respectability without forgoing other, less respectable practices.²¹⁸

What is evident from these examples is that young women associated their appearance with respectability. There is no evidence, however, that they associated it with their duties as citizens or with national economic needs. The gap between the middle-class embracing of the government message of thrift and the conduct and attitude of young working-class women is apparent in an incident described by a middle-class MO diarist. The diarist was appalled that a young woman who worked in her office was unconcerned about spoiling a five months' old dress. Another colleague scolded her for her carelessness with clothes remarking "I look after my clothes and they last for years!" to which the young woman replied "Yes, well, I don't believe in that. I believe in getting new things regularly, so's to be up-to-date."²¹⁹ The shock that the diarist expressed at this comment demonstrates that while the need to take care of clothes and make them last was apparent to the older female office staff, whose members would have been middle-class, this understanding of clothes as a national concern was not shared by the working-class adolescent girl. This young woman saw her spending as her own business, subject to considerations of the availability of coupons and money but not to patriotic sentiment. If she could afford to buy a new dress every five months, she was entitled to do so. Spending to her was a private, not a national, concern.

It is doubtful that many young women could sustain a careless attitude under rationing, particularly if they were no longer considered "growing children" thus receiving supplementary coupons. In 1945, when this incident took place, this category only included

²¹⁸ Bailey, "Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?" 342.

²¹⁹ MOA, D 5270, Diary for 13 September 1945.

children up to the age of 15.²²⁰ Judging from Norris' account of women's clothes in the 1930s, young working-class women who could afford to do so would have had an average of three to five dresses in their wardrobes just before the war, and needed about three so as not to "feel short."²²¹ According to the Board of Trade's wardrobe survey, this situation had not changed significantly in 1944, with two thirds of young working-class women surveyed owning at least three dresses.²²² Worn out as they may have been, wardrobes did not grow considerably smaller or larger, meaning that rising wages did not necessarily mean young women bought more clothes, while rationing did not mean a significant change in purchasing habits. The 1945-6 rationing period that began just before the incident was the most stringent rationing period under austerity. It lasted eleven months and provided thirty-eight coupons for members of the general public. This meant that young women could purchase a couple of low coupon-value dresses (five coupons each) that year.²²³ Yet, such a purchase would have required careful planning, so as to account for necessities such as stockings, outerwear, underwear or shoes, as well as contribution towards household linen. Buying without careful planning could hardly have been sustainable without some – legal or illegal – source of additional coupons. Perhaps the young woman tried to create the impression of affluence in order to snub a member of another social class who she felt was looking down on her and meddling with her personal affairs.

If young women did not associate their clothes purchasing habits with national needs it was not because of their lack of patriotism. Although glamour was deemed

²²⁰ In 1945 the "growing children" category included children aged 15 and younger. In earlier periods it included older children as well – up to 18 years old. See: 'The 1946 Clothing Quiz,' TNA, BT 131/37.

²²¹ Norris, "Mass Observation at the Dance Hall," 94. Norris cites several MO surveys.

²²² TNA, BT 64/4084, "Report on Third Wardrobe Check among Members of the Clothing Consumer Panel."

²²³ See: 'The 1946 Clothing Quiz,' TNA, BT 131/37.

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unpatriotic by government campaigns there was little correlation between a glamorous appearance and other forms of patriotic activity. Mary Beazley, a young middle-class woman, who at the age of eighteen volunteered to work at a parachute factory, gave a nuanced account of her colleagues in her oral history account of the war. She described how the young women with whom she worked were mostly preoccupied with the cinema, with romance and with their clothes.²²⁴ Alongside these would-be frivolous concerns she also discussed how anxious they were to know that their work had contributed to the war effort and exclaimed: “I don't ever remember seeing a girl or a woman shirk her job or not be worried if something had gone wrong.”²²⁵ Her account included this positive portrayal of her colleagues as well as hints about her dislike of their personal behaviour, discussing foul language and promiscuity.²²⁶ These two aspects, however, remained distinct. White's account of her own behaviour is similarly complex. Despite the fact she admitted to buying second-hand clothes on the black market and coupons from her acquaintances, she demonstrated sincere interest and a remarkable concern for her work.²²⁷ Accounts of young women whose care of their appearance came at the expense of their attention to their work, like Peggy the factory worker, were mentioned above. The conflation of these various portrayals of young women's attitudes towards their work and their appearance suggests that the understanding of the national significance of clothing and cosmetics promoted by government campaigns was not widely shared among this group. They did not see clothing economy as part of their duty.

²²⁴ Mary Loveday Beazley, interviewed by Conrad Wood, IWM, catalogue reference: 18266, Reel 2 of 4, 28:30 and Reel 3 of 4, 19:00, accessed: 27 April 2018, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80017669>.

²²⁵ Beazley, IWM, catalogue reference: 18266, Reel 3 of 4, 15:10.

²²⁶ Beazley, IWM, catalogue reference: 18266, Reel 3 of 4, 00:39 and 04:56.

²²⁷ White, *D for Doris*, 13, 25-6

It is more likely that they saw the purchasing of consumer goods for their own enjoyment as a right. In her study of women's leisure, Langhamer discusses youth as a life-cycle stage when women felt "entitled to time for themselves."²²⁸ Young working-class women demonstrated a similar attitude to the consumer goods they used to construct their appearance. The young office worker is one example of this. When her purchasing habits were questioned by older staff members, she was quick to defend her position. Another example of this attitude appeared in an angry letter to *Woman's Own*, written by a young working woman, aged 15. The young worker complained that a shop assistant in a Birmingham store refused to sell her face powder, since "children could not be served."²²⁹ After standing in a long queue, excited that she might get this scarcely obtainable product, she met this refusal with resistance:

I told her that I had left school, but she was adamant, and I went away disappointed. I have to do all the shopping as my mother is unable – through illness – to get about. Is this the way we should be treated? I have to pay full bus fares and adult's price at the cinemas, and yet I am treated as a child in a queue. Surely this pettiness should not be.²³⁰

By presenting her contribution to her household, her responsibilities and her experience of adulthood in other commercial contexts and contrasting these with the shop assistant's treatment, she demonstrated that in her eyes, she was entitled to spend her money as she pleased.

These young women's right to spend their money as they saw fit was defended by their communities. Although some young women certainly experienced restrictions on their

²²⁸ Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, 50.

²²⁹ "Too Young to Queue?" Readers Say, *Woman's Own*, 13 July 1945.

²³⁰ "Too Young to Queue?" *Woman's Own*.

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spending and appearance at home, some mothers thought their daughters earned the right to make their own decisions.²³¹ One of the *Daily Mirror* columns discussed at the beginning of this chapter included several comments from mothers about their daughters' spending, conduct and appearance. Of the three mothers quoted in the article, two thought that their daughters should be allowed to do as they wished with their money. One of them framed this entitlement around pre-war conditions:

“Do you blame us for spending money?” she said. “Why, it wasn't until the war began that we had any to spend – my husband being unemployed and all. Certainly we spend, and have a good time. Why shouldn't we?”²³²

In the context of pre-war unemployment and want, working-class communities felt justified in spending money on themselves. A similar attitude was expressed in a letter responding to another *Daily Mirror* article mentioned above. The writer of the letter complained that “running a home and caring for invalids is drudgery enough, without being robbed of simple pleasures.”²³³ All these cases discussed the relationship between young women's rights and duties, presenting either paid or unpaid work as their main duty. Consumer goods like clothes and cosmetics were presented as rewards they had earned the right to possess by virtue of performing their duties. Spending was therefore legitimate in working-class communities, although it should be noted that the spending discussed here was legal spending – it did not necessarily normalise forms of evasion like the ones mentioned above.

Middle-class understandings of respectability were in line with austerity propaganda of thrift and moderation, facilitating their adoption of the view that excess was unpatriotic. Their judgements of young women demonstrated that the new austerity norms were

²³¹ See for instance: Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, 97-8.

²³² Boswell, “But Now It's Gin!”

²³³ “Wrong to Punish Girls Who Dodge War Work,” Readers' Review, *Daily Mirror*, 5 August 1944.

understood through old ideas about the relationship between appearance and respectable behaviour. While young working-class women understood interpretations of their appearance associated with pre-war norms of respectability, they did not necessarily accept the new links between these norms and patriotic behaviour. When their spending and appearance were challenged as unpatriotic, young women's responses reflected other aspects of respectability such as independence, self-sufficiency and privacy. They emphasised their right, as wage-earners, to decide for themselves how to spend their money. Their duties, in their eyes, did not include frugality.

Conclusion

It is difficult to fully understand the motives behind young working-class women's construction of their appearance. One previous attempt to understand working-class women's fashion choices uses a heavily theoretical approach and manages merely to substantiate the possibility that these choices were conscious rather than dictated from above.²³⁴ The evidence in this chapter suggests that young working-class women demonstrated more initiative and discrimination than their contemporaries allowed them. They followed the trends described in women's magazines, but decided for themselves what was or was not appropriate for their age. They were conscious of the need to project a certain image in a job interview, but did not necessarily make themselves up in the same way in their daily lives. They decorated themselves in ways that they found beautiful, whether or not opinionated onlookers approved.

In doing so, they defied outside attempts to define their behaviour and appearance according to middle-class standards. Government propaganda, which resonated with

²³⁴ Angela Partington, "Popular Fashion and Working-Class Affluence," in *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader*, eds. Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson (London: Pandora, 1992), 145-161.

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members of the middle-class was either lost on or ignored by young working-class women. As Selina Todd put it, “they refused to conform to the stereotype of self-sacrifice.”²³⁵ While being committed to performing their jobs, they indulged in constructing their appearances as closely as possible to their own ideals of beauty, picking and choosing from the models accessible to them through the media. They did not necessarily conform to the “Make do and Mend” narrative because they thought they had earned the right to keep their appearance and their consumption practices a private business. For teenagers who at fourteen were working long hours, this was probably the one aspect of life which they had some control over.

When members of the middle-class observed these young women, their judgements incorporated austerity-era views about conspicuous consumption into familiar norms that governed the appearance of respectability. They understood respectable appearance to be the appearance of the good, and moral, citizen. Whether it was neglect or excess, these observers found fault with young women’s appearance, and understood it as an indication of their lack of morality. Their immoral conduct had many faces: lack of care in their work, loose sexual behaviour, negligence of their femininity or conspicuous consumption. The association of their appearance with Hollywood added another layer to their misconduct: that of Americanisation, and all that this signified. In one way or another, any one of these condemnations put into question their membership in the national community. As many scholars have already noted, the geographical mobility of young women, and particularly young working-class women, was a focal point of national anxiety during the Second

²³⁵ Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England*, 124.

World War.²³⁶ Geoffrey Field suggests that these anxieties continued into the post-war years and were eventually channelled into the attacks on Teddy Boys subculture: “all that was lacking” from the moral panics of the late 1940s, argues Field, “was the sartorial signifier.”²³⁷ Yet the sartorial signifier of juvenile delinquency did not emerge in the 1950s, it simply changed. As this chapter has argued, efforts to regulate young women’s economic behaviour and appearance were just as present under post-war austerity, focusing on beauty trends that signified immoral behaviour.

Yet while middle-class observers found it easy to apply to others a morality index that constructed the conscientious citizen as thrifty, they did not necessarily think that they should follow the same example. Thrift, after all, depended on income, and a respectable appearance represented not only morality but status as well. The next chapter will discuss men in white-collar employment, and analyse their reactions when clothing economy conflicted with established norms of respectability in the work place.

²³⁶ See for instance: Rose, *Which People’s War?* 71-106; Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, 194-207. For the moral panics about women as citizens, see: Matthew Grant, “Citizenship, Sexual Anxiety and Womanhood in Second World War Britain: the Case of the Man with the Cleft Chin,” in *Moral Panics, Social Fears and the Media: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Siân Nicholas and Tom O’Malley (New York: Routledge, 2013), 177-90.

²³⁷ Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, 201.

Chapter 4: “That Bugbear of English Respectability”: Keeping up Appearances, White-Collar Workers and Clothing Controls

Ideas of respectability affected the appearance of men just as much as they affected the appearance of women. In April 1942, just ten months after the introduction of rationing, MO asked its panel of respondents about the effect rationing had on their clothing habits. A middle-class respondent who was working with children wrote in relief that he had not had to change any of his habits. “Luckily I don’t,” he wrote, “in my walk of life have to do that bugbear of English respectability – to keep up appearances and can afford (in two senses of the word) to go about shabby.”¹ Two years later in a similar survey, in June 1944, a 41-year-old chartered accountant, claimed that rationing caused him “mild anxiety,” explaining that “one has to keep up some sort of professional standard with one’s clothes and it is getting steadily more difficult as time progresses.”² After three more years, in July 1947, as clothes rationing went into its sixth year, MO posted another clothing inquiry to its panel of volunteers. A 38-year-old research physicist described the adverse effect rationing had on his wardrobe, referring to his situation as “clothes starvation,” and stressing the inadequacy of the ration. He then explained his position, remarking “This is regrettable especially as I have risen to a job in which decent clothing would be a social and business asset.”³ These answers demonstrate the continuing importance good clothing and a respectable appearance had for men employed in white-collar work under rationing. The norms that governed the acceptable appearance of men in white-collar occupations, discussed in Chapter One, still held sway in austerity Britain, despite years of rationing and shortages. Ongoing

¹ MOA, DR 2720, reply to April 1942 Directive.

² MOA, FR 2502, “July 1947, Clothes Buying and Wearing: Use of Coupons and Effects of Rationing.”

³ MOA, FR 2502.

government propaganda promoting the rejection of pre-war norms, explored in Chapter Two, had a limited effect on individuals who felt that shabbiness threatened their prospects of employment and social position. Government assertions that shabbiness was patriotic were incongruous with pre-war understandings of respectability.

Studies of clothes rationing tend to focus on women, their difficulties as housewives in making ends meet and pressures on them to maintain beauty standards during and after the war.⁴ Menswear receives little attention, either because men are believed to have had to deal with personal rather than family problems and therefore do not merit investigation, or because it is believed that men were not under the same pressures.⁵ In addition, clothes are generally considered a women's issue.⁶ That considerations of men's clothes tend to end at the beginning of the war, or begin at its end, suggests that the war is considered a lacuna for menswear.⁷ There are few exceptions. Peter McNeil's 1993 analysis of austerity clothes includes men, but he focuses on uniformed men.⁸ Honeyman's study of the Leeds suit-making industry published in 2000 is about civilian clothes and includes the war years, but her focus naturally lies with the manufacture and sale of clothes, giving little attention to consumer experiences.⁹ In 2005, Paul Jobling studied menswear advertising, but like Honeyman, focused on the trade rather than the consumers.¹⁰ Recent work by Biddle-Perry, which gives some attention to civilian men, offers an analysis of post-war austerity rather

⁴ See for instance: Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*; Kirkham, "Fashioning the Feminine."

⁵ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 90-3.

⁶ Three notable exceptions are: Paul Jobling, *Man Appeal: Advertising, Modernism and Menswear* (Oxford, Berg, 2005); Biddle-Perry, *Dressing for Austerity*; Sprecher, "Demob Suits."

⁷ For example: Frank Mort, "Cityscapes: Consumption, Masculinities and the Mapping of London since 1950," *Urban Studies* 35, no. 5-6 (1998): 889-907; Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*.

⁸ McNeil, "Put Your Best Face Forward."

⁹ Honeyman, *Well Suited*.

¹⁰ Jobling, *Man Appeal*, specifically 109-120.

than discussing the period as a whole.¹¹ In the most recent work concerning men's clothes in this period, Danielle Sprecher discusses the demobilisation suit. Although the focus there is men out of uniform, this is only in the context of their transition from service to civilian attire.¹² As a result, we know a lot about women's experiences of civilian clothes-buying in this period, but very little about men's. The clothing experiences of civilian men under austerity – through war and peace – are yet untold.

During the war, men on the home front held a problematic position. Studies of the Second World War agree that a uniform was essential to the performance of masculine identities during that time. Civilian men were therefore positioned as less masculine, and their sacrifices as less meaningful. Rose demonstrates how working men in essential industries were generally presented as supporting the men in the fighting forces, rather than as doing an equally important job.¹³ She also demonstrates the association of conscientious objectors with effeminacy and a “suspect” sexual identity.¹⁴ Summerfield notes that women generally regarded men in civic attire as “impaired.”¹⁵ Recent studies try to reverse the impression that civilian men had no place in wartime Britain. David Clampin studies contemporary advertisements and argues that civilian men were portrayed as legitimate consumers on the home front.¹⁶ In a project focusing on men in reserved occupations, Juliette Pattinson, Arthur McIvor and Linsey Robb seek to build a more nuanced narrative of civilian men, emphasising the way war work sometimes contributed to a sense of self-

¹¹ Biddle-Perry, *Dressing for Austerity*, 84-109.

¹² Sprecher, “Demob Suits.”

¹³ Rose, *Which People's War?* 182-95.

¹⁴ Rose, 170-8.

¹⁵ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, 118-26.

¹⁶ David Clampin, *Advertising and Propaganda in World War II: Cultural Identity and the Blitz Spirit* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 188.

worth, even in the face of unfavourable social attitudes.¹⁷ While their focus on men's experiences shows the diverse reaction to popular belief that civilian men were "prioritising self-preservation over collective survival,"¹⁸ they do not dispute that this was the general message conveyed in British media at the time. Their project, however, focuses on men in manual work, while white-collar workers on the home front remain a largely overlooked population.

The discussion in Chapter One and the responses quoted above demonstrate that men in white-collar occupations perceived clothing and appearance as having professional consequences. Their appearance was governed by the middle-class norms of their line of work and the boundaries of respectability. The standards that white-collar workers associated with respectability became increasingly unachievable over the decade. Although, as explored in Chapter Three, many of the dictates of respectable appearance were in line with the clothing practices that government propaganda promoted, the sacrifice expected of them as men remained at odds with these dictates. This chapter will explore the tension between the sacrifices of appearance associated with responsible masculine citizenship and the construction of respectability. It will do so by demonstrating the changes in this population's consumer habits and the effects of austerity as well as by analysing their responses to various sartorial challenges. These will be presented in the context of the public debates about men and menswear, most prominently the wartime debate about austerity regulations and post-war debate about demobilisation and shortages.

The main source of insight into the views of men in white-collar occupations in this chapter is the MO panel of respondents. While MO's panel was generally not representative

¹⁷ Juliette Pattinson et al., *Men in Reserve: British Masculinities in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 5-13.

¹⁸ Pattinson et al, *Men in Reserve*, 12; 95-7.

of the contemporaneous British population, this particular section of the population tended to be over-represented in the panel.¹⁹ In the responses to the April 1942 Directive, for instance, men represented 58 percent of respondents, 10 percent more than their part in the general population, and about 15 percent more than their part in the civilian population.²⁰ Among male respondents to the survey, 43 percent were in white-collar occupations, as compared with about 19 percent of the general population.²¹ For these reasons, and because clothing and appearance were subjects included in MO directives throughout the decade, the MO panel of respondents provides a window into the way men thought about their appearance in the age of austerity.

Work, Gender, Class and Dress

Some attention is due to the composition of this group and the social norms that governed work-wear in white-collar occupations. Although white-collar workers should be distinguished from members of the middle-class, it is not always easy to do so. McKibbin identifies middle-class as a set of occupations with shared lifestyle choices and outlooks, yet he includes in his definition groups that vary greatly in these categories such as farmers and clerks.²² Horwood, alternatively, treats “middle-class” as synonymous with white-collar occupations. She refers to different types of white-collar work to outline the minutia of dress norms and conventions that dictated middle-class lives, but mostly disregards types of middle-class work that did not conform to the same criteria.²³ To complicate matters, she

¹⁹ Hinton, *The Mass-Observers*, 268-72, 278-82.

²⁰ MOA, responses to April 1942 Directive; CSO, *Statistical Digest of the War* (London: HMSO and Longmans Green and Co., 1951), 1, table 1.

²¹ MOA, responses to April 1942 Directive; DEP, *British Labour Statistics*, 197, table 103. Although there was no census in 1941, the percentage was fairly consistent between the 1931 and 1951 censuses.

²² McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 44-7.

²³ See: Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*.

also cites examples of white-collar workers who came from working-class backgrounds.²⁴ Understanding white-collar and middle-class as interchangeable was common for contemporaries. In a 1948 article about the middle-class, Allan Jackson discussed a similar predicament of definitions, yet the group he considered “can certainly be described as middle-class” included only white-collar occupations.²⁵ A pre-war survey of middle-class expenditure reinforces this point, since it included civil servants, teachers and local government officers (all white-collar positions) and considered them “broadly representative [...] of the middle-class.”²⁶ This interchangeability complicates the task of distinguishing the two groups.

Statistical data contributes to the difficulty in discussing white-collar workers as a group. Social surveys in this period tended to categorise individuals according to class, income and occupation, often, as discussed in Chapter One, using visual assessment to determine class or income. Occupation was a category utilised to determine class, but which rarely appeared in the published results. The census, which included an analysis of occupational categories, was not conducted in 1941 due to the war, and the 1951 data is only of partial relevance here. Much of the statistical data about work and workers in the 1940s tended to be classified by industry, lumping manual workers and office staff together. As a result, it is often difficult to sift out white-collar workers from these data. The investigators in the Board of Trade’s wardrobe surveys used both occupation and class to determine social position, but only tabulated the results of the surveys according to class. Since a question about income was not included in the form, it is probable that social class was assessed by the surveyor, utilising middle-class norms of respectability, as was

²⁴ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 41.

²⁵ Allan Jackson, “What Future for the Middle Class?” *Contact* no. 10 (1948): 55.

²⁶ Massey, “The Expenditure of 1,360 British Middle-Class Households,” 159.

common at the time. These surveys, in which the majority of office workers were classified as C, that is, between the AB upper-class and the D and E sections of the working-class, are a good example of the great level of overlap between members of the middle-class and white-collar workers.²⁷ Surveys and statistical data that use class as a category of analysis, therefore, can offer some insight on white-collar workers.

Unlike the term middle-class, this occupational category represents a distinct set of norms, since it offers a direct link between work and dress. As discussed in Chapter One, the association between respectability and dress was linked to the dress of clerical staff, whose white collars symbolised the cleanliness of their profession. In pre-war MO surveys, white-collar workers were those who felt obliged to meet a certain standard of appearance.²⁸ Although men in white-collar occupations did not tend to use their best suits at the office, they still had to adhere to certain codes of appearance. In the context of white-collar work, a respectable appearance – tidy, neat and clean – was a reflection of the characteristics that allowed workers to perform their work to the best advantage. In the wider social context, these characteristics were associated with the respectable law-abiding citizen.²⁹

This placed men in white-collar occupations in a problematic position because of the dress norms surrounding their work and the wartime norms of behaviour surrounding their gender. Unlike labourers, the BoT did not consider the work-wear needs of white-collar workers separately from their leisure clothing needs within the rationing scheme. In the case of labourers, the Board acknowledged the functional aspect of their clothes and allowed for supplementary rations for industrial workers. Because of the less physical

²⁷ See analysis below and Figure 3.

²⁸ See replies to April 1939 Directive and the discussion in Chapter One.

²⁹ Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 30.

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nature of their employment, white-collar workers defined the functionality of work attire by its appearance rather than its durability. While a shabby suit did not prevent them from performing their work, the comments of the research physicist and chartered accountant above and the discussion in Chapter One suggest that clothes were crucial for the purposes of promotion at work in many white-collar professions. Simply put, white collars and lounge suits (or morning suits for those in the higher professions) were the work clothes of white-collar workers. Wartime conditions made social events less formal and less frequent, making the need for evening-wear and morning dress – both essential before the war – less crucial for those who did not wear morning dress for work. The need for a presentable and respectable looking lounge suit and white collar for the office, however, remained.

Dressing appropriately was as important in the establishment of masculinity as it was in the practical context of the work environment. Chapter One addressed the importance of conventionality in menswear. Horwood notes that in the interwar period, limited incomes and economic instability contributed to a conservative outlook on dress among middle-class men doing office work, who stuck to familiar patterns “for fear of losing their jobs.”³⁰ Shaun Cole and Matt Houlbrook show how gay men in the interwar period used their garments as a way of concealing or communicating their sexual orientation in different contexts. The slightest departure from the “style monotony”³¹ of masculine dress was akin to a declaration of homosexual identity or gender nonconformity. Similarly, dressing in the correct middle-class manner in respectable clothes could protect

³⁰ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 30.

³¹ The reference to the ‘style monotony’ of menswear is attributed to Montague Burton, see: Katrina Honeyman, “Style Monotony and the Business of Fashion,” *Textile History* 34, no. 2 (2003): 188n7. <https://doi.org/10.1179/004049603235001599>.

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men from revealing their sexual identities.³² Dressing conservatively was therefore an important aspect of male sociability in a middle-class, white-collar context, where caring for one's appearance was discouraged as part of gender construction, but encouraged as part of professional pride. Masculinity and respectability were closely connected to the performance of law-abiding citizenship in this context, since certain acts of gender and sexual nonconformity were punishable offences.

The previous chapters addressed the norms surrounding respectable female appearance in the work place. If wartime pressures on women to look feminine but industrious at the office were a continuation of pre-war understandings of workplace femininity, wartime conceptions of masculinity were at odds with pre-war white-collar masculine appearance. Images of male and female consumers differed, marking women as more avid and frivolous shoppers.³³ As a result, during the austerity period, the construction of the conscientious citizen's attitude towards dress differed by gender. While women were encouraged to look their best even under wartime conditions, utilizing craftiness and creativity to compensate for the inability to shop, men were encouraged to care less about their appearance and to let go of old standards.³⁴ BoT officials viewed clothing controls as something women might struggle with, or that may concern men doing manual labour, but not as something that should concern men in white-collar occupations.³⁵

Beyond the similarities in professional constraints on their attire, men engaged in different types of white-collar work had little in common. The discussion of pre-war

³² Cole, *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel*, 21-2, 24, 41-2, 63; Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 144-7.

³³ Honeyman, "Following Suit," 428; Greenfield et al, "Gender, Consumer Culture and the Middle Class Male," 188-90.

³⁴ Kirkham, "Fashioning the Feminine," 154-6; Rose, *Which People's War?* 122-35. See also Chapter Three.

³⁵ 'Minutes of the 24th Publicity Committee Held on January 2nd, 1942,' TNA, BT 64/871.

clothing expenditure in Chapter One makes it apparent that income levels between white-collar professions varied wildly, between low level clerks at the bottom of the scale who earned meagre sums and members of the professions or executives who earned significantly higher salaries. The white-collar workers included in the pre-war middle-class expenditure survey earned annual salaries that ranged from £250 to over £700.³⁶ The diversity of this group was reflected in its clothing expenditure. A clerk's lounge suit could cost as little as 50s. at a store like Burton.³⁷ When Simpson, which catered to a more affluent middle-class, opened their store in London, they offered tailored suits that started at eight guineas (£8 8s.) for their made-to-measure range and could get to 12 or 14 guineas for their bespoke range.³⁸ In 1939, an office worker from London reported that he was only able to buy suits at the lower end of the price range, although he was aware that they wore out quickly.³⁹ A 31-year-old London bank clerk, who would have liked to afford bespoke, but would not buy cheap made-to-measure, spent £5 5s. on a ready-made Austin Reed suit, which he considered good quality.⁴⁰ A young London solicitor considered it reasonable to pay £6 6s. for a made-to-measure suit for everyday use.⁴¹ Buying a suit every year or two seems to have been standard practice, and the level of wear men were willing to accept largely depended on their earnings. A buyer from Birmingham described this practice in 1939 as "I cut my cloth according to my income."⁴²

While heterogeneous in terms of income, spending and status, men in white-collar occupations who remained on the home front were not as diverse in terms of age. Mass

³⁶ Massey, "The Expenditure of 1,360 British Middle-Class Households," 166-7.

³⁷ Honeyman, "Style Monotony and the Business of Fashion," 185.

³⁸ Wainright, *The British Tradition: Simpson*, 18.

³⁹ MOA, DR 1211, reply to May 1939 Directive.

⁴⁰ MOA, DR 1325, reply to May 1939 Directive.

⁴¹ MOA, DR 1624, reply to May 1939 Directive.

⁴² MOA, DR 1216, reply to April 1939 Directive.

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conscription during the war meant that more young men than old were conscripted, leaving an older population in Britain.⁴³ In addition, men in white-collar reserved occupations tended, on average, to be older than those in manual work.⁴⁴ Age is the one area where the MO panel was not representative of this section of the population, as it over-represented young men. MO's April 1942 survey included answers from eighty-two men in white-collar occupations, over half of whom were under the age of 39.⁴⁵ Men in white-collar work on the home front were therefore an older population in a diverse range of occupations with a wide range of incomes, most of whom had to keep some sort of dress standard at work before the war. When the government introduced austerity policy, this dress standard was targeted as irrelevant and unnecessary.

Clothing Controls and the Civilian Man

The introduction of clothing controls meant that men in white-collar occupations could not maintain the usual standard of dress to which they were accustomed. These regulations changed the frequency with which men bought their clothes, the types of clothes that were available in the shops and the way they planned their clothing budget. Although men were not under the same type of pressure to look attractive as women were, the need to keep up appearances that was prominent in pre-war middle-class culture still influenced the way men in white-collar work responded to clothing controls. Government endorsement of shabbiness did not automatically translate to men's acceptance of it. This section will explore the material impact regulations had on men in white-collar

⁴³ CSO, *Statistical Digest of the War*, 10, table 11.

⁴⁴ Pattinson et al, *Men in Reserve*, 34-5.

⁴⁵ Forty-nine of respondents were aged 39 and below, twenty-eight were aged 40 and upwards. The age of five of the respondents was not known. See: MOA, Replies to April 1942 Directive.

employment, how they reacted to these changes, and how their reactions were framed in the context of patriotic conduct, good citizenship and respectable appearance.

As explored in Chapter Two, in 1941, the British government replaced its policy of minimal restrictions over clothing supplies and prices with a more constricting policy. In some ways, this new policy worked for the benefit of consumers, with greater control of prices and quality regulations in the Utility Scheme, yet it also spelled greater limitations for consumers. The rationing scheme limited the amount of textile goods that citizens could buy and the austerity regulations limited the design of garments as a way of saving on material. Although short lived, the restrictions that austerity regulations placed on menswear were central to wartime debates about men's performance of citizenship. The BoT enacted these regulations in 1942, gradually removing them from 1944 onwards, beginning with those placed on menswear. These restrictions on the production and design of clothing limited the use of cloth in different elements of design.⁴⁶ While the simplifying effect these limitations had on women's clothes was celebrated through the attention of the fashion industry and press, men's suits did not receive similar treatment.⁴⁷ The new restrictions only allowed for three pockets in men's trousers and jackets, while double breasted jackets and trouser turn-ups were forbidden.⁴⁸ These limitations were unpopular among men leading to their abolition in anticipation of demobilisation.⁴⁹ While they were still in force, these restrictions changed the appearance of men's fashion.

While buying clothes became more difficult for all Britons, men were pressed to be more accepting towards this change. Christopher Sladen demonstrates that the radio

⁴⁶ "Less Material for Clothes," *Times*, 18 March 1942.

⁴⁷ "Fashionable Intelligence," *Vogue*, October 1942.

⁴⁸ "Fewer Pockets and Buttons for Men," *Times*, 19 March 1942.

⁴⁹ Allport, *Demobbed*, 119-20.

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announcement of rationing defined the way the civilian population should handle rationing in gendered terms.⁵⁰ As discussed in the previous chapter, women were expected to look smart, even if not glamorous. Men were presented with a different set of expectations. Oliver Lyttelton, president of the BoT in 1941, asserted in his speech that if men will grow shabby “we must learn, as civilians, that it is also honourable to be seen in clothes which are not smart.”⁵¹ Sladen suggests that most men accepted this attitude.⁵² Sprecher recently argued that this was not the case, and that his speech represented the government’s false assumptions about the way men would react to the deteriorating condition of their clothes. As we will see below, however, officials at the Board were well aware of the importance of dress standards in white-collar professions and predicted men’s resistance to changes in these standards. They did not assume men would accept shabbiness without comment, rather, they used opportunities like Lyttelton’s speech to set up the standard of behaviour that the government expected of the men who stayed at home. Just as women were pressed to continue looking as they have always done, despite the new difficulties, civilian men were pressed to let go of old standards and accept their shabbiness as their “share in the war.”⁵³ Gender determined the way the conscientious citizen was expected to conduct him or herself under the conditions of shortages and restrictions.

The way rationing affected different populations depended not only on what they had when rationing began, but on how well rationing accommodated their needs.⁵⁴ The BoT’s rationing policy, presented to the public as fair shares, generally relied on the

⁵⁰ Sladen, *The Conscription of Fashion*, 20.

⁵¹ ‘Broadcast Speech by the Rt. Hon. Oliver Lyttelton, M.P. President of the Board of Trade in the Home Service B.B.C News at 9 a.m. Sunday, June 1st on the Rationing of Clothes,’ TNA, BT 64/ 871.

⁵² Sladen, *The Conscription of Fashion*, 20.

⁵³ ‘Broadcast Speech by the Rt. Hon. Oliver Lyttelton,’ TNA, BT 64/871.

⁵⁴ I will return to this theme in Chapter Five.

principle of equality, but provided concessions for certain populations according to need. Thus, the scheme recognised the greater needs of children, the special needs of expectant mothers and the greater wear and tear of the clothes of industrial workers.⁵⁵ As an aesthetic norm rather than material need, the dress of office workers was not deemed a necessity, and as such, did not require special provisions.

Although the BoT did not consider the maintenance of respectable appearance as reason to allocate additional resources to this population, internal records, as noted in Chapter Two, show that civil servants at the BoT were aware that existing standards may be a hurdle in convincing white-collar workers to economise on clothes. As early as March 1942, Board officials targeted “sedentary workers” as a population that will require some convincing that “the employee who wears what he has and doesn’t buy new things for appearance-sake is doing a good job for the State, and so a good job for the firm.”⁵⁶ In their addresses to the public, BoT officials insisted that men should forgo “pre-war standards of respectability,” defining them as “out of date.”⁵⁷ At a press conference in 1943, Hugh Dalton announced that “Striped trousers and stiff collars should no longer, in the fourth year of the war, be regarded as a badge of profession.”⁵⁸ Dalton targeted the dress standards of white-collar workers, highlighting their redundancy at a time of national crisis. He listed the staple components of the professional’s Morning Dress, striped trousers and stiff collar, but he also spoke generally about the dress standards of office workers. If we can trust the *Daily Mirror*’s transcription, Dalton’s use of the word “should” is telling, since it implies

⁵⁵ Hargreaves and Gowing, *Civil Industry and Trade*, 314-22.

⁵⁶ ‘Publicity for Next Year’s Ration,’ undated, TNA, BT 64/3037. See also: “Less Material for Clothes,” *Times*, 18 March 1942.

⁵⁷ “Forget Smart Clothes for War – Dalton,” *Daily Mirror*, 12 March 1943; “Wear Trousers to the Office, Dalton Tells Girls,” *Daily Mail*, 12 March 1943.

⁵⁸ “Forget Smart Clothes for War - Dalton,” *Daily Mirror*, 12 March 1943.

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that he regarded the discarding of these standards as the desirable ideal and not as the prevailing practice. While all men were encouraged to embrace shabbiness, Dalton's speech focused on white-collar workers' standard of appearance as a particular luxury that had no place during the war.

McKibbin notes that the deteriorating appearance of the middle-class in this period, particularly in the context of work, "caused both shame and resentment."⁵⁹ This resentment, directed towards manual workers who received additional allocations, can be seen in the response of a 21-year-old office worker to an MO survey, following Dalton's speech:

I would like to record my protest against what I consider to be my unfair position. I am an office worker who has to go to work decently dressed, and that is difficult to do these days, but workers in factories who can wear any old thing get an extra allowance of coupons, if I could wear overalls as they can, it would save me coupons never mind put me in need of extra. No wonder there is a traffic of coupons in this area, the latest price they are fetching is 1/8 each.⁶⁰

This reply shows little awareness of the wear and tear that industrial work induced on manual workers' wardrobes, or the limited clothing reserves that a population that suffered mass unemployment in the decade that preceded the war would have had. Socio-economic gaps aside, his response demonstrates his own distress with regard to his work clothes. The government may have deemed his dress needs unnecessary but it did not mean that white-collar employees considered a respectable appearance at work obsolete. The following pages will discuss the tensions between new material conditions and expectation and pre-war standards of respectability.

⁵⁹ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 65.

⁶⁰ MOA, DR 3293, reply to April 1943 Directive.

Material Conditions

Clothing regulations in combination with wartime conditions meant shabbiness and discomfort for men in white-collar occupations by making clothes far less obtainable. Although the control of prices operated through many channels during the period of British austerity, prices rose continually. Leonard Woolf, for instance, paid £13 13s., exclusive of purchase tax (£1 11s. 10d.) for a suit with an additional pair of trousers from Jennings and Dully in 1942. The price included labour and all materials.⁶¹ In 1948, he made a nearly identical order from the same company. The price was now £23 15s., but it did not include the main fabric for the suit – only the lining, trimmings and the making of the garments. The tailor estimated that purchase tax might amount to another £1 8s.⁶² Similarly, a 39-year-old bank clerk who answered an MO questionnaire about the cost-of-living in 1947 reported a doubling of prices.⁶³ While prices rose, quality deteriorated and purchases were fewer. Many of the white-collar respondents who answered an MO questionnaire about clothing in 1942 reported that they paid more for the same or worse quality or for fewer clothes compared with pre-rationing conditions.⁶⁴ This, of course, was not only true for men, but encompassed the entire British population, as can be seen in Figure 24 that shows personal expenditure on clothing from 1938 to 1950. The graph demonstrates that while the amount of money that British consumers spent on clothing during the war was relatively stable, its purchasing power diminished. In 1942, for instance, Britons spent £41 million more on clothes than they did in 1938 – a 9 percent increase. Revalued in 1938 prices,

⁶¹ University of Sussex Library Archives, Leonard Woolf Papers, SxMs 12/2/k/2, letter dated 18 September 1942.

⁶² Leonard Woolf Papers, SxMs 12/2/k/2, letter dated 24 May 1948.

⁶³ MOA, DR 1325, reply to December 1947 Directive.

⁶⁴ See for instance: MOA, DR 2588, 3207, 2539, 2656, 2739, 2753, 1216, replies to April 1942 Directive.

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however, the clothes bought in 1942 were worth £171 million less – a 38 percent decrease. After the war consumer expenditure rose gradually, yet the expanding gap between current and revalued prices shows that prices rose more rapidly than consumption levels, to the extent that when consumption finally caught up with pre-war levels in 1951, expenditure had more than doubled.

These conditions meant that even items that were once insignificant purchases, now required careful thought. The need to plan purchases, recommended by government campaigns, quickly became necessary for every purchase, no matter how small – from suits and coats to socks and ties. Small items quickly became a hassle, since the rate at which they were previously replaced was higher. “I am now restricted in my purchase of clothing, chiefly in respect of shirts, shoes, socks, ties etc.,” wrote a local government officer in 1942.⁶⁵ Other men were similarly worried and irate about small purchases, particularly socks, which had to be mended if they could not be replaced.⁶⁶ Men who had stocks could use them, but it is telling that in the early months of rationing, socks were the most frequently bought item for middle-class men in Slough.⁶⁷ It would have been difficult for men to make the transition from buying new socks “every two or three weeks,” to darning them or to a lower rate of replacement that was in step with the new restrictions.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ MOA, DR 2939, reply to April 1942 Directive.

⁶⁶ MOA, D 5003, diary entry dated 3 June 1941; MOA, DR 2794, reply to April 1942 Directive.

⁶⁷ MOA, DR 2727, reply to April 1942 Directive; TNA, BT 64/4101, “An Investigation of Consumer Reaction to the Clothes Rationing Order, September 1941.”

⁶⁸ MOA, D 5003, diary entry dated 3 June 1941.

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Table 1 – Items Lower Middle-class Men Could Not Buy Due to Rationing*

	April 1944	December 1945
Suits	58.40%	52.90%
Shirts	50.60%	55.10%
Socks	46.50%	46.10%
Shoes	46.30%	46.60%
Overcoats	33.80%	31.80%
Nightwear	29.40%	34.60%
Pants	26.50%	32.80%
Vests	27.50%	33.30%
Raincoats	24.40%	28.30%
Trousers	19.40%	22.30%
Underwear	15.80%	1.20%
Jackets	16.00%	15.20%
Pullovers or cardigans	7.30%	17.10%
Slippers	12.20%	23.40%

* Panel members were asked what six items they would buy if rationing ended tomorrow. This table includes items which at least 15 percent of respondents wanted to buy. Source: TNA, BT 64/4084; BT 64/4085.

The information gathered for the BoT’s wardrobe surveys, which appears in Table 1, suggests that white-collar men felt that many items were missing from their wardrobes. The market research company that conducted the wardrobe surveys divided the sample into AB, C, D and E classes. Relying on the information given in a previous consumer investigation, class C were “lower middle-classes; families whose chief wage-earner brings

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in £5-£10 per week.”⁶⁹ While this does not correlate exactly to white-collar workers, the majority of office workers were classed under C in all surveys (Figure 20). Men in this group placed large purchases like suits at the top of their list of needed items, but many also felt short on socks. A comparison with the other groups in the survey shows that this was a class-crossing problem. The items most urgently in need of replacing in the lower middle-class group, suits, shirts, socks and shoes, were similarly wanted by all other groups, on both the higher and lower ends of the socio-economy scale.⁷⁰ Compared to men in the upper classes, the lower middle-class white-collar worker was likely to have a small wardrobe. While their wardrobes were typically larger than those of working-class men, their need to be presentable at work was more deeply embedded in their workplace culture.

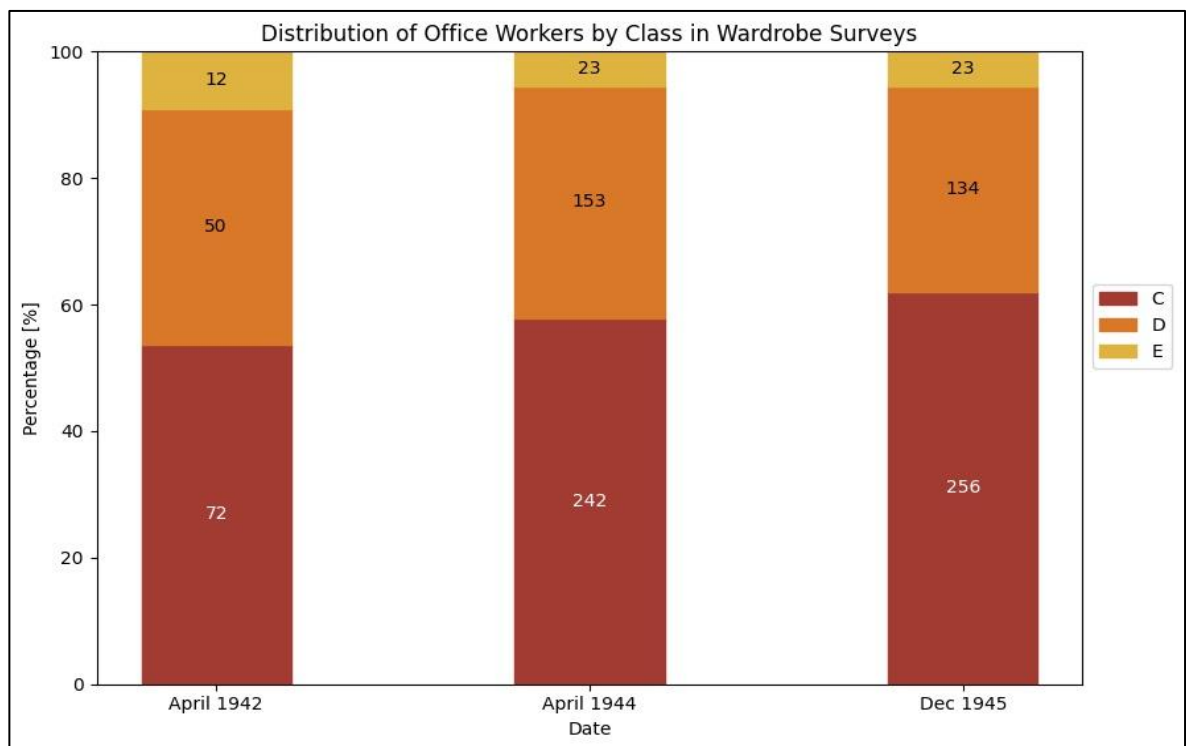


Figure 20 – Distribution of office workers by class in the BoT Wardrobe Surveys. Sources: TNA, BT 64/4083; BT 64/4084; BT 64/4085.

⁶⁹ TNA, BT 64/4095, “Report on First Consumer Investigation.”

⁷⁰ TNA, BT 64/4084; BT 64/4085, “Report on Fourth Wardrobe Check among Members of the Clothing Consumer Panel.”

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Men had to adapt either by replacing only small items, or by increasing the rate of mending and darning. Small items could still be replaced more frequently than larger items, but large items were often not replaced at all. The BoT's wardrobe surveys suggest that this was probably the situation for most male white-collar workers. Some MO respondents took pride in their ability to adjust to the new conditions. A Birmingham buyer was glad of his habit of buying good quality clothes in 1943, since it meant his suits could be kept at a decent condition for longer than he used to have done.⁷¹ The money he previously spent on buying new clothes, he now spent on keeping his wardrobe in good repair.⁷² A middle-aged teacher reported that he "managed with what I had by dint of resurrecting clothes that had been discarded."⁷³ By April 1943, however, he was already feeling "intolerably shabby," citing the shortage of funds as his main reason for not renewing items in his wardrobe.⁷⁴ The availability of funds allowed workers to maintain their wardrobes, making the differences between low-paying and high-paying positions more pronounced. While some adjusted to the new conditions, others complained about shabbiness as early as 1942. Various office workers and professionals who responded to the April 1942 survey reported that their clothes were "beginning to look worse for wear," as one railway clerk put it.⁷⁵ A personnel manager confessed that his situation was "really acute" since he was forced to prioritise his family obligations over his personal clothing needs at the beginning of the war.⁷⁶ Although men were less likely to manage the family's coupon budget than women, and less likely to worry about the family's wardrobe, they were as likely to contribute their

⁷¹ MOA, DR 1216, reply to January 1943 Directive.

⁷² MOA, DR 1216, reply to April 1943 Directive.

⁷³ MOA, DR 2734, reply to April 1942 Directive.

⁷⁴ MOA, DR 2734, reply to April 1943 Directive.

⁷⁵ MOA, DR 1372, reply to April 1942 Directive. See also: MOA, DR 1679, reply to April 1942 Directive.

⁷⁶ MOA, DR 3213, reply to April 1942 Directive.

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coupons to clothe children as women were.⁷⁷ It is possible that, since they did not make the decisions themselves, they were also more resentful about decisions made on their behalf. Thus, existing wardrobes, financial status and the demands of other family members were all factors in the way rationing affected individual men in white-collar employment.

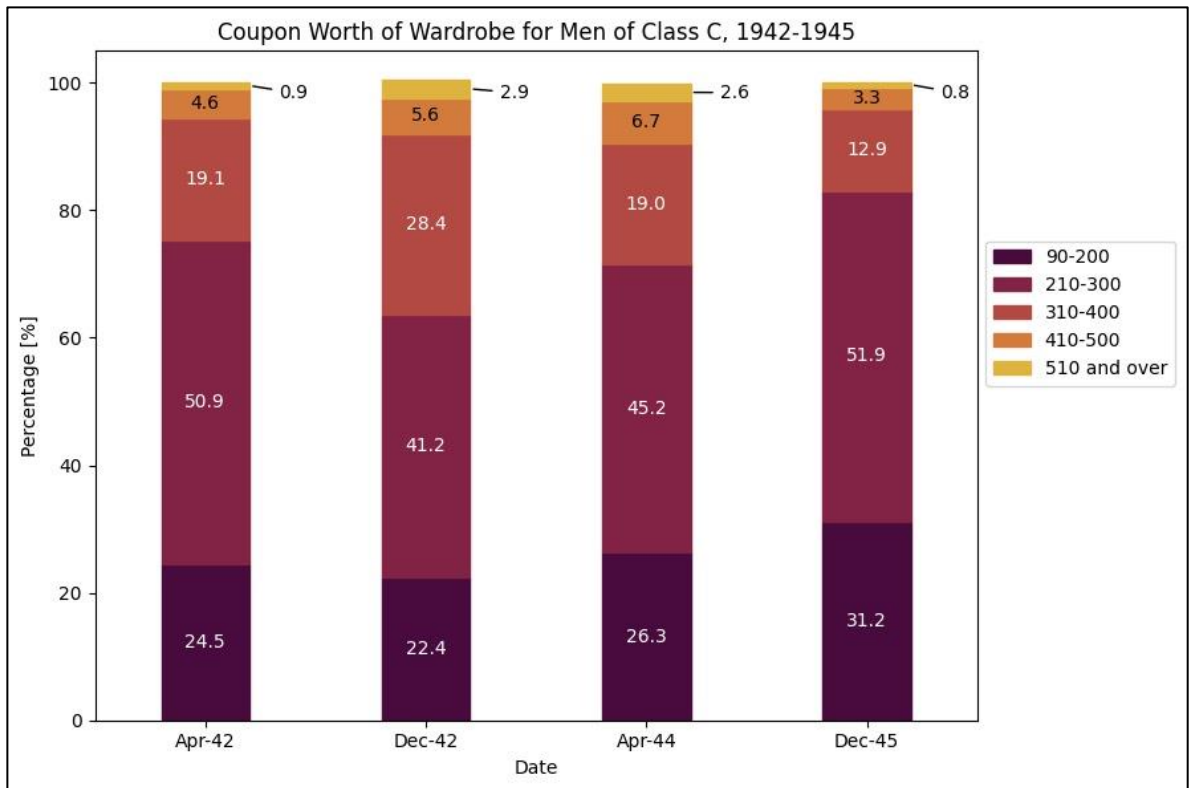


Figure 21 – Changes in size of wardrobe for men of Class C, 1942-1945. Source: TNA, BT 64/4085.

The amount of clothes men in white-collar occupations had in their wardrobes throughout the war period, hides the material changes they experienced. Although the BoT's wardrobe surveys show that large wardrobes of men in Class C suffered somewhat from rationing, in general, their wardrobe sizes remained stable. About half the men in this group owned a wardrobe of a size estimated to be worth 210-300 coupons during the first survey in 1942. By 1945, the number has increased slightly, but the change was not

⁷⁷ TNA, BT 64/4101. Compare: Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 90-1.

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significant. The number of men who owned smaller wardrobes worth 200 coupons or less incurred only a slightly more prominent rise with nearly 7 percent (Figure 21). Large wardrobes increased at first, but shrunk again by the first post-war survey – perhaps indicating the hope that rationing would end soon.

The relatively constant size of men's wardrobes, when compared with the sharp drop in consumption (Figure 24), suggests that men either retained their old consumption habits or kept their garments for a longer period of time rather than replacing them. Coupon expenditure data suggests that the former was unlikely, at least not legally.⁷⁸ The latter option is supported by the MO surveys, where reports of this practice were common. Out of the eighty-two white-collar male workers who answered the survey, forty-six mentioned that they bought less clothes than usual, and twenty-six mentioned that they did not discard clothes that they would have under pre-war circumstances. Some men were surprised to discover that their wardrobe has grown larger, since they held on to old garments.⁷⁹ While wardrobes were not necessarily smaller, they were shabbier, since clothes were kept even if they were not in a wearable condition. An accountant from Kent for instance, reported that his stock of wearable clothes has decreased, implying that he kept items that were unwearable.⁸⁰ Similarly, a 32-year-old production manager reported that he has kept two suits and an overcoat he would normally have discarded because he “may have to use them again,” although he felt “they look too bad.”⁸¹ This is significant because it indicates the extent of anxiety about clothes – although men were growing progressively shabbier, they

⁷⁸ TNA, BT 64/4093, “Average Number of Coupons Used during the Month by Consumer Panel, October 1943-August 1945.”

⁷⁹ MOA, DR 2797, 1211, 2539, 3009, responses to April 1942 Directive.

⁸⁰ MOA, DR 2588, reply to April 1942 Directive.

⁸¹ MOA, DR 2574, reply to April 1942 Directive.

were worried enough about conditions growing worse to keep clothes that they did not consider wearable.

When men in white-collar positions retained their clothes for a longer period, it had possible implications beyond their own wardrobes. Several of the men in the survey noted that they were keeping garments that they would have previously given away – to less fortunate relatives or to “poorer folk” – or that they would have sold to the rag trade.⁸² If this was the case, this meant that less stock was available in the second-hand market for people who could not afford to buy new garments. Evidence from the rag trade itself, however, tells a different story, emphasising the proliferation of this trade during the war.⁸³ Arthur Harding, who traded in second-hand clothing, recounted in his memoir people’s willingness to part with old clothes, attributing it to “the fact that hundreds of thousands of men were casualties or missing.”⁸⁴ The stocks that used to flow into the second-hand trade from white-collar workers were now coming from other sources – most likely from men who were away in the forces. Men in white-collar occupations on the home front were holding on to their stocks, since they were finding it increasingly difficult to keep up appearances.

Cultural Implications

Shabbiness was not always socially acceptable regardless of governmental calls to let go of pre-war standards. Not all employers were patriotically lenient in regards to clothing standards, and their reluctance to adapt to the new conditions forced white-collar

⁸² MOA, DR 2588, reply to April 1942 Directive; MOA, DR 2727, reply to April 1942 Directive; MOA, DR 2797, reply to April 1942 Directive.

⁸³ Arthur Harding, *My Apprenticeship to Crime: An Autobiography* [original manuscript, 1969], Bishopsgate Institute Archives Online, <https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/Library/Archives-Online/My-Apprenticeship-to-Crime> [Accessed: 24 April 2019], 282-3.

⁸⁴ Harding, *My Apprenticeship to Crime*, 286.

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employees to make unnecessary purchases.⁸⁵ The need to keep up appearances, a staple in pre-war middle-class society, remained a part of wartime life. The middle-class man quoted at the beginning of this chapter, who had escaped the “bugbear of English respectability,” demonstrates that the need to maintain personal appearance was dependant on occupation, and did not disappear with the outbreak of war.⁸⁶ Concerns about employment status, even in wartime, were inevitably more tangible to individuals than the national shortage of supplies.

Whether because of their employers or due to their own perceptions of standards, men in white-collar employment did their best to keep up appearances. In MO’s April 1942 survey, thirty-three men in this occupational group demonstrated that they cared about the appearance of their clothes. Of these, twenty-five respondents were preoccupied with keeping their clothes in the best condition possible to prevent their appearance from deteriorating too quickly. They changed their clothes in the evenings, planned their purchases ahead, invested in better quality garments whenever possible and repurposed old garments. They invested time or money in order to continue looking presentable in their daily lives.⁸⁷ These practices were in line with the advice of the BoT concerning the care of clothes, but they are also indicative of a refusal to let go of pre-war standards.

The investment of time or money was not always possible, and did not always help under the limitations of controls. The remaining eight respondents demonstrated their concern for keeping up appearances by complaining about their inability to do so. Their responses demonstrate that a sizeable wardrobe did not necessarily save men from

⁸⁵ MOA, DR 2845, reply to April 1943 Directive.

⁸⁶ MOA, DR 2720, reply to April 1942 Directive.

⁸⁷ See for instance: MOA, DR 1200, 1279, 2393, 2576, 2734, 2797, 2930, replies to April 1942 Directive.

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shabbiness. An insurance broker from Cheshire complained about his inability “to keep up my modest wardrobe of 7 or 8 business suits, sports suit, 4 or 5 hats and 4 pairs business shoes on account of prices as well as coupons.”⁸⁸ Similar complaints came from a railway booking clerk, who felt “well stocked at the start of the war,” but in 1943 was beginning to feel “very short of clothes.”⁸⁹ In 1944, when BIPO conducted a survey asking “Apart from food, what is the first thing you would buy if it were to be had in the shops?” clothes were the most frequent answer, appearing in over 30 percent of responses.⁹⁰ While the surviving results do not indicate the gender of the respondents who were lacking clothes, these are indicated in a similar survey conducted in 1947. In the later survey, clothes were still the most sought after item by both men (34 percent) and women (37 percent).⁹¹ The high number of class C men who indicated their need for suits and other particular items in the BoT’s wardrobe surveys (Table 1) combined with the decreasing ration, implies that the situation did not change significantly between 1944 and 1947 and that the importance of personal appearance was ongoing despite national calls to forgo pre-war standards. A journalist who, like the insurance broker above, had a large wardrobe he could not sustain under rationing, gave some insight into the tension between these conditions and old norms of respectability. His reply to MO indicated that he had used most of his clothing coupons and did not feel he could economise on soap, because “to wear a soiled collar would still distress me.”⁹² He was still anxious about maintaining the pre-war imperative to look clean and tidy, which had become ingrained in his perception of proper appearance.

⁸⁸ MOA, DR 2776, reply to April 1942 Directive. See also: MOA, DR 2820, reply to April 1942 Directive.

⁸⁹ MOA, DR 1372, reply to April 1943 Directive.

⁹⁰ Hinton et al., “British Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup) Polls,” survey dated January 1944.

⁹¹ Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, 162-3.

⁹² MOA, DR 2820, reply to April 1942 Directive.

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Some white-collar men were also reluctant to let go of the cut and shape of clothes to which they were accustomed. Their reaction to the austerity regulations was foreshadowed in the reaction to the idea of standard suits early in the war, discussed in Chapter One. When men worried they may not be able to choose the style of their suits, they rushed to buy new suits before limitations were enacted. Responses to the austerity regulations among professionals and clerks record a similar intensity of feeling. Despite the BoT's insistence that citizens should "not buy anything more until we had won the war," the prospect of trousers without turn-ups was enough to incite excessive spending.⁹³ Men disliked the prospect of trousers without turn-ups, and some even thought it was "a crime."⁹⁴ One 31-year-old technical drawing artist was indignant about the new styles: "I do not like utility suits and certainly will have 'turn-ups' to my trousers as soon as rationing allows it; until then, I hope not to have to buy any more trousers."⁹⁵ Pockets were another significant issue that made austerity styles unacceptable to this population. A teacher from Irvine noted that he had "little interest in clothes" but expressed "dismay at scarcity of pockets foreshadowed in utility suits."⁹⁶ According to BoT internal documents, these responses to the regulations were common, causing stagnation in suit sales, which was only resolved when the reappearance of unrestricted styles caused a surge in consumer demand.⁹⁷ The association that the BoT encouraged between the saving of material enabled

⁹³ "Less Material for Clothes," *Times*, 18 March 1942.

⁹⁴ MOA, DR 2539, reply to April 1942 Directive; Francis Meynell, *My Lives* (London: The Bodley Head, 1971), 271.

⁹⁵ MOA, DR 3225, reply to April 1943 Directive. See also: MOA, DR 3225, reply to April 1942 Directive. This respondent confused the austerity limitations with the Utility scheme, a common mistake at the time.

⁹⁶ MOA, DR 3131, reply to April 1942 Directive. See previous comment about the use of 'utility' here.

⁹⁷ 'The Bespoke Tailors,' TNA, BT 64/881, "Bespoke Tailors Policy File"; Letter from Sir Cecil Weir to Sir Thomas Barlow dated 16 August 1944, TNA, BT 64/954, "Demob Emergency Scheme."

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by austerity regulations and contribution to the war effort had little effect on men's perception of the appropriate appearance of a suit.

As Sprecher suggests, men's negative reaction to these restrictions was expressed in terms of comfort and functionality.⁹⁸ Tailors were in disagreement over whether turn-ups "give extra wear" or were just "a matter of fashion."⁹⁹ They did, however, agree that allowing only eight pockets in a suit (three each in the jacket and trousers, two in the waistcoat) was insufficient.¹⁰⁰ Men also argued that the pockets were too small to hold essential items like wallets and pipes.¹⁰¹ This focus on functionality was typical of contemporary discussion of menswear. Greenfield, O'Connell and Reid show in their study of interwar masculinity that magazines that catered for middle-class men, like *Men Only*, contrasted men's sober interest in dress to women's frivolous obsession with fashion. By doing so, they legitimised masculine consumerism and created a language through which men could feel comfortable talking about clothes.¹⁰² Yet, although in this pre-war context, comfort was a legitimate requirement of clothes and men felt justified in defending it, the BoT thought that in the context of the war, comfort was a luxury, secondary to the demands of warfare.

Men's dislike for austerity-style suits was located in both their bodily experience of the suits and in their social perception of these styles. In January 1944, a month before the abolition of the austerity regulations, the *Times* published an opinion piece titled "Pockets and Liberty" that welcomed the news:

⁹⁸ Sprecher, "Demob Suits," 113.

⁹⁹ "Turn-Ups Fight," *Daily Mail*, 10 March 1943; "Home Made Turn Ups are Suggested Now," *Daily Mirror*, 12 March 1943.

¹⁰⁰ "Home Made Turn Ups are Suggested Now."

¹⁰¹ Laurence Wild, "The Problem of Pockets," *Men Only*, January 1946.

¹⁰² Greenfield et al, "Gender, Consumer Culture and the Middle Class Male," 188-90.

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[Men] will rejoice that the rules are to go, for these have sorely tried the temper [...] Man is prepared for sacrifice in big things, but minor troubles are more within his reach, so that as he thinks, an effort of the will ought to put them to rights. If he may have a sleeve, it seems outrageous that he may not have buttons on it; if he is allowed a pocket to put his pipe in, why should the pocket be just so narrow that the pipe is jammed there and can only be dislodged by a frantic gesture? [...] even in his blindest fury, even when he feels for a waistcoat pocket that is not there and encounters only his own smooth, unbroken contour, man does not want to kill Mr. Dalton or Sir Thomas Barlow. [...] What he does want to do is to stamp on his austerity suit and tear it into a hundred fragments.¹⁰³

The writer expressed mounting frustration at the way the cut of these suits disrupted his habits. This change made the suit noticeable – an object in which it was impossible to feel comfortable. As Hardy Amies will write a decade later, “A man's suit is psychologically a gloriously comfortable thing” and once he has put it on “you need to think nothing more of your dress.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, a suit that its wearer is constantly aware of does not serve its purpose. Fashion philosopher Joanne Entwistle remarks that dress “forms a second skin which is not usually an object of consciousness,” unless “something is out of place.”¹⁰⁵ The drastic change in the construction of suits, practicality aside, made men conscious of their appearance on both the physical and social level. The social implications are evident in J.B. Priestley’s portrayal of the suits in his novel *Three Men in New Suits*. Writing in 1943, he assumed that the men demobilised at the end of the war would receive austerity suits upon their return to civilian life. He predicted that these suits would impede their ability to build new successful lives for themselves. At the time of writing, Priestley could not have known

¹⁰³ “Pockets and Liberty,” *Times*, 28 January 1944.

¹⁰⁴ Hardy Amies, *Just So Far* (London: Collins, 1954), 172.

¹⁰⁵ Entwistle, “The Dressed Body,” 133.

that the government would abolish the limitations. When the novel was finally published in 1945, he included an apology to the officials in charge, commending them for having the “good sense” to clothe the demobilised men in well-made suits.¹⁰⁶ He did not believe men would be able to integrate back into British society with austerity-style suits, which were perceived as inferior.

Reactions to the BoT’s frugality policies in the field of menswear suggest that men did not adhere to the idea that good civic conduct required that they change their perception of appropriate appearance. They viewed the respectable appearance of work clothes as a necessity – an aspect that played a central part in their clothes’ function. While their emphasis on the practical aspects of clothes suggests that they understood any preoccupation with appearance to be incompatible with masculinity, it also suggests that they held on to pre-war ideas about what were the essential aspects of dress. Their purchasing choices and vocal resistance to regulations on style further suggest that they did not believe this resistance made them unpatriotic. The BoT, however, did not only press men to be as frugal as possible and accept their shabbiness, it promoted the idea that resistance to the regulations as unpatriotic.

Clothes and Patriotism

Although men considered comfort was an essential aspect of clothes, the BoT’s policy did not see it as a necessity. In November 1943, the BoT’ third *Clothing Quiz* included a forward by Dalton, which emphasised the importance of rationing and controls to the war economy. Dalton concluded with a statement that outlined the correct conduct for British citizens: “Any sacrifice of comfort or appearance [...] will, I am sure, be

¹⁰⁶ J. B. Priestley, Author’s Note to *Three Men in New Suits* (London: W. Heinemann, 1945).

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cheerfully borne, in order that victory may come sooner.”¹⁰⁷ While positing the deteriorating clothing situation on the home front as a sacrifice, this conclusion also made sure to prioritise the national war effort over the comfort of individual citizens. The message was addressed to all citizens on the home front, yet in light of the vociferous arguments against the lack of comfort embedded in the design of the austerity suits, it can be viewed as addressing men’s complaints.

BoT officials made repeated efforts to create a link between the war effort and clothing controls. Officials constructed the acceptance of regulations as civilian men’s patriotic duty by associating it with their masculinity. Attempts to convince Dalton to alleviate austerity regulations were met with contempt, and an assertion of the hierarchies of contribution to the war effort. Dalton reminded the complaining civilians that Merchant Navy men had to risk their lives to bring raw material into Britain and that turn-ups were not worth this risk, concluding “Some must lose lives and limbs; others only the turn-up on their trousers.”¹⁰⁸ Comparing the sacrifices of the Merchant Navy men with the complaints that civilian men in physically safe employment were making on the home front was meant to underline the ridiculousness of complaints. The use of the language of sacrifice, discussed in Chapter Two, served a dual goal: it emphasised the link between civilian clothing economy and the war effort, while creating a clear hierarchy between trivial civilian sacrifices of comfort and the heroic sacrifices of the Merchant Navy.

¹⁰⁷ ‘The 1943-1944 Clothing Quiz,’ TNA, BT 131/37.

¹⁰⁸ “Wear Trousers to the Office, Dalton Tells Girls,” *Daily Mail*. It is interesting to note that in the *Daily Mirror*’s reporting of this press conference, Dalton’s comparison between soldiers’ lives and trouser turn-ups does not appear, see: “Forget Smart Clothes for War – Dalton.”

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these requests would have been entirely reasonable, this 1943 cartoon portrayed him as a spoiled child making excessive demands, a portrayal that undermined the masculinity of men who insisted on those details. In a later issue of the paper, one of the paper's columnists, Walter Holmes, reiterated the message that there was no place for complaints about appearances, writing that attention to this issue "arouses disgust."¹¹⁰ He juxtaposed the pursuit of victory with the support of and compliance with clothing controls, implying that those who opposed the regulations were unpatriotic. This position was not entirely confined to the left-leaning press. A William Sillince cartoon, published in *Punch* in 1943, also criticised complaints about trouser turn-ups.¹¹¹ The cartoon showed two officers in the Middle-East, dressed in short trousers appropriate for the desert heat. The officers are looking at a newspaper and suggesting that there are better ways to save cloth than abolishing turn-ups. While at first glance, the cartoon may read as a criticism of the government, the juxtaposition of the comment and the speaker's short trousers suggests that it is intended for the consumers, who should be happy that their trousers are still full length. Even more than turn-ups, long trousers were a symbol of adult masculinity, and forcing men to wear short trousers was unthinkable before austerity.¹¹² Although certainly more ambiguous than the previous examples, the cartoon played on men's awareness of these norms to suggest that they were no longer in place.

Comparisons between complaints about clothing controls and the service that the forces provided for the country draws attention to the low status that a low-risk civilian

¹¹⁰ Walter Holmes, "Those Turn-Ups," A Worker's Notebook, *Daily Worker*, 2 April 1943.

¹¹¹ William Sillince, "Better Ways of Saving Cloth," *Punch*, 7 April, 1943. Punch Magazine Cartoon Archive, accessed: 17 December 2019, <https://punch.photoshelter.com/gallery-image/William-Sillince-Cartoons/G0000wsaEp6jK9zs/I0000sYF4QxF8B3U>.

¹¹² Tebbutt, *Being Boys*, 121. See also: "A Threat to Long Trousers," *The Yorkshire Post*, 14 February 1940.

position had in the context of the war. For men whose status in British society was previously high, this may not have been a welcome change. The gap between the low cachet of home-front office work and the high cachet of uniform, noted at the beginning of this chapter, can best be illustrated by a controversy born early in the war. In March 1940, the *Daily Mirror*'s satire and political commentary page protested that it was "a screaming disgrace" that men serving in Whitehall in administrative positions were allowed to wear a uniform, thereby, "masquerading as warriors."¹¹³ The identification between a uniform and active battle was so strong, that men whose service involved a desk on the home front were not considered worthy of wearing one.¹¹⁴ If a uniform communicated the highest level of contribution to the war, the clothes that symbolised white-collar positions communicated its opposite. In this context, it is not surprising that men whose appearance identified them as respectable citizens before the war chose to hold on to pre-war notions of appearance and status.

In the context of national survival, the adjustments that men in white-collar employment had to make in their daily lives were marginal. If young men could sacrifice their lives to guard the nation, the least that men on the home front could do was to sacrifice their wardrobes. It is doubtful that, confronted with this comparison, men on the home front would have insisted on their right to obtain clothes of their liking. What is not clear is whether they accepted the standard of civic behaviour set by the BoT and saw their sacrifice as something that made them into good citizens. The way men wrote about their clothes, their appearance and their clothing habits, suggests that most men did not associate their wardrobes with the national cause and continued to see their clothing habits through

¹¹³ Cassandra, "All Dressed Up," *Daily Mirror*, 11 March 1940.

¹¹⁴ See also: "Why Not?" *Daily Mirror*, 6 July 1940.

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the lens of respectable appearance and pre-war norms. Only a minority of men in white-collar employment saw the restrictions on clothes as either a worthy sacrifice or an infringement on their civil liberties, while most men did the best they could with the resources they had at their disposal.

Men in white-collar occupations were aware of the idea that clothing habits had an impact on the national cause and it certainly appealed to some of these men. A manager of a tailor's shop wrote to MO: "I do not feel the need for new clothes when most of our forces are suffering many hardships. That I think is the general view."¹¹⁵ An engineer's draughtsman used the patriotic air associated with shabbiness to make himself feel better about the state of his wardrobe.¹¹⁶ Others, however, presented a somewhat more ambivalent response to the dilemma of appearance and patriotism. An engineer from the West Midlands was undoubtedly aware of the requests to avoid unnecessary purchases, yet he was also keeping his coupons because of the great increase in clothing prices and his fear that an unexpected need may arise. In his response, he presented his personal considerations on equal footing with the national considerations promoted by the government.¹¹⁷ Where they do appear, declarations of patriotism should be considered carefully, since they were not always sincere. The confession of a London journalist demonstrates that they could be a method of self-persuasion and of keeping face. The journalist, who kept a relatively large wardrobe, wrote "I am depressed at growing shabbiness, though I profess not to mind and repeat the bit about shabbiness being patriotic."¹¹⁸ This confession implies that citizens who articulated their commitment to the

¹¹⁵ MOA, DR 2691, reply to April 1942 Directive.

¹¹⁶ MOA, DR 2671, reply to April 1942 Directive.

¹¹⁷ MOA, DR 1097, reply to April 1942 Directive.

¹¹⁸ MOA, DR 2820, reply to April 1942 Directive.

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national cause were not necessarily comfortable with the affects clothing controls had on their appearance. Although men sometimes thought about the national impact of their clothing habits, they often had other consideration that played into purchasing decisions.

Some of the men in white-collar work on the MO panel, rather than viewing clothing controls as part of their civic duty, took issue with the government over controls. An accountant from Sheffield, for instance, was indignant about all controls, and although he was not a keen dresser, freely admitted to buying two suits that were not necessary, just as a precaution against possible want.¹¹⁹ A civil servant from Stoke-on-Trent felt that the government forced him to change his habits, and would not adjust to the new standards.¹²⁰ A chartered accountant from Bristol saw restrictions and shortages as the responsibility of the government. He wrote in his diary in 1942 that “although people are grumbling bitterly at the insufficiency [*sic*] of coupons [...] there is infinitely more dissatisfaction at the failure of supply of goods.”¹²¹ He himself had difficulty obtaining a shirt, and reported the general lack of goods in Bristol, the poor quality of goods available and the deteriorating circumstances of small independent shops.¹²² These men represent the few who, even during the war, felt clothing controls had no justification.

Admittedly, men who were openly displeased with controls were few, as were men who explicitly tied their clothing habits to the national cause. However, the general attitude of seeing clothing habits as a personal matter was prevalent among white-collar men who answered the MO April 1942 survey. Out of the eighty-two men in white-collar employment, only five mentioned the national cause as a reason to refrain from buying

¹¹⁹ MOA, DR 2539, replies to April 1943 and November 1944 Directives.

¹²⁰ MOA, DR 2739, replies to April 1943 and June 1944 Directives.

¹²¹ MOA, D 5128, diary for 4th November 1942.

¹²² MOA, D 5128, diary for 4th November 1942.

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clothes or as a way of reassuring themselves in their shabbiness.¹²³ The majority of men in this category mentioned only their personal concerns, discussing their budget, whether the ration was congruent with their shopping habits, what they have done to adapt to the new conditions, whether their appearance suffered from the limitations and what they thought about austerity styles.¹²⁴ Despite government promotion of the message that personal consumption choices had an impact on national concerns, most men showed little awareness or consideration of this impact, concentrating instead on how controls affected their wardrobes. The behaviour they described testifies to the persistence of the norms of respectability that dictated frugal consumption as well as a clean and tidy appearance, rather than to a willing sacrifice of this appearance for the sake of patriotism. Although shabbiness was consistent to a certain degree with the patriotic consumption that the BoT propagated, it was incompatible with perceptions of respectable law-abiding citizenship. This is evident in the wartime cartoons discussed in Chapter Two. The cartoons demonstrate the anxiety surrounding the deteriorating appearance of white-collar workers and its harmful effect on their social status. In a few of these cartoons, respectable citizens are being mistaken for vagrants because of their shabby appearance. The need to maintain a respectable appearance was understood by these men to be a part of the way they maintained their social status, since this was the immediate way in which they were “read” in the street.

During the war, BoT official communications emphasised the need for citizens to be willingly frugal. The message for men in white-collar employment was that their sacrifice of smartness was the least they could do to compensate for their position away from the

¹²³ MOA, DR 1095; DR 1097; DR 2199; DR 2671; DR 2691, replies to April 1942 Directive.

¹²⁴ MOA, replies to April 1942 Directive.

front. While some men accepted this message, personal habits and needs tended to take precedence over the national cause when it came to clothing and appearance. In their answers, men in white-collar occupations on MO's panel emphasised the need to keep up appearances – doing their best to maintain a pre-war standard of respectability rather than letting go of it in the name of national pride. This attitude demonstrated not only the continuing relevance of these standards, but also the general acceptance of regulations. Most men did not protest against restrictions, they handled them as they would have handled pre-war limitations of budget. This suggests that most of them they did not view it as their civic duty to be frugal, and that their frugality was itself in line with pre-war norms of respectable behaviour. The end of the war, demobilisation, the persistence of controls and the post-war economic crisis changed the conditions and the challenges these men had to face. In the next section, I will discuss the implications of the end of the war on men's clothing and the reaction of white-collar workers to continuing want.

New and Old Suits: Problems of the Post-War Market

The discussion of the post-war clothing situation in Chapter Two illustrated the new pressures that the end of hostilities placed on clothing production. Although cargo sent from overseas could now make its journey safely, materials were still in short supply due to Britain's balance of payments deficit.¹²⁵ In addition, the clothes-making trade lost many workers to essential work and to the services during the war, which made it difficult to manufacture enough clothes to meet the requirements of the post-war market. While this problem existed across many industries, and across different sections of the clothing trade, the menswear trade faced an additional problem. The making of suits for the soldiers

¹²⁵ "Trade Warns Against Optimism Over Supply Position," *Tailor & Cutter*, 15 June 1945; "'Own Materials' Danger," *Tailor & Cutter*, 6 July 1945.

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demobilised at the end of the war placed a strain on this section of the market, causing further shortages for civilians.¹²⁶ This section will discuss demobilisation from two aspects. It will begin by considering the demobilisation suit and reactions to it. Using oral history accounts of demobilised soldiers from the Imperial War Museum (IWM) collection, it will give a nuanced portrayal of the experiences these men had of their demob suits, concentrating on the experience of men who were returning to white-collar employment. It will then go on to discuss the impact that the manufacture of these suits had on the civilian market and on civilian men, an issue that is overlooked in discussions of demobilisation.

Allan Allport notes that while women who returned to civilian life received clothing coupons and a special allowance to help them renew their wardrobes, W.W. Richards of the War Office decided that men would receive a stylish demobilisation suit. Richards recognised the disastrous results of inadequate planning following the First World War, which meant that returning soldiers were clothed in a miscellany of mismatching garments. He was determined that the suits issued at the end of the Second World War would be a source of pride rather than a point of ridicule for the demobilised men.¹²⁷ The decision to provide stylish menswear to demobilised soldiers should also be viewed in light of the negative sentiment surrounding austerity styles. As we have seen, Priestley predicted that the government would keep the simplified styles and that the results of this decision would be the repetition of the mistakes of the First World War. Instead, the suits that the War Office supplied demobilised soldiers were lauded for their potential in allowing the demobilised to feel like “dignified citizen[s].”¹²⁸

¹²⁶ “Working Party for Clothing Industry,” *Tailor & Cutter*, 15 February 1946.

¹²⁷ Allport, *Demobbed*, 119-20.

¹²⁸ 398 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1944), col. 2232.

Elaborate plans were therefore put in place for demobilisation. Men coming home from the forces received a full set of clothes. In addition to the (in)famous suit, demobilised men received a full kit including “shirts, ties, socks, shoes,”¹²⁹ and a set of clothing coupons.¹³⁰ Demobilisation kits varied between the forces, but as an illustration, a list of kit items prepared in 1944 included “a suit, socks (2 pairs), shirt with two collars, tie, hat, [...] shoes and raincoat” alongside items of army gear that soldiers could keep for their personal use.¹³¹ At the time, the clothing ration amounted to 38 coupons for an 11 months period commencing September 1945. The kit that demobilised soldiers received was worth between fifty-two and sixty-one coupons.¹³² This was in addition to a civilian coupon book and a special issue of ninety coupons. This placed the demobilised at a significantly improved position compared with the civilian population.

The transition from a uniform to civilian gear affected the way soldiers saw their new suits. Oral history accounts of newly demobbed men tell stories of drab uniformity as well as stories of gaudy conspicuousness. Alan Bryett, who was a bank clerk before going into the forces, thought that “the quality was quite good,” but recognised that “the range of materials was very limited,” which resulted in incidents where “you got on the train [...] to go up to the office there would be four people on the same carriage who got suits identical to yours.”¹³³ While before the war, style monotony was a staple of the menswear market, after the enforced monotony of style in the forces, this uniformity of appearance was

¹²⁹ Ronald Wheatman, interviewed by Peter M Hart, IWM, catalogue reference: 28671, Reel 9 of 9, 12:05, accessed: 5 December 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80026857>.

¹³⁰ Allport, *Demobbed*, 121.

¹³¹ ‘War Office Memorandum No.1359’ dated 1st April 1944, TNA, BT 64/936, “Correspondence with the War Office about Clothing for Demobilised Soldiers.”

¹³² Based on the 1946 clothing quiz. The amount would vary according to the specific types of garments chosen by the soldier. See also: ‘Coupons for the Demobilised,’ TNA, BT 64/1939, “Demobilisation, British Forces: Issue of Coupons.”

¹³³ Alan Bryett, interviewed by Peter M Hart, IWM, catalogue reference: 27051, Reel 18 of 19, 17:20, accessed: 7 April 2018, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80024309>.

glaring. This complaint appears in other accounts as well, yet there are also accounts of unwearable, flashy suits.¹³⁴ Allport brings some of these accounts as examples of the variety of reactions to the suits.¹³⁵ Although he presents it as a problem of the commission, some particularly colourful suits were chosen by men who, after several years of wearing uniform, lost their heads at the sight of colour. Frank Luff remembered that he chose a ginger suit after spending his service years in Navy blue, a decision he later regretted.¹³⁶ Soldiers on MO's panel anticipated similarly extreme reactions.¹³⁷ *Tailor & Cutter*, the voice of the retail trade, expected that "men and women who are tired of wearing uniform will probably demand clothing of brighter colour and character."¹³⁸ The reactionary need for distinctive clothes is also evident in the re-emergence of the gangster style suit after the war. Roodhouse describes how some demobbed soldiers sold their demobilization suits and used the money to buy draped suits and cowboy style outfits in London's East End.¹³⁹ Like Roodhouse's gangster-chic men, Luff was working-class. It is possible that men who expected to go back to white-collar occupations chose suits of a less conspicuous nature. Whether they chose a gaudy or a conformist suit at the demobilisation depot, uniformity was uncomfortable after coming home from the war.

As Sprecher shows, claims that the scheme was egalitarian were overstated.¹⁴⁰

Demob suits were various in terms of quality. Bryett was not alone in thinking that the

¹³⁴ Bob Collins, interviewed by Peter M Hart, IWM, catalogue reference: 28656, Reel 11 of 11, 20:10, accessed: 21 October 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80026735>. See also: Fougasse, "Isn't It Wonderful to Be..." *Punch Almanack for 1946*, 29 October 1946.

¹³⁵ Allport, *Demobbed*, 120.

¹³⁶ Frank S Luff, interviewed by Peter M Hart, IWM, catalogue reference: 27267, Reel 8 of 8. 18:05, accessed: 17 October 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80025161>.

¹³⁷ See for instance: MOA, DR 2962, reply to April 1943 Directive; DR 3052, reply to April 1943 Directive.

¹³⁸ "To Would Be Exporters," *Tailor & Cutter*, 26 January 1945.

¹³⁹ Roodhouse, "In Racket Town, 533.

¹⁴⁰ Sprecher, "Demob Suits," 118.

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quality of the suits was good, or at least reasonable.¹⁴¹ Assessment of the suits could depend on the level of familiarity with tailoring and on personal standards. Some of the men testified that they were young and inexperienced, therefore thinking at the time that the suits were better quality than they were.¹⁴² Sprecher's main argument is that many demobilized men were displeased with the fact that demob suits were ready-to-wear, since made-to-measure was the preferred option before the war.¹⁴³ This was true for some of the oral history interviewees in the IWM project, who sold their demob suits, and bought a tailor-made suit instead, whether they liked or disliked the suits they received.¹⁴⁴ These stories indicate that the differing opinions about the quality of the suits could have been the result of differing sensitivities. Men with little experience of suits could not always tell the difference between a well-made and well-fitting suit and one that was of low quality and poor fit. In addition, since the suits were produced by many different firms, they were bound to differ in quality to some extent.¹⁴⁵

An additional story emerges from the accounts of demobilised soldiers. Since a large number of firms manufactured the demob suits and they had large variations in

¹⁴¹ Alan Davis, interviewed by Peter M Hart, IWM, catalogue reference: 30639, Reel 17 of 17, 01:45, accessed: 21 October 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80030676>; Albert Earl, interviewed by Peter M Hart, IWM, catalogue reference: 28679, reel 6 of 6, 06:54, accessed: 17 October 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80027032>; Ian Nelson, interviewed by Peter M Hart, IWM, catalogue reference: 25277, reel 4 of 4, 01:15, accessed: 17 October 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80023509>; David Roy 'Bim' Wells, interviewed by Peter M Hart, IWM, catalogue reference: 29054, reel 12 of 12, 09:52, accessed: 21 October 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80027494>.

¹⁴² John James Farquharson, interviewed by Peter M Hart, IWM, catalogue reference: 30633, Reel 16 of 16, 05:03, accessed: 17 October, 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80030705>; Alan Hay, interviewed by Peter M Hart, IWM, catalogue reference: 13079, Reel 18 of 18, 15:30, accessed: 21 October 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80012802>.

¹⁴³ Sprecher, "Demob Suits," 123-4.

¹⁴⁴ Wells, IWM, reel 12 of 12, 09:52; Monty Fish, interviewed by Peter M Hart, IWM, catalogue reference 30625, Reel 10 of 10, 15:05, accessed: 21 October 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80030206>.

¹⁴⁵ Bert Scrivens, interviewed by Peter M Hart, IWM, catalogue reference: 29536, Reel 16 of 16, 17:02, accessed: 21 October 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80028277>. See also: Sprecher, "Demob Suits," 118.

quality, the quality men received often depended on their luck at the demobilization depots. The men who fitted the demobilised soldiers had a free hand to allocate the suits as they pleased, so a man's kit rested on the luck of meeting an old acquaintance or on a man's initiative and available funds. The trade press insisted that reports of differential treatment were unsubstantiated, and it was certainly frowned upon when it came to light.¹⁴⁶ Yet it was not uncommon, and oral history interviewees give first-hand accounts of favours they were granted at demobilisation centres. Reginald Spittles and Alan Hay both met old acquaintances who worked at the depot and fitted them with suits from the better racks.¹⁴⁷ Bert Scrivens who came back from serving in Italy used the cigarettes he brought back with him to get himself a Simpson's suit "something that'll do for the city."¹⁴⁸ Bryett similarly recalled that

a pound or two here, slipped into the right places would probably get you an Austin Reed suit as opposed to a Burton suit [...] and it was done, probably by most of us in a fairly gentle sort of way and was not really frowned on and everyone accepted it was going on anyway.¹⁴⁹

Despite what Bryett believed, these small bribes were not as acceptable to people who could not afford them.¹⁵⁰ As white-collar workers, Scrivens and Bryatt had good reason to invest in a better suit. Scrivens' comment that he wanted his suit to be appropriate for the city indicates that he saw clothing standards as an integral part of this urban white-collar work environments. Both highlighted brand names like Simpson and Austin Reed, which

¹⁴⁶ Sprecher, "Demob Suits," 118.

¹⁴⁷ Reginald James Spittles, interviewed by Conrad Wood, IWM, catalogue reference: 16808, Reel 35 of 38, 29:02, accessed: 6 August 2018, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80020934>; Alan Hay, IWM, Reel 18 of 18, 15:30.

¹⁴⁸ Bert Scrivens, interviewed by Peter M Hart, IWM, catalogue reference: 29536, Reel 16 of 16, 15:25, accessed: 21 October 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80028277>.

¹⁴⁹ Bryett, IWM, Reel 18 of 19, 18:15.

¹⁵⁰ James Corr, interviewed by Peter M Hart, IWM, catalogue reference: 13080, Reel 7 of 7, 28:38, accessed: 21 October 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80012803>.

were associated with the affluent middle-class before the war and evidently retained this status. The fact that these names were mentioned by those returning to white-collar occupations suggests that they particularly sought these better quality suits. Their place as the most sought after brands in the demobilisation scheme marked them as the dress most associated with dignified citizenship.

Whether the suit they received was from Burton or Simpson, demobilised soldiers were noticeable because their suits were new. Studies of demobilisation tend to overstate the suits' uniformity.¹⁵¹ As we have seen, the suits were variable in style, design and make, so it is difficult to believe that their conspicuousness was entirely the result of their uniformity. The main thing that set these suits apart from those worn by the civilian population was their pristine condition. A *Punch* cartoon from May 1945 demonstrates how glaring demobilised men looked in civilian life (Figure 23). The cartoon contrasts 'Mobilisation' with 'Demobilisation'. In the first situation, a newly mobilised soldier walks on the street wearing his new uniform. His expression and body language illustrate his uneasiness and dissatisfaction with his shabby appearance. He receives condescending and slightly unsympathetic looks from the smartly dressed civilians on the street. The second situation reverses the roles: the young man now walks proudly in his new demob suit, while the men on the street look at his outfit with envy, ashamed of their own shabby appearance. After four years of clothing restrictions on British civilians, seeing a man wearing a new suit had become a rare, enviable event. The pronounced appearance of an unspoiled suit suggests that if pre-war monotony was broken by varying degrees of wear, the sameness of demobilisation suits was glaring since all were acquired at similar times – they were invariably new.

¹⁵¹ Allport, *Demobbed*, 119; Sprecher, "Demob Suits," 120-1.

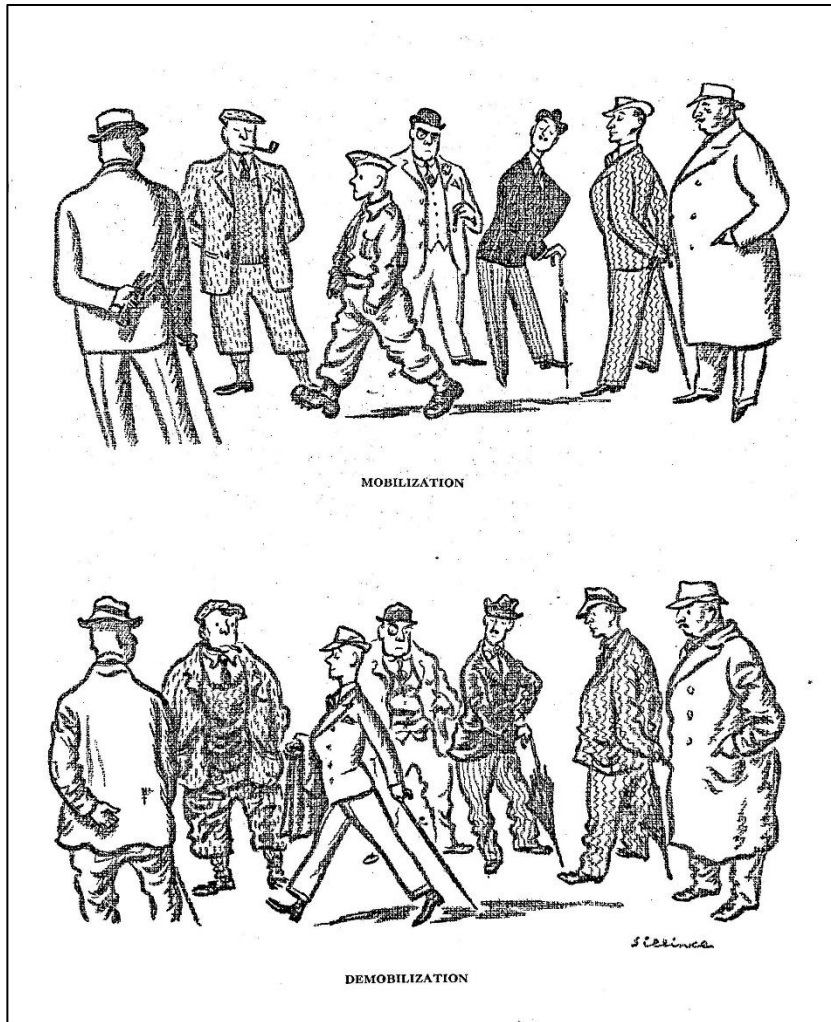


Figure 23 – Cartoon by William Sillince, demonstrating the sartorial gap between the newly demobbed and those who remained on the Home Front during the war, *Punch*, 14 May 1945.

This conspicuous newness was bound to cause resentment for two reasons. The first, as above, was the contrast between the condition of these suits and the shabbiness experienced by most civilian men. If before demobilisation all men were shabby to varying degrees and this shared shabbiness mediated the individual plight, the contrast with the new demobilisation suits highlighted civilian men's shabbiness. The second was the effect that the production of these suits had on the civilian market, a factor often overlooked by scholars. In order to meet the demands of demobilisation, the War Office commissioned the leading suit manufacturers in Britain, most of which were located in Leeds, to make

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demobilisation suits.¹⁵² The high rate of demobilisation at the end of the war meant that the commercial made-to-measure suit manufacturers diverted the majority of their resources to make suits for demobilised men. This took a toll on the availability of suits for the civilian market. When plans were laid for the demobilisation scheme, this shortage was anticipated by BoT officials, one of whom proposed to defend the Board's position "by reference to the needs of the demobilised men."¹⁵³ When demobilisation began causing shortages on the home market, such a defence became necessary. In 1946, Montague Burton, who owned one of the commissioned companies, wrote to Sir Stafford Cripps, then president of the Board of Trade, to complain that:

Almost a hundred-per-cent of our output is devoted to demobilisation clothing.

This is causing some resentment among the less well-informed members of the public, who are of opinion that inability to execute orders promptly is unpardonable now that the war is well over.¹⁵⁴

Burton proposed to post part of a speech Cripps made recently at the windows of his shops to remind his civilian customers that the company was preoccupied with the manufacturing of clothes for the demobilised men and helping "to raise the clothing standard of this country."¹⁵⁵ This request demonstrates both the way that demobilisation pulled resources away from civilian production and the lack of understanding from civilians who had to continue struggling for scarce goods. Later correspondence with the Board reveals that goods remained scarce at least until 1948; demobilisation suits were still prioritised over

¹⁵² Honeyman, *Well Suited*, 93.

¹⁵³ Letter from H.J.B. Lintott to Sir Thomas Barlow, dated 24 July 1944, TNA, BT 64/954.

¹⁵⁴ Letter from Montague Burton to Sir Stafford Cripps, 7th March 1946, WYL 1951/76, West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds District Archives (WYL), Records of the Burton Group Ltd. 1896-1985.

¹⁵⁵ Letter from Montague Burton to Sir Stafford Cripps, 7th March 1946, WYL 1951/76, WYL, Records of the Burton Group Ltd. 1896-1985.

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suits for the home market at this time.¹⁵⁶ As Honeyman demonstrates, the scarcity of civilian clothes was a result of a combination between a shortage of labour and a shortage of supplies. The effects on civilian men were compounded by deteriorating quality throughout the ready-made and made-to-measure trades. All of this meant that less clothes were available for civilians.¹⁵⁷ Men in low paying white-collar occupations, who formed one of the groups Burton's stores targeted, had to maintain a respectable appearance without having a good stock of high quality garments from before the war and without the funds to obtain these under rationing. They were now entirely unable to obtain new suits. In contrast to the respectable looking demobbed, civilian white-collar workers who remained at home during the war looked shabby and undignified from years of clothing economy.

Trade papers and BoT internal reports corroborate a story of scarcity on the menswear home market. Throughout 1945 and 1946, *Tailor & Cutter* was riddled with repeated calls to improve the labour situation and supplies for the clothing industry, emphasising that "stocks available to the civilian purchaser are growing less and less."¹⁵⁸ They specifically underlined the plight of men, who they thought "are sadly in need of new suits."¹⁵⁹ As noted in Chapter Two, this was one of the industries that the British government pressed its citizens to join to improve production. BoT internal reports confirm that the supply position was problematic as late as 1948. A summary of reports from Regional Distribution Offices (RDOs) shows that civilians experienced a severe shortage of ready-made suits of good quality – men were unwilling to buy below a certain quality

¹⁵⁶ Letter from Montague Burton to Harold Wilson, 4th May 1948, WYL 1951/86, WYL, Records of the Burton Group Ltd. 1896-1985.

¹⁵⁷ Honeyman, *Well Suited*, 94-5.

¹⁵⁸ "'Shortage of Men's Clothes,'" *Tailor & Cutter*, 2 February 1945.

¹⁵⁹ "Fourteen!," *Tailor & Cutter*, 22 February 1946.

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threshold.¹⁶⁰ The supply of suits in “the medium trade” could take three to five months, and waiting time for bespoke suits could be as long as a year in 1946.¹⁶¹ It was only in the final months of 1948 that the supply position began to improve.¹⁶²

It is no wonder, then, that civilian men were not very forgiving when the production of demobilisation suits made suits less available. The cartoon in Figure 23 and Burton’s report of the criticism of his civilian customers demonstrate a common attitude among suited men towards their deteriorating appearance. Like Burton, BoT officials trusted that the cause of dressing the newly demobilised was worthy enough for most civilians to show understanding towards continued scarcity and production delays. Rather than understanding, there is evidence that men in pressing need of new suits grew increasingly bitter over shortages and shabbiness, criticising the government for clothing controls and supply problems. An accountant from Bristol criticised the Labour government because the nation was “inadequately provided with clothes,” writing elsewhere that the price of clothes was going to make it impossible for him to save.¹⁶³ When asked about his six “main grumbles” in 1947, a buyer from Birmingham devoted two places to clothing related problems.¹⁶⁴ Their problems were echoed in magazines aimed at a male audience. *Punch* cartoons reiterated problems of supply, hinting that the export drive is aggravating the problem.¹⁶⁵ *Men Only* directed the blame towards wives as well as the BoT’s management

¹⁶⁰ ‘Extracts from R.D.O.’s Reports,’ dated 1 September 1948, TNA, BT 64/2014, “Men’s and Boy’s Suits and Overcoats.”

¹⁶¹ “Bond Street Noblesse,” *Tailor & Cutter*, 29 March 1946.

¹⁶² See extracts from R.D.O.’s reports dated October 1948 onwards, TNA, BT 64/2014.

¹⁶³ MOA, DR 2930, replies to January and October 1947 Directives.

¹⁶⁴ MOA, DR 1216, reply to April 1947 Directive.

¹⁶⁵ Starke, “No, we have...,” *Punch*, 7 August 1946; Fougasse, “I say...,” *Punch*, 9 October 1946; William Scully, “Of course...,” *Punch*, 4 September 1946.

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of supplies.¹⁶⁶ Surveys indicate that men’s need for new clothes was widespread. As stated earlier, a survey conducted by BIPO in 1947 showed that men experienced a similar shortage of clothing items to women.¹⁶⁷ Rather than demonstrating good citizenship by patiently waiting for supplies to improve, men viewed clothes as a necessity for which the government was responsible.

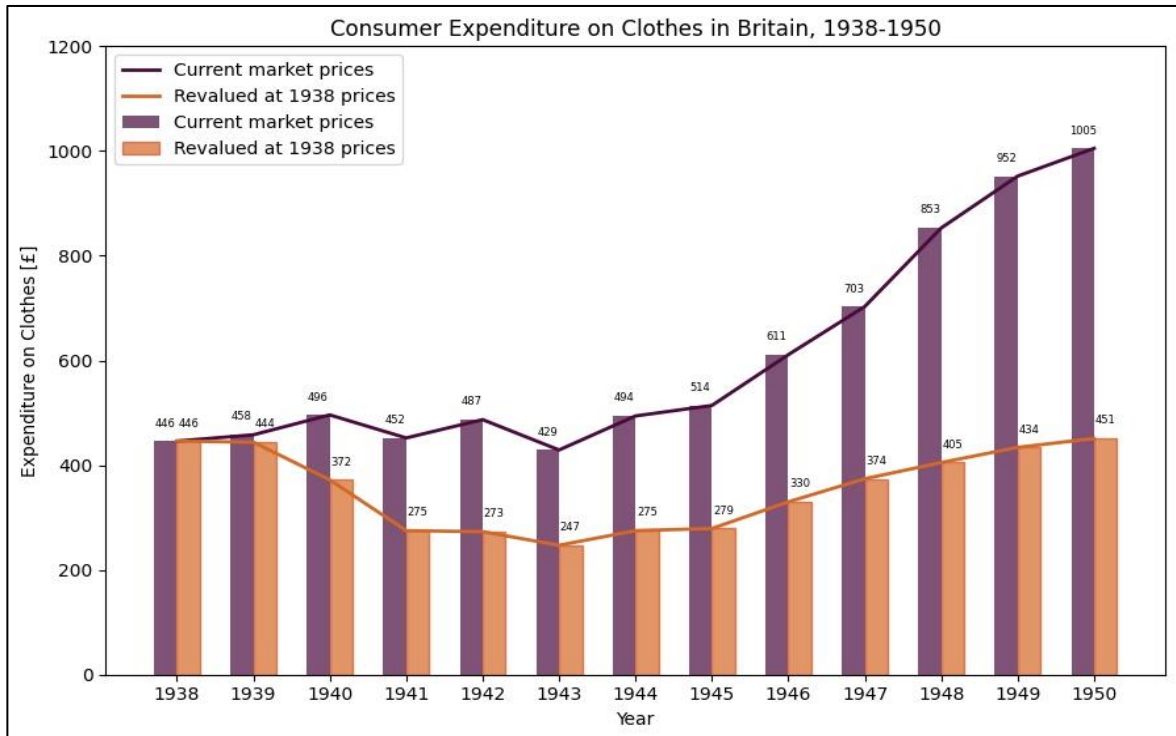


Figure 24 – Changes in consumer expenditure on clothes in Britain, 1938-1950. The gap between current and revalued prices demonstrates the drop in purchasing power as a result of rising prices, and its gradual recovery from 1945 onwards. Figures are in £ million.

Sources: consumer expenditure, 1938-1945: CSO, *Statistical Digest of the War*, 203, table 186 (current prices); Hargreaves and Gowing, *Civil Industry and Trade*, 648, table X (figures revalued at 1938 prices). Consumer expenditure, 1946-50: CSO, *Annual Abstract of Statistics No. 88*, 277, table 294. For revaluation data, see: *Statement on National Income and Expenditure of the United Kingdom*, 1946, Cmd. 7099, UK Parliamentary Papers.

Resentment for shortages was aggravated by the significant rise in the cost-of-living coupled with stagnating middle-class salaries.¹⁶⁸ In a series of economic surveys in 1948, the British government’s social survey department enquired about citizens’ views about the

¹⁶⁶ Starke, “My husband...,” *Men Only*, June 1946; H. Harry Sheldon, “The Widespread...,” *Men Only*, February 1948.

¹⁶⁷ Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, 162-3.

¹⁶⁸ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 62.

economic crisis. While most people did not mention clothes specifically as part of the way that the crisis affected them, the cost-of-living was repeatedly mentioned by 36-42 percent of those questioned.¹⁶⁹ Clothing was one of the main reasons for the increase in the cost-of-living. According to a report published by MO in their monthly bulletin, the three items that hid behind the high cost-of-living were (in declining order of importance) food, clothes and transport.¹⁷⁰ When asked in the government's surveys about the economic situation throughout 1948 what was preventing them from obtaining the clothes they wanted, only 10 percent or less of respondents answered that they had no problem obtaining clothes, indicating that garment-shopping problems were common.¹⁷¹ These surveys confirm that, as discussed in Chapter Two, the restrictions of rationing were being replaced by the rising cost-of-living, the clothing component of which incurred a significant rise from 1947 (Figure 24).¹⁷² The gradual easing of restrictions from mid-1948 meant that men who were still relatively affluent could return to old consumption habits. Demand for evening dress, which had been stifled by war and rationing, was returning to the high and medium class market segments (terms used by the trade to refer to the price and quality of commodities as well as to the social class of their potential consumers), but formidable prices prevented many men from participating in this revived consumer culture. Shortages were still a significant problem that kept prices high.¹⁷³ Figure 24 shows that clothing consumption levels, though consistently rising from 1945, did not reach pre-war levels before 1949. The

¹⁶⁹ TNA, RG 23/102, "Survey of Knowledge and Opinion about the Economic Situation, October 1948."

¹⁷⁰ MOA, MO bulletin, May 1948, SxMOA1/1/13/5/9.

¹⁷¹ TNA, RG 23/102.

¹⁷² See also: Figure 12.

¹⁷³ 'Extracts from R.D.O.'s Reports,' dated November 1948, TNA, BT 64/2014.

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improvement in the conditions of manual labourers, however, indicates that it is unlikely that white-collar workers resumed pre-war consumption levels at the end of the decade.¹⁷⁴

Men with limited income, whose wardrobes were beginning to suffer before the end of the war, found themselves in the post-war era in a problematic position. Low office-work incomes meant that accumulating clothing needs could not be relieved.¹⁷⁵ Before the end of 1948, coupons were also still a significant factor. It was in this context that the research physicist mentioned in the opening paragraph of this chapter complained about the negative implications restrictions had on his position at work. These conditions also caused several of MO's white-collar respondents to change their attitudes towards clothing controls. Even those who accepted shabbiness during the war and in the early post-war days were gradually becoming more anxious to return to old consumption habits.¹⁷⁶ Men were disappointed by the slow rate of recovery.¹⁷⁷ Some directed their frustration with the condition of their wardrobe to the government. On two occasions, an accountant from Sheffield stressed his wish to live independently of government planning rather than "become an ideal citizen by regulation."¹⁷⁸ These views were evident in his approach to clothing consumption: in October 1948, when asked about his attitude towards clothes, he freely admitted that he was "determined" to evade regulations by shopping abroad.¹⁷⁹ Roodhouse emphasises the diminishing motivation of the British public, and specifically its middle-class sector, to comply with rationing regulations after the war.¹⁸⁰ He demonstrates

¹⁷⁴ For a comparison between income increases see: McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 62-3.

¹⁷⁵ MOA, DR 1211, replies to November 1944, October and December 1947 Directives.

¹⁷⁶ MOA, DR 2925, replies to June 1944, December 1947, October 1948, July 1950 Directives; MOA, DR 3009, replies to January 1947, October 1948 Directives.

¹⁷⁷ MOA, DR 2739, reply to January 1947 Directive; MOA, DR 2576, reply to December 1945 Directive.

¹⁷⁸ MOA, DR 2539, reply to January 1945 Directive; D 5076, diary entry dated 22 July 1946.

¹⁷⁹ MOA, DR 2539, reply to October 1948 Directive.

¹⁸⁰ Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, 208.

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that perceptions of unfairness, needs and responsibility contributed to their ability to justify the evasion of regulations. If the commodity was greatly needed, if their position compared to others was unfair or if they could argue that the responsibility for the situation lay elsewhere, they were able to participate in illegal transactions while keeping their identity as law-abiding citizens.¹⁸¹

Some of the white-collar MO panel members had certainly considered the government responsible for their deteriorating wardrobes. In surveys about the Labour government and his expectations for the future, the Birmingham buyer who had been grumbling about clothing controls attacked the government's regulations and poor planning for deteriorating standard of living, particularly addressing the issue of clothes.¹⁸² As shown in Chapter Two, government propaganda in this period placed the responsibility for the supply situation in the hands of citizens, asking them to postpone purchases to aid the economic recovery of the nation. The responses of white-collar workers to the post-war clothing situation illustrate that an increasing number of citizens were no longer willing to view the state of their wardrobe as their responsibility, and were more likely to hold the government accountable for their ongoing inability to renew their wardrobes. While this does not mean that they all evaded regulations, it suggests that they were finding these regulations less and less acceptable.

The scholarly focus on demobilized soldiers rather than those around them overlooks the impact that demobilization had on the home market clothing situation. As I have shown, men who were not conscripted during the war were especially vulnerable to its consumer shortages. The post-war clothing market prioritised demobilised soldiers over

¹⁸¹ Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, 195-210.

¹⁸² MOA, DR 1216, replies to October 1947 and January 1948 Directives.

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civilian men who stayed on the home front. Men in white-collar occupations, who linked their appearance to professional pride, saw the newly demobbed soldiers as doubly offensive – the production of demob suits was starving the civilian market, increasing problems of shortages and production delays, while the suits themselves, glaringly visible on city streets, made civilian shabbiness more pronounced. The continuing scarcity at the end of the war made white-collar workers critical and impatient towards the government and the trade; they were ready to go back to the pre-war life they remembered, and that included being better dressed. Respectable suits were becoming rare and British men grew shabby. This shabbiness was beginning to gain public attention since it was threatening one of Britain's potential post-war markets.

Reviving Menswear for the Export Market

While British men were growing shabbier, the British government began investing in the development of the menswear trade. Unfortunately for the shabby men at home, the government's focus was on manufacturing menswear for export. This created a sharp contrast between the image of British menswear and the appearance of British men, since the interests of the export market encouraged a resumption of pre-war standards of appearance while many men were still struggling to maintain decent clothes. Differences between those who could and those who could not afford to return to pre-war dress standards became even more pronounced once rationing was abolished. Pre-war norms of appropriate and respectable appearance, particularly where evening dress was concerned, were reinstated, and men adhering to these middle-class norms embraced them once again even if they were not able to resume their own respectable appearance.

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As part of the effort to revive British industries after the war, explored in Chapter Two, the BoT shone a spotlight on menswear as a potentially strong export market. The need to improve



Figure 25 – The Menswear section in the “Britain Can Make It” exhibition. Notice the smartly dressed men in the murals on the back wall. Printed with permission from Design Council Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives.

efficiency meant that the government helped British industries seek advice on production and design from the United States. A specialised team of menswear garment makers was sent there in 1948 to learn about new production methods.¹⁸³ Similar ideas about the need to improve productivity were being voiced by the menswear trade itself since 1945.¹⁸⁴ After the war, productivity became important as part of the effort to re-establish Britain as a global leader in the menswear trade. The BoT wanted to secure export markets by showing them what Britain was able to produce. As part of the “Britain Can Make It” exhibition, Ashley Havinden designed the menswear exhibition, which celebrated urban masculinity and showcased all types of English menswear – sportswear, country clothes, business suits and evening-wear (Figure 25). He believed that “with the war over the stage is now set for England to take the lead again in men’s fashions.”¹⁸⁵ Havinden worked as a commercial

¹⁸³ Anglo-American Council on Productivity, *Productivity Team Report: Men’s Clothing* (London: Anglo-American Council on Productivity, 1950), inner cover.

¹⁸⁴ “Efficiency in Business,” *Tailor & Cutter*, 5 October 1945.

¹⁸⁵ Havinden, “Men’s Wear,” 74.

artist for the menswear retailer Simpson before the war, an association which is evident in the space he created. The space was dominated by the drawings of Max Hoff, with whom Havinden collaborated for the firm's advertisements. The identification between this brand and upper middle-class professionals meant that the revival of British menswear reflected the standards of appearance that governed the lives of white-collar workers.

If Britain was to regain its export markets, it had to protect its reputation for well-dressed men. The early wartime debate about standardised suits, considered in Chapter One, highlighted the influence of home market consumption on the export market. After the war, this idea gained more traction. In August 1947, Laurence Wild pointed out in *Men Only* that, "Englishmen are in danger of losing their reputation of being among the best dressed men in the world," as he offered his readers style advice.¹⁸⁶ We have seen earlier that the situation at home after the war meant that the menswear market was short of materials, and despite consumer controls, was unable to meet home demand.¹⁸⁷ As one cartoonist pointed out, if "anywhere abroad men insist on the hats that the English wear," Englishmen were to remain hatless and badly dressed (Figure 26). Shortages were at least partly the result of exports. Internal BoT correspondence from 1948 suggests that men's clothes from worsted materials were scarce and in very high demand on the home market.¹⁸⁸ Yet they were also in high demand for export, "and in present circumstances the export trade must have first claim."¹⁸⁹ The need to improve the appearance of British men, however, was presented as a problem of consumer taste. Both the trade and the BoT

¹⁸⁶ Laurence Wild, "Consider Your Appearance," *Men Only*, August 1947.

¹⁸⁷ Editorial, *Tailor & Cutter*, 2 January 1948.

¹⁸⁸ For example: 'Extracts from R.D.O.'s Reports,' dated 29 December 1948, TNA, BT 64/2014.

¹⁸⁹ Undated transcription of a question posted at the House of Commons, TNA, BT 64/2014.

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emphasised the need to educate the public as a way of improving exports.¹⁹⁰ This idea also underscored the “Britain Can Make It” exhibition, the focus of which was promoting British commodities to the global market, but which was open to the public as a way of cultivating good taste among British citizens. While the government could provide guidance in matters of taste, men were responsible for constructing and maintaining their appearance. The connection between the export and home markets sheds additional light on the tension between exports and controls explored in Chapter Two. Men in white-collar employment would have been happy to improve the standard of clothes in their wardrobes. Under post-war shortages, which owed much to the needs of the export market, they had difficulty doing so. Men were expected to remain well dressed in support of exports, while accepting shortages in the very commodities they needed to buy in order to be well dressed.



Figure 26 – Cartoon by William Scully, ridiculing the paradoxes of export, *Punch*, 4 September 1946.

¹⁹⁰ “Direct Link with Consumer Urged,” and “Federation of Clothing Designers and Production Managers,” *Tailor & Cutter*, 2 March 1945; “Council of Industrial Design,” *Tailor & Cutter*, 2 February 1945.

The pressure on men to improve their appearance involved a revival of pre-war standards of everyday dress alongside the reassertion of norms of formality, which had been neglected during the war. In March 1947, *Tailor & Cutter* magazine published a comic article that appealed to men to take care of their appearance. The ideal look suggested by the article included well-made suits in fashionable styles that were well-pressed and in good condition. The writer contrasted this ideal with the men that he saw around him, who wore shabby, misshapen clothes.¹⁹¹ The trade paper also attempted to emphasise the superiority of made-to-measure and bespoke tailoring over ready-made, marking these as “the way to true sartorial success.”¹⁹² Its writers were keen to bring back evening dress, announcing that “the revival of receptions, dinners and dances is giving tailors the opportunity to show their skill in the creation of dress wear,” more than a year before sales of evening-wear began to recover.¹⁹³ Evening dress was a controversial topic in the first years after the war. Most men did not use evening dress during the war, and when the war was over, many could no longer use their old evening dress, with rationing making it difficult to replace.¹⁹⁴ There was considerable apprehension about its return due to these conditions.¹⁹⁵ But the return to evening dress was a potential machinery of advertisement for the global market, helping Britain regain its reputation for fine tailoring.¹⁹⁶ The return of British men to the formality of pre-war days had the potential of securing an export market for British menswear, thereby associating the return to pre-war standards with support for the economic welfare of the nation.

¹⁹¹ “Pulling Your Leg!,” *Tailor & Cutter*, 21 March 1947.

¹⁹² Editorial, *Tailor & Cutter*, 2 January 1948.

¹⁹³ “The Return to Formality,” *Tailor & Cutter*, 21 March 1947.

¹⁹⁴ Quidnune, “The Battle of Evening Wear,” A Tailor’s Notebook, *Tailor & Cutter*, 4 January 1946. See also: “Optional: A Suitable Story for Xmas,” *Manufacturing Clothier*.

¹⁹⁵ P E Kroyer, “Evening Dress,” Letter to the Editor, *Times*, 26 September 1945; “Evening Dress Rule ‘Unreasonable’,” *Times*, 12 October 1945.

¹⁹⁶ Quidnune, “The Battle of Evening Wear.”

As discussed above, many men were eager to return to pre-war standards of dress. The readers of *Men Only* began pressing the magazine for style advice from 1946.¹⁹⁷ Yet there was little chance of success in improving men's style at a time when the majority of the population had trouble making ends meet and half the population could not obtain clothes because of rising prices.¹⁹⁸ MO's white-collar respondents recounted their dilemmas in coping with the renewed endorsement of standards and the persistent shortages and high prices. The Sheffield accountant, who was determined to evade controls when rationing was in place, would not go through the trouble of replenishing his stock of evening-wear, but found that this placed him at a disadvantage among other respectable citizens. In March 1949, he was invited to the Lord Mayor's ball, after which he wrote in his diary,

Evening dress was stated to be optional and from this I concluded that there would be plenty of lounge suits. So I went along in a brown suit. Out of all the crowd there, I was the only one dressed like this, and I felt in not so splendid isolation. I did not dare to step on to the dance floor until late in the evening [...]¹⁹⁹

The most dignified citizens in the community had evidently resumed the appearance that identified them within their communities before the war.²⁰⁰ Government reports indicate that professional men, rather than parting with pre-war dress norms, rented their evening-wear – a cheaper option that was also coupon free when rationing was still in place.²⁰¹ Pressures to resume pre-war standards of respectable appearance meant that men who could

¹⁹⁷ "'Rambler' Again," Correspondence, *Men Only*, April 1946; S. V., "Men's Clothes," Correspondence, *Men Only*, August 1947.

¹⁹⁸ TNA, RG 23/102.

¹⁹⁹ MOA, D 5076, diary entry dated 30 March 1949.

²⁰⁰ See also a similar situation described in Chapter One.

²⁰¹ 'Extracts from R.D.O's Reports,' dated November 1948, TNA, BT 64/2014.

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not meet these standards felt embarrassed and out of place, but not that they abandoned those social norms. In July 1950, many of MO's white-collar panellists demonstrated a complete return to pre-war perceptions of appropriate appearance, and even if they could not meet those standards, they tended to judge others in reference to ideals of respectability.²⁰² This was as true for older men, who carried with them their pre-war standards, as it was for younger men in white-collar professions, who spent more years under austerity conditions than in pre-war employment.²⁰³ Even if clothing conventions of white-collar respectability were loosened by prolonged shortages and rationing, by 1950 they were completely reinstated. Those who considered themselves respectable citizens did their best to assume a respectable appearance.

After the war, the economic crisis prevented the return to pre-war standards. Discussions of the menswear trade show that the trade and the government had an interest in the renewal of men's wardrobes and the return to pre-war standards of appearance. Government plans to regain the menswear export market depended in part on the ability to maintain Britain's reputation of sartorial excellence and several government schemes implemented this aim, including, as discussed above, the demobilisation scheme. While the government felt that men needed to be educated on matters of taste, men were simply eager to return to pre-war habits – not in order to aid export, but in order to keep up appearances in their social environment. The standards that dictated the appearance of respectability in the context of white-collar work before the war remained the ideal men were expected to imitate, and although many men struggled to meet that standard, they embraced it as a marker of status and character in the national community.

²⁰² MOA, DR 2694, reply to July 1950 Directive; MOA, DR 2771, reply to July 1950 Directive.

²⁰³ MOA, DR 2923, reply to July 1950 Directive; MOA, DR 3434, reply to July 1950 Directive.

Conclusion

Professional dress standards did not disappear at the beginning of the Second World War. Although men in white-collar occupations may have understood the urgency of national needs throughout the 1940s, they did not replace the social norms that dictated their lives before the war with the new standard of civic behaviour advocated by the government. The need for BoT officials to scold British men for their attitude to clothing regulations demonstrates that appeals to accept shabbiness were ineffective. War did not prevent them from worrying about keeping up appearances just as the post-war economic crisis did not postpone their need to maintain social standards of respectability. Even young men, who spent a large proportion of their life under the restrictions of austerity, felt pressure to adhere to certain standards of appearance after the war. At a time when purchasing power was still recovering from the aftermath of the war, governmental attempts to distribute taste were more likely to cause resentment among this class because of the inability to purchase more than bare necessities. Although the government needed the cooperation of citizens of all classes for the country to survive the economic crisis, the precedence of personal over national problems was an obstacle difficult to overcome.

The persistence of dress codes among male white-collar workers did not mean that all these men were resentful towards the government, or that they evaded regulations. It does mean that they found it difficult to reconcile their status within their occupational community and the demands of long-term regulations on dress. The contrast between the regulations and pre-war standards of appearance emphasised the centrality of appearances in white-collar employment. In this context, a neat and clean appearance represented respectability, and its absence could make it difficult for men to improve their position.

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Their dress troubles were personal in the sense that they undermined these men's status in their social environment. They continued to buy the best quality clothes they could, even if the best available was not as good as it was before the war. They continued to maintain a neat and clean appearance, even if that required more work and had less pleasing results. When they made do with an old suit or mended their clothes, they continued to follow the established rules of conduct that governed respectability rather than redefining their outlook to suit the terms that government agents used. They constructed their appearance according to old, rather than new, standards of civic conduct. The cartoons that portrayed shabby respectable men being mistaken for vagrants, mentioned in Chapter Two, come to mind here. Regulations made common conduct more difficult to follow, the correct appearance more difficult to achieve, but they did not redefine the appearance to which men aspired, despite the visible impact it had on them. It did not redefine the appearance of respectability.

The case of civilian men in white-collar work offers a new perspective on the way citizens dealt with the need to defer clothing consumption. It highlights the unique problems of male consumers, who experienced different burdens to women. Yet, the space devoted to their grievances reflects the level of social status they still held, despite the new wartime hierarchies. They used it to express their own expectations from the government. If the government controlled the market, it had the responsibility to enable them to keep up appearances. The final chapter will explore the plights of a group with very little social status, which encountered greater difficulties with government policy and priorities.

Chapter 5: “A Nuisance to the Board of Trade”: Fair Shares, Rationing and the Outsize

Population

If state definitions of good sartorial citizenship could coincide with pre-war definitions of moral civic behaviour when it came to young women’s appearance, or contradict them in the case of white-collar men, state definitions could also be the outcome of what good citizens looked like. When citizens did not fit into this pattern of appearance, they could be deemed unworthy of the same provisions of clothing as other citizens. This was the case when under clothes rationing, shortages of clothes in outsize ranges delineated the limits of the concept of “fair shares for all.” In contemporary terms, “outsize” referred to anything that was larger than normal. In the context of clothing, it meant garment sizes that were larger than stock sizes normally found in stores. As discussed in Chapter One, large bodied citizens were associated before the war with conspicuous consumption and selfish behaviour. The treatment of these citizens under clothes rationing shows how these perceptions affected their access to clothes. The group of consumers wearing these sizes was a minority – 29 percent of the adult civilian female population and 9 percent of the adult civilian male population.¹ But while a minority, these percentages represented a significant quantity of people. At their worst, outsize shortages affected approximately six million adults in Britain. As detailed in Chapter Two, the Board of Trade’s formation of clothes rationing as a scheme of fair shares concentrated on curtailing consumption as a way of ensuring that all citizens had access to essential clothing. Although the previous case studies demonstrated that not all consumers happily accepted the path of moral consumption and sacrifice suggested by the term fair shares, civil servants at the BoT

¹ TNA, BT 64/4094, “Outsize Survey, 1943”; CSO, *Statistical Digest of the War*, 1, table 1, 2, table 3.

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expected citizens to consume in a conscientious manner that supported the system of clothing controls and sustained Britain's fragile economy. Good citizens were fair consumers, whose appearance reflected their participation in the promotion of fair shares. The appearance of citizens who wore outsize clothes represented excessive, rather than fair, consumption.

For the rationing system, the concept of fairness dictated a flat-rate adult ration, which made fairness analogous to uniformity. Each citizen received an identical ration, which marked the limits of legal consumption. At the same time, the Board was able to adjust the scheme to accommodate the variable needs of particular sections in the population, establishing concessions for industrial workers, children and expectant mothers. Yet the Board was not willing to consider outsize consumers as equally worthy of a scheme that would accommodate their needs. While some of the other groups who received concessions represented more significant numbers in the British population, like industrial workers (ten million), others were smaller than the group of outsize consumers, like expectant mothers (around or under one million).² Other rationing schemes even made adjustments for the needs of far smaller populations, like the Ministry of Food's schemes addressing religious and dietary food requirements.³ The apathy that Board policy makers demonstrated towards outsize consumers denied them equal access to clothing and

² For industrial workers, see: British Information Services, "Current Problems of British Trade Unions," *Labour and Industry in Britain* vol. II, no. 9 (1944), 157; Children under 15 years old were about ten million as well, see: CSO, *Statistical Digest of the War*, 2, table 3); Expectant mothers averaged at 855,000 under rationing, peaking at just over a million in 1947 (CSO, *Statistical Digest of the War*, 3, table 4; "Births and Deaths," Closer: The Home of Longitudinal Research, UCL Research Institute, <https://www.closer.ac.uk/data/births-deaths/>). Similar concessions under food rationing accommodated far smaller groups.

³ See: Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 15n23; R.J. Hammond, *Food*, vol. 2, *Studies in Administration and Control* (London: HMSO, 1956), 452, 590n1, 595. According to Hammond, there were only about 100,000 vegetarians in Britain at the time. He does not mention Muslims at all, indicating this was probably a very small minority. British Jewry numbered about 385,000, see: A. H. Halsey (ed.), *British Social Trends since 1900: A Guide to the Changing Social Structure of Britain*, 2nd completely rev. ed (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1988), 602, table 14.17.

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marginalised their needs. The Board's vision for the clothing industry concentrated on economically produced garments and since outsize citizens could not easily fit into this vision, they were left out of the egalitarian ideal that it promised.

In the official history of British domestic industry during the Second World War, outsizes are dealt with in less than half a page. *Civil Industry and Trade* remains to date the most comprehensive guide to restrictions on the British clothing industry, despite numerous scholarly additions and expansions on various aspects of the regulations.⁴ When it discusses clothes rationing, its authors use the outsize problem as a primary example of manufacturers' problems during wartime rationing.⁵ Later on, as they discuss the production of special garments, they devote a couple of paragraphs to explain the reason outsizes caused a particular problem and enumerate the steps the Board of Trade took to circumvent it.⁶ This terse account obscures the persistence of shortages, the effect these shortages had on a growing proportion of the British adult population, and the Board's hesitation in introducing a solution to this problem. Historians who have written since Hargreaves and Gowing's 1952 volume had also overlooked this issue, despite its presence as a consumer problem into the late 1940s. It is worth noting that Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, whose extended account of rationing covers wartime as well as post-war rationing, does not address this problem at all, despite writing extensively about obesity, weight and diet. Christopher Sladen's account of the Utility Scheme only mentions in passing that a couple of MoI monthly reports recounted "complaints about the lack of

⁴ The most prominent are: Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*; Sladen, *The Conscripted of Fashion*.

⁵ Hargreaves and Gowing, *Civil Industry and Trade*, 311.

⁶ Hargreaves and Gowing, 465.

larger-size women's clothes.”⁷ The growing field of Fat Studies and growing historiographical interest in body shape make this an opportune moment to address this gap in the scholarship.

While this chapter will work to correct this oversight, its aim is to understand why outsize consumers were denied their fair share of clothes, why their problems were treated as trivial and how they responded to that treatment. As I have done in the two previous case studies, I will examine public responses to government policy and to the set of expectations it implied. Alongside the point of view of citizens, however, this chapter will also explore the motivations behind the Board of Trade's handling of this problem and the way pre-war conceptions of the clothed body influenced decision making processes. It will review the outsize problem, tracing its origin in the formulation of the clothes rationing scheme, examining the response of garment makers and retailers and illustrating the way consumers suffered from and reacted to this problem from its first appearance and until the end of the decade. The clothes rationing system made the production of outsize clothes disadvantageous to anyone who made garments – from tailors to mass manufacturers. As a result, the production of such garments fell far below the figures needed to keep the outsize population well clothed, creating a shortage that outlasted rationing. The various solutions that the Board of Trade designed to relieve this shortage did not succeed in supplying the outsize population with adequate clothing. This chapter will address the Board's reluctance to take responsibility over shortages as the main reason for this shortcoming. Civil servants at the Board of Trade introduced concessions to help the outsize population but were also reluctant to publicise these concessions. They sought the advice of the clothing trade to find solutions to the problem but were reluctant to implement the solutions offered. They sought

⁷ Sladen, *The Conscripted Fashion*, 48.

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information to ascertain the size of the population affected, but did not use this information to ensure adequate supplies. I will argue that this ambivalence was influenced by the reluctance of civil servants to treat the needs of the outside population as equally legitimate as those of other populations who required special clothing concessions, thereby failing to implement the policy of fair shares.⁸

While Board of Trade officials easily accepted the fairness of supplying additional coupons to industrial workers, expectant mothers or growing children, when they encountered requests for supplementary coupons from individuals who were unable to find ready-made clothes to fit them, they were often suspicious and reluctant to help, making clear distinctions between citizens worthy of assistance, and those unworthy. If in the case of other populations, concessions were treated as contributing to “fair shares,” in the case of the outside population, supplements to the ration were viewed as undermining that principal. Citizens seeking concessions were viewed as lazy, infantile and unwilling to make compromises at a time of national emergency. These citizens, however, maintained that they were patriotic citizens. They adopted the Board’s definitions of good citizenship, and expressed their right to have equal access to clothes within that context. They used various channels to convey that stance to the Board: from letters to Board of Trade offices and to various newspapers, to mobilising various organisations or their local Members of Parliament.

Tracing the sources needed to cover the administrative perspective for this issue was similar to researching other aspects of this project. Although some lacunae remain, the National Archive holds sufficient documentation to make sense of the problem and its origin. Examining the perspectives of individuals, however, proves more complex. The

⁸ Hargreaves and Gowing, *Civil Industry and Trade*, 317-22.

MOA, an invaluable source for earlier chapters about men in white-collar employment and young working-class women, contains little information. There is no reliable way of identifying outsize Mass Observers from their writings and it is rare to find individuals who wrote openly about their weight and figure. On this issue the press is an infinitely more useful source. The national and local press covered the problems that outsize consumers experienced, and the local papers contained letters to the editors by outsize individuals sharing their consumer misadventures. Coverage was uneven among the different papers, indicating which papers thought their audiences would find these stories interesting. Local papers devoted more space to this issue than the national dailies. The only two national papers to routinely run stories about outsize consumer problems were the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Herald*, papers supporting the Labour movement. As a result, the voices of outsize citizens in this chapter are often screened through an alien perspective – that of the newspaper editors, that of the politician or that of the civil servant.

The scarcity of research about clothes for consumers with larger figures, male or female, is not unique to rationing and other clothing controls. While historical studies of weight, diet and health are abundant, scholars have overlooked the history of the outsize garment industry.⁹ At the time of writing, Hannah Wroe is the only scholar to have touched upon this issue in the British context in a paper about pattern-making for older women presented to the Everyday Fashion conference in 2019.¹⁰ Globally the situation is similar. Recently, Lauren Downing Peters conducted a ground-breaking study of outsize garments

⁹ See essays in: Derek J. Oddy Peter J. Atkins and Virginie Amilien (eds.), *The Rise of Obesity in Europe: A Twentieth Century Food History* (ICREFH Symposium, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009).

¹⁰ Hannah Wroe, “Making Clothes for the Older Woman: Post-War Pattern Cutting and Dressmaking Home Instruction Texts,” Everyday Fashion Conference, University of Huddersfield, 27 June, 2019.

for women in the United States in the interwar period.¹¹ Only the latter work was published, but these studies indicate a growing interest in this issue, perhaps instigated by the body-positive movement of recent years.¹² These studies come from the field of fashion studies and focus exclusively on women. This chapter will differ from them by discussing the issue from the perspective of both the male and female consumer.

The scarcity of research about large-sized garments could be the result of the wider perception of the fat body as an unfashionable body. This was true for the trans-war period as it is today. As discussed in Chapter One, the association between large bodies and consumption in the pre-war era was one of unwarranted excess. Large-bodied women could only achieve a fashionable body by losing weight, and this was also the path marked for large-bodied men if they wanted to achieve a masculine body. For women at least, fashionable styles were not made in large sizes. Beyond being considered unfashionable, body fat denoted conspicuous consumption at the expense of others, laziness and selfishness, and in fiction, it often marked the antagonist of the good citizen.

Throughout this chapter I will use the terms “outsize” or “larger” to describe this population and the clothes sizes they wore. Scholars in the field of Fat Studies tend to prefer the term “fat,” but while I support the need to use that word as a way of establishing it as a positive signifier of identity, I found it to be inappropriate here.¹³ Contemporaries rarely used that term, and when they did, it was used derogatorily. “Outsize” and “larger,”

¹¹ Downing Peters, “Flattering the Figure, Fitting in.”

¹² See for instance: Rachel Colls, “Outsize/Outside: Bodily Bignesses and the Emotional Experiences of British Women Shopping for Clothes,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 13, no. 5 (2006): 529-545. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09663690600858945>.

¹³ Robyn Longhurst, “Fat Bodies: Developing Geographical Research Agendas,” *Progress in Human Geography* 29, no. 3 (2005): 249-51.

however, were used routinely by this population and the general public as neutral terms. They therefore seem more appropriate to use here.

Considering the Outsize Population

From 1941, people whose body measurements did not fit stock sizes began finding it increasingly difficult to obtain clothes that fitted them. Their difficulties emerged due to several factors: the calculation of coupon pointing in the rationing system, the conflict between the interests of garment makers and those of the controller, the Board of Trade, and a lack of accurate information about the distribution of body measurements in the population. As a result, makers and manufacturers found it disadvantageous to make garments in large sizes, creating a shortage that had an impact on outsize consumers' ability to buy clothes.

Two of the issues that affected the manufacture of outsize garments were part of the planning of the rationing scheme, and in particular, the pointing system by which it operated. A couple of important elements in the operation of the pointing system were problematic when it came to outsize garments: the assignment of coupons to commodity and the passing back of those coupons from consumer to producer. In 1951, one of the prominent statisticians who worked on the scheme at the BoT, Brian Reddaway, published an article that reflected on the operation of rationing during and after the war.¹⁴ The initial work of the Statistics Department was done with very limited data, requiring many adjustments later on to work in practice. In his essay, Reddaway emphasised that the

¹⁴ Reddaway was a part of the BoT's Statistics Department (later the Statistics Division) between 1940 and 1947 and was involved in planning and adjusting the clothes rationing scheme. Alec Cairncross, "Economists in Wartime," *Contemporary European History* 4, no. 1 (1995): 33; R.C.O. Matthews, "Reddaway, (William) Brian (1913–2002), economist," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 5 Jan. 2006; accessed 21 May, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/77063>.

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assignment of coupons was guided by the idea of an “unchanging characteristic.” For the sake of enforcement, argued Reddaway, it was important to attach the point-value of a rationed commodity to a quality that did not change as the product was transferred and processed through the supply chain.¹⁵ In the case of clothes rationing, that quality was cloth yardage. The problem with yardage was that it could be easily measured when the product was still in the form of cloth. When it came to assigning pointing to a made garment, the relationship between yardage and coupons was less straightforward. As Reddaway pointed out, a clothes rationing system of the kind that operated in Britain between 1941 and 1949 “will only work if the pointing for made-up garments is kept in line with that for the cloth from which they are made.”¹⁶ This meant that if a blouse took two yards to make, its coupon value should be equal to the value of two yards. However, since garments come in different sizes to fit diverse measurements, this meant that not all garments of the same type could be made from the same amount of cloth.

The BoT therefore had to decide whether to give similar garments the same pointing or assign coupon value on the basis of size and cloth use. In the interest of fair shares and simplicity, the Board opted for the former: each type of garment was given a coupon value that remained constant between various sizes. Board officials explained to consumers that this represented fair shares, since “even though they use more material, [...] [garments] in large sizes are couponed at the same rate as similar garments in smaller sizes.”¹⁷ Therefore, consumers’ physical size did not affect their ability to buy clothes.¹⁸

¹⁵ Reddaway, “Rationing,” 194-5.

¹⁶ Reddaway, 197.

¹⁷ ‘Letters,’ *Daily Herald*, 19 April, 1943.

¹⁸ See also: ‘Draft Stock Letter,’ TNA, BT 64/1361, “Outsizes.”

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While this meant that coupon values were not attached to the amount of cloth that a specific garment used, they were still attached to an element of yardage. A document pertaining to the outsize problem dated February 1945 asserted that the coupon value given to a suit (26 coupons) was based on the “weighted average of men’s sizes,” and covered a chest girth of 38 inches.¹⁹ Official communications with tailors clarify that this was based on the average use of cloth “in normal trade [...] including large, medium and small customers.”²⁰ For women, the average size that was covered by coupon values was probably a size W, equivalent to measurements of 36 inches bust girth and 40 inches hip girth. Of the coded sizes assigned to women’s clothes, discussed in Chapter One, the Woman size (W), was most commonly used as the normal size for trade purposes – the size that patterns and cutting instructions were given for.²¹ In the lack of direct documentation on this matter, it is reasonable to assume that this was the size used to calculate coupon pointing. Although the above quote asserts that pointing was based on the average use of cloth over the range of sizes rather than the use of cloth for the average size, later accounts of these calculations suggest that the latter was true.²²

This method of coupon assignment meant there was danger there would be a gap between the pointing of a garment and the physical amount of cloth it consumed. Since human beings differ in height as well as girth, garments that needed an excess of cloth in either direction could potentially destabilise the system. If makers and manufacturers that

¹⁹ ‘Proposed Issue of Extra Coupons,’ TNA, BT 64/1361.

²⁰ Reply to a letter dated 21 April 1944, TNA, BT 64/1361.

²¹ See for instance: Phillip Dellafera, “Ladies’ Garments Waistcoat Cutting,” in Bridgland and Whife, *The Modern Tailor, Outfitter and Clothier*, 2:98, 101; Ursula Bloom, “Two Way Beauty,” *Woman’s Own*, 17 April 1942; “In Search of a Suit,” *Woman’s Own*, 15 February 1946; “Normal Figure,” *Tailor & Cutter*, 22 June 1945. Commercial patterns tended to use bust measurements, while professional pattern instructions used either bust or hip, depending on the pattern. Size W is roughly equivalent to modern UK size 12.

²² Hargreaves and Gowing, *Civil Industry and Trade*, 307-8; Meynell, *My Lives*, 268-9.

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produced these larger garments could not compensate for them by making and selling smaller garments, they were at risk of accruing a coupon deficit, and would have been unable to replace their stock.

The BoT did not entirely overlook this problem. A list of potential complaints that the Board's publicity department prepared in late May 1941 included "the disappearance of large sizes" as a problem for which the BoT may have to find a solution.²³ The Consumer Needs Section (CNS) also saw height differences in men as a potential problem from the early days of planning. In his memoir about his work in the section, Francis Meynell recalled that the Statistics Department reassured him that "the problem is self-solving."²⁴ Ideally, garments for people shorter than the average would take up less cloth, and balance the additional cloth that larger garments required. The statistician asserted that "there are twice as many" extremely short people as extremely tall people in the population. Meynell noted his suspicion that this solution was more theoretical than practical, but resolved the story by mentioning a concession that was introduced at a later stage.²⁵ Large sizes – whether by height or by girth – would soon create problems in the production of garments for both men and women.

Without any documents from the Statistics Department, it is difficult to determine the basis for the statistician's confidence. Although there were figures concerning men's height and girth, these relied on data from the forces, and although they covered a wide range, were not representative of the population as a whole.²⁶ From later documentation it is clear that there was a problem in obtaining reliable anthropometric data that was

²³ 'Clothes Rationing – Possible Difficulties,' TNA, BT 131/39.

²⁴ Meynell, *My Lives*, 269.

²⁵ Meynell, 269.

²⁶ Aldrich, "History of Sizing Systems," 42.

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representative of the population. In 1943, the BoT commissioned a survey into the girth and height of the adult civilian population.²⁷ It is unlikely that the Board would have commissioned the survey had reliable and complete data about body measurements of civilians existed. Since the survey used a small sample, the writer indicated that the data might not be reliable at its margins, despite the fact that the survey was specifically ordered to assess those margins. Since they were at the margins of the common range of measurements the outsize population was anyway likely to be under represented.²⁸

Problems in obtaining information about the distribution of sizes meant that throughout the rationing period, there were inconsistencies in citing of figures of the outsize population. In August 1941, for instance, Lanarkshire's *Sunday Post* commented that although "London claims" there were "only 120,000" outsize women, the number was actually closer to a million.²⁹ Other numbers indicated throughout the period were five million,³⁰ 30 percent of the adult female population³¹ and less than 2 percent of the adult population,³² with only the last figure addressing men as well as women. Partially, these inconsistencies were the result of differing definitions of outsize, which relied on either height, girth, weight or various combinations of the three, and did not always begin counting the outsize population at the same measurement. I will show below that the BoT's definition of outsize garments changed several times over the period and was inconsistent between schemes aimed at consumers and schemes aimed at manufacturers. Hargreaves and Gowing note that the calculation of pointing was based on figures from the 1935 and

²⁷ TNA, BT 64/4094; Minute dated 7 April, 1943, TNA, BT 64/1361.

²⁸ TNA, BT 64/4094. See also: Letter from Geoffrey Morant to William B. Fagg dated 12 November 1944, in TNA, BT 64/1361.

²⁹ "Scotland's Big Women," *Sunday Post*, 31 August 1941.

³⁰ "Good News for Five Million," *Daily Mirror*, 20 November, 1948.

³¹ 'Women's Outsize Garments: Meeting held at Horseferry House on Wednesday July 10th 1946,' TNA, BT 64/1361 (roughly 5.5 million women, see: CSO, *Annual Abstract of Statistics No. 85*, 9, table 8).

³² Less than 2 percent: Morant to Fagg, TNA, BT 64/1361.

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1937 Census of Production that did not provide information about demand – the latter being based on “inspired guesswork.”³³ Hector Leak and Reddaway – the main statisticians at the BoT’s Statistics Department during the war – had no training or experience related to the clothing trade, and since pointing was assigned without consulting the trade, it is difficult to believe all their calculations were accurate.³⁴

The 1943 Outsize Survey and the larger *Women’s Measurements and Sizes* survey conducted in 1951 demonstrate that the Board’s supposition that there was a balance between large and small sizes was ill considered. Figure 27 gives examples from the 1943 survey, since it contained data for both men and women, but comparable data from the 1951 survey displayed similar distribution patterns.³⁵ The statistician was correct to point out that there were more men below average height than above it, although the proportions were not as extreme as he portrayed them. This was true for girth differences as well. Yet while these proportions suggest that the population with smaller measurements could easily compensate for the population with larger measurements, the distribution graphs make it clear that this would not have been possible for girth measurements. Although there were more people smaller than average for the four girth measurements shown below, most of their measurements were immediately below the average size, while individuals larger than average covered a wider range of sizes. In terms of fabric, this meant that sizes at the small end of the scale used a similar amount of fabric to that used on average sizes, and on which coupon pointing relied, while sizes at the large end of the scale needed significantly more fabric than average sizes needed.

³³ Hector Leak, “The Sources and Nature of Statistical Information in Special Fields of Statistics: Statistics of the Census of Production and Distribution,” *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Series A (General)* 112, no. 1 (1949): 68; Hargreaves and Gowing, *Civil Industry and Trade*, 307-8.

³⁴ Meynell, *My Lives*, 268; Hargreaves and Gowing, *Civil Industry and Trade*, 308.

³⁵ Board of Trade, *Women’s Measurements and Sizes* (London: HMSO, 1957), 10, table 2.6.

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Even if larger sizes should have theoretically been kept in balance by smaller sizes, in practice, there was less likely to be a balance in the case of bespoke and other types of small-scale manufacturing like dressmaking. Meynell observed that “this meant that every time a giant went to order a suit he had to take with him two dwarves to order theirs.”³⁶ While Meynell’s description was crude, he highlighted an important issue – makers would have only been able to supply a person of large measurements if their clientele was well distributed across the size chart, and if orders were balanced between large and small customers within each supply period. Although the numbers could balance each other on the macro scale, this did not mean that a balance was possible for individual makers. It was also not possible for outsize specialists, who did not make small sizes at all.

This issue was a result of the unchanging characteristic Reddaway described. Setting the coupon value of cloth yardage throughout the system ensured that “honest traders” were only able to replace their stock, so that it was impossible for businesses to expand or accumulate quantities of cloth or clothing by legal means.³⁷ As a side effect, this meant that, unlike monetary transactions, coupon transactions did not produce a profit, which denied traders an important safety net. In the context of outsize garments, it meant that a series of purchases from large customers could significantly deplete a tailor’s business, which made them reluctant to produce large sizes.

Makers and journalists associated with the various aspects of the clothing trade were quick to recognise this problem. An office worker from Birmingham reported that his tailor complained that: “the coupon scale was worked out by a lot of bungling amateurs,” and that

³⁶ Meynell, *My Lives*, 269.

³⁷ Reddaway, “Rationing,” 191fn1, 194.

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a suit for an outsize customer cost the tailor more coupons than its worth.³⁸ It made little economic sense for tailors to sell suits at a coupon loss without any confidence that the losses could be recovered, a problem acknowledged by the NFMT in 1944. The NFMT noted that “As a result some tailors were refusing orders from the outsize man, and ready-made clothes were no use to him.”³⁹ Although ready-made garments’ manufacturers had the advantage of being able to cut their fabric to the best economical advantage, they soon encountered similar problems, which made them reluctant to produce large sizes. Whether a dress required little more than a square yard or seven square yards, it returned the same amount of coupons.⁴⁰ If the use of cloth could not be balanced, it meant a deficit of coupons across the trade. Firms specialising in large sizes would experience particular want, since they could not balance large garments with smaller sizes, which they did not produce. Yet, even if firms produced a range of sizes, it was more profitable to concentrate on smaller sizes, which anyway represented the majority of consumers.

These problems were imposed on a trade that outsize consumers already found difficult to navigate. As discussed in Chapter One, ready-made women’s wear was produced in a limited range of sizes, and it was common to distinguish models in large sizes from models in smaller sizes. Some firms charged larger sums for outsize garments than they did for equivalent garments in stock sizes, a difference that represented the significant increase in the use of material beyond a certain size.⁴¹ Differential treatment was also common in the menswear trade. In wholesale tailoring firms like Burton, where the price of a suit was low and pre-determined, shop assistants were instructed to discourage

³⁸ MOA, D5176, 19 October, 1941.

³⁹ “Defining the ‘O.S.’ Man,” *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 12 April, 1944.

⁴⁰ “Eating Less to Be Slim,” *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 6 August, 1941.

⁴¹ See for instance: Pontings Advert, *Daily Mirror*, 22 May 1939; Leodian Advert, *Daily Mirror*, 22 April 1939.

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men over a certain girth to order a suit.⁴² Difficulties in obtaining outer garments in the right size could be mitigated before the war by buying from a private tailor or dressmaker, but these types of businesses were significantly more susceptible to coupon deficits. They were also in significant disadvantage compared with all forms of mass-manufacturing, which the BoT explicitly prioritised during the war.⁴³ The structure of the rationing system therefore created a problem for makers of outsize garments and by implication for their customers. Yet, while both consumers and makers raised their issues with the BoT, there were stark differences in the way they were received.

⁴² Honeyman, "Following Suit," 438-9.

⁴³ See for instance: "No More Pleated Skirts," *Daily Mirror*, March 4, 1942.

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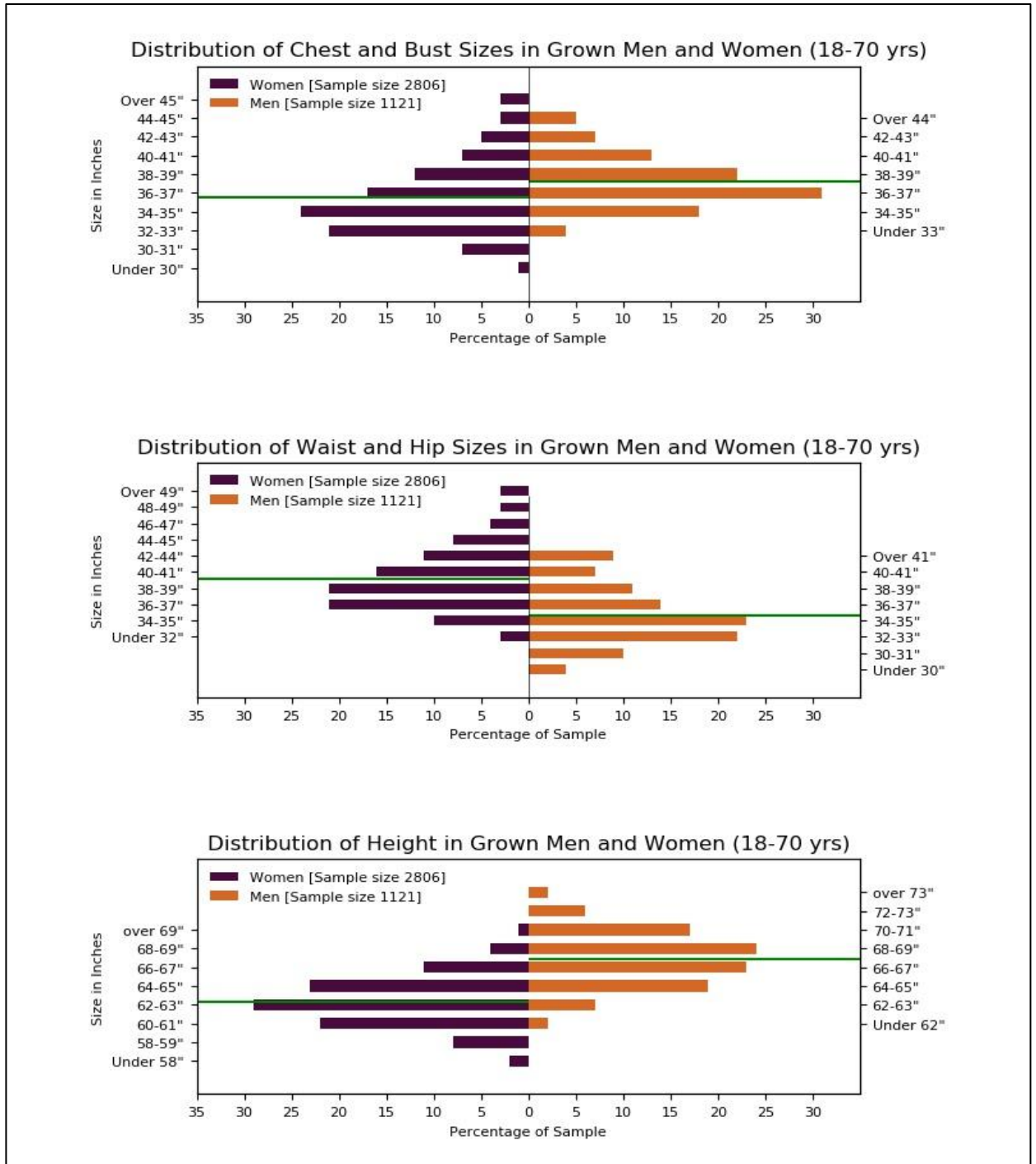


Figure 27 – Distribution of body measurements from the 1943 Outsize Survey. The two charts at the top show the distribution of girth measurements in the sample. The charts at the bottom of the page shows height measurements. The left-hand side of the charts displays information about women, and the right-hand side displays information about men. The thin horizontal green line represents the average measurement. Source: TNA, BT 64/4094.

Makers or Consumers? Wartime Beneficiaries of Outsize Concessions

Since the BoT did not involve the clothing trade in the planning of rationing, negotiations about how to make the scheme workable ensued immediately after its announcement. The coupon deficit problem was one of the main issues raised by trade representatives. Although the Board was initially reluctant to make any concessions for the manufacture of outsize garments, makers' representatives and the BoT eventually agreed on a concession. The concession favoured large scale manufacturers who specialised in outsize garments and concentrated solely on womenswear; only minor provisions were made in the case of menswear. Although ultimately it would be outsize consumers who would suffer the consequences of inadequate manufacturing of outsize garments, the emphasis was on the interests of manufacturers rather than that of consumers. Treatment of outsize consumers reflected civil servants' belief that their complaints were not genuine, that they sought preferential treatment they did not deserve and were responsible for their own plight. The BoT introduced concessions to alleviate the needs of outsize consumers, yet these were not perceived as a legitimate part of the rationing scheme. Outsize citizens were framed as dishonest and worthy of ridicule, in line with their pre-war image.

Consumer representation was conspicuously absent from the early debates about the problem of outsize manufacturing. In July 1941, BoT officials met with trade representatives to solve the coupon deficit problem. These debates were conducted as part of various committees set up to work out the details of clothes manufacturing and selling under the Rationing Order, which included representatives of retailers, manufacturers and suppliers. It is likely to assume that the Board was meant to represent the needs of consumers. The CNS, which Matthew Hilton portrays as the defender of consumers'

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interests within the Board, did not yet assume that title, but was already operating to investigate the effect of consumer controls on citizens.⁴⁴ However, these negotiations did not include any representative of this section, even after it officially became the CNS.⁴⁵ The interests of consumers were therefore left in the hands of officials who were mainly concerned with manufacturing.

Effectively, consumer interests were often promoted by the trade sectors in these debates rather than government representatives. This was particularly true for the sectors most likely to accrue coupon deficits: tailors, represented by T.R. Hewitt of the NFMT and manufacturers of women's outerwear represented by H.C.H. Scott of the Wholesale Fashion Trade Association. The problems of tailors, particularly in the bespoke trade, extended beyond outsize garments because of the generous use of cloth customary in that trade, but these were given little room, since it was considered politically undesirable to aid this luxury trade. Negotiations therefore centred on problems that affected the bulk of the trade. Overcoats for men and women were identified as being severely under-pointed.⁴⁶ Another urgent issue was women's dresses, where all sizes above hip measurement of 39 inches (just below average) took more coupons than the cost of the fabric, with the greatest deficits accrued on outsizes and maternity wear.⁴⁷ Contrary to the assumption of the Statistics Department, Scott noted that this was not balanced "by a saving on sizes below

⁴⁴ Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain*, 141-2; Meynell, *My Lives*, 261-3, 268-72.

⁴⁵ See: TNA, BT 131/38.

⁴⁶ 'Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the Trade Suppliers Committee,' dated 16 July 1941, TNA, BT 131/38.

⁴⁷ Notes on 'Trade Suppliers Sub-Committee on Coupon Deficits,' dated 15 July 1941, TNA, BT 131/38. See also: Board of Trade, *Women's Measurements and Sizes*, 5; TNA, BT 64/4094 (respectively).

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39 inches, owing to waste in cutting small sizes.”⁴⁸ Some concession or change in the scheme had to be made to allow large sizes to be manufactured.

Reluctantly, BoT officials acknowledged that the assigned pointing did not create a balance between small and large sizes, particularly on the level of individual manufacturers. In July 1941, the Board amended the coupon values given to overcoats (for both men and women), agreeing to introduce the new pointing at the earliest date.⁴⁹ They also introduced a concession for women’s outsize outerwear, which entitled manufacturers who produced women’s dresses and coats in large sizes to a grant of extra coupons for these garments on a monthly basis. The Board applied this concession retroactively from 1 July.⁵⁰ The concession applied to dresses “made to fit hip (body measurements) exceeding 44 inches,” as well as coats in larger sizes.⁵¹ It was amended in January 1942 and again in May 1944 to include smaller sizes, eventually including garments made to fit a 42 inch hip.⁵² The increased coupon value of coats, along with a small concession on lining materials, satisfied the menswear trade at the time, and an equivalent compensation scheme for menswear was deemed unnecessary at least until 1942.⁵³

The scheme did not apply to all firms manufacturing outsize dresses and coats for women in the same way. Specialists, who primarily manufactured large sizes had to register with the Board of Trade as such to receive compensation. Specialists were defined as those

⁴⁸ Notes on ‘Trade Suppliers Sub-Committee on Coupon Deficits,’ dated 15 July 1941, TNA, BT 131/38.

⁴⁹ ‘Trade Suppliers Committee: Minutes,’ dated 22 July 1941, and ‘Minutes of the 7th Meeting of the Trade Suppliers Committee,’ dated 1 August 1941, TNA, BT 131/38.

⁵⁰ ‘Trade Suppliers Committee: Minutes,’ dated 22 July 1941, TNA, BT 131/38.

⁵¹ ‘Board of Trade Scheme for Extra Coupons for Women’s Outsized Dresses and Coats’ and Minute written by A.C. Pomroy, dated 29 October 1942, TNA, BT 64/1361.

⁵² See: ‘Trade Suppliers Committee: Minutes,’ dated 22 July 1941, TNA, BT 131/38; ‘Board of Trade Scheme for Extra Coupons,’ TNA, BT 64/1361; ‘Coupon Allowance for Outsize Garments to be Extended,’ *Drapers’ Record*, 27 May 1944. WX was roughly equivalent to modern UK size 14 or 16.

⁵³ ‘Trade Suppliers Committee: Minutes,’ dated 22 July 1941, TNA, BT 131/38; Letter from A.C. Pomroy to I.J. Taylor dated 9 November 1942, TNA, BT 64/1361.

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whose manufacturing consisted of at least 75 percent outsize garments or maternity wear.⁵⁴ As an interim measure, manufacturers who produced a range of sizes could be compensated for coupons lost on their larger range, on the condition that these garments would amount to at least 15 percent of the makers' production.⁵⁵ The Directorate of Civilian Clothing was reluctant to regard this non-specialist compensation scheme as a permanent measure, since they thought it would create too much work for Board of Trade personnel.⁵⁶ This point had significant impact on consumer interests. Trade representatives warned Board officials that the outsize specialist trade "would not be sufficient to meet essential requirements" of the outsize population.⁵⁷ Although the Board was supposed to represent the interests of consumers, the members of the Directorate ignored the warning and hoped that "if coupons were issued to specialists registered as such [...] the number of specialists would increase sufficiently to ensure adequate supplies of outsize clothes."⁵⁸ As a safety valve, they were willing to consider compensating manufacturers who could demonstrate hardship as a result of coupon deficits.⁵⁹ Under pressure from manufacturers, however, the Board agreed to create a permanent concession for non-specialists.⁶⁰ The records available do not indicate when this concession was agreed, although negotiations probably lasted at least until early

⁵⁴ 'Minutes of the 9th Meeting of the Trade Suppliers Committee,' dated 16 August 1941, TNA, BT 64/1361. This was extended from 85 percent: 'Trade Suppliers' Sub-Committee on Coupon Deficits,' dated 15 July 1941.

⁵⁵ 'Second Meeting of the Directors,' dated 13 August 1941, 'Minutes of the 9th Meeting of the Trade Suppliers Committee,' dated 16 August 1941, 'Twenty Sixth Meeting of the Retailers' Advisory Committee on Consumer Rationing,' dated 16 September 1941, TNA, BT 64/1361.

⁵⁶ 'Second Meeting of the Directors,' dated 13 August 1941, TNA BT 64/1361.

⁵⁷ 'Trade Suppliers' Sub-Committee on Coupon Deficits,' dated 15 July 1941, TNA, BT 131/38.

⁵⁸ 'Directorate of Civilian Clothing: Second Meeting of the Directorate,' dated 13 August 1941, TNA, BT 131/38.

⁵⁹ 'Minutes of the 9th Meeting of the Trade Suppliers Committee,' dated 16 August 1941, TNA, BT 131/38.

⁶⁰ 'Twenty-Sixth Meeting of the Retailers' Advisory Committee on Consumer Rationing,' dated 16 September 1941, TNA, BT 131/38.

1942.⁶¹ Trade representatives were anxious to secure the provision so that outsize manufacture could continue, while the BoT was determined to avoid adding significant amounts of paperwork to its already busy staff. It was this consideration that restricted the group of firms which were able to claim reimbursement for outsize garments. The arrangement reached, under which firms whose outsize range covered less than 15 percent of production could not claim compensation, lasted until 1946.⁶² Firms covered by the compensation scheme represented only a small proportion of pre-war outsize manufacture.⁶³

Internal BoT documents demonstrate that civil servants at the BoT considered this concession to have settled the question of women's ready-to-wear garments in large sizes. When shortages began to appear, however, makers argued that the Board did not do enough to enable the manufacture of large sizes and that the concession was inadequate. The Wholesale Textile Association insisted that the Board did not include outsize undergarments in its schedule of production.⁶⁴ A retailer in London, specializing in outsize garments, commented that "Manufacturers are no longer producing corsets, brassier[e]s, underwear or stockings for the woman who is not stock-size." He continued to clarify that the trade concession did not solve the problem, because it did not cover the loss entirely, leaving makers at a deficit.⁶⁵

Makers who felt that they were not able to sustain the continued manufacture of outsizes solved this in one of two ways. Some stopped making outsizes. A London retailer

⁶¹ 'Draft Minutes of the 16th Meeting of the Trade Suppliers Committee,' dated 12 December 1941, TNA, BT 131/38.

⁶² 'Women's Outsize Garments,' 14 October 1946, TNA, BT 64/1361.

⁶³ 'Draft Minutes of the 16th Meeting of the Trade Suppliers Committee,' dated 12 December 1941, TNA, BT 131/38.

⁶⁴ "Women May Have to Go Hatless," *Yorkshire Post*, 21 August 1942.

⁶⁵ "Outsize," *Daily Mirror*, 23 June 1942.

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complained of having to turn away the majority of his house's outsize customers since some garments, including outer- and underwear, were no longer in production.⁶⁶ Reports that makers could not, or were unwilling to make outsize garments were common in 1942.⁶⁷ While these makers avoided losses, others found ways to roll their losses down the supply chain or onto the consumer. Both small tailors and wholesale manufacturers began demanding a coupon price to match the yardage used for the garments they made, rather than the number of coupons authorised by the BoT. The *Daily Mail* published a complaint by a retailer who spoke of this problem in the context of outsize men's overcoats: "For an ordinary man's overcoat it takes 2 2/3 yards, but for an 'O.S.' man it takes at least 3 1/2 yards, and that means more coupons must be given by us to the makers."⁶⁸ A representative of the Wholesale Textile Association also reported the problem at the Trade Suppliers Committee.⁶⁹ The practice of demanding more coupons for a garment than the amount stated in the rationing schedule was illegal for both wholesale manufacturers and tailors, but tailors could avoid being charged by "splitting" their order: charging their customers the full coupon price for the length of fabric, and registering the making of the garment as a separate deal. When the problem was reported to the BoT, officials worked to make sure that the wholesale practice was discontinued.⁷⁰ Tailors, in the meantime, were allowed to continue charging more coupons in this roundabout way, although the practice was contrary to the spirit of the rationing order and placed outsize consumers at a disadvantage. This practice undermined the principle of fair shares, which was emphasised in government

⁶⁶ "Outsize Women Cannot Use Coupons," *Lincolnshire Echo*, 22 May 1943.

⁶⁷ For example: "Unlucky Women," *Gloucester Journal*, 14 February 1942; "More Cloth for Outsizes," *Daily Mail*, 26 June 1942; 380 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1942) cols. 1355-6.

⁶⁸ "Fat Men Face Coat Famine," *Daily Mail*, 2 September 1941.

⁶⁹ 'Minutes of the 10th Meeting of the Trade Suppliers Committee,' dated 22 August 1941, TNA, BT 131/38.

⁷⁰ 'Draft Minutes of the 11th Meeting of the Trade Suppliers Committee,' dated 29 August 1941, TNA, BT 131/38.

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communications about clothes rationing, since it made access to clothes dependant on body measurements. In practice, this meant that citizens whose body measurements were larger than average did not have equal access to clothes as the rest of the population did.

The BoT tolerated tailors' malpractice as a form of safety valve for outsize consumers, despite the fact it placed this population at a disadvantage. At various points during the war this malpractice was suggested as a possible solution to the shortages of outsize consumers. A BoT document preparing officials for an early press conference about clothes rationing listed the discontinuing of outsize production as a potential issue. The note outlining the BoT's response to this read "If it really does become serious, we shall have to take action. It is always possible for the large person to buy material and have it made up."⁷¹ Board staff suggested this practice as a solution to the women's suits and overcoats deficit problem as part of the early trade negotiations.⁷² In a different meeting with the trade, the practice was endorsed by Metford Watkins, Director-General of Civilian Clothing at the time.⁷³ An inner Board correspondence from November 1942 noted that:

[...] while the tailor cannot demand or take more coupons than are prescribed by the Consumer Rationing Order, he might perhaps be able to arrange for his customer to purchase the cloth (through his good offices, of course) and then to proceed on a cut, make and trim basis.⁷⁴

References to the continuation of this practice, as well as the Board's reluctance to fight it, appear at least until 1944, when steps were made to legalise the procedure by providing

⁷¹ 'Clothes Rationing – Possible Difficulties,' TNA, BT 131/39.

⁷² 'Trade Suppliers Sub-Committee on Coupon Deficits,' dated 15 July 1941 TNA, BT 131/38.

⁷³ '19th Meeting of the Retailers' Advisory Committee on Consumer Rationing,' dated 22 July 1941, TNA, BT 131/38.

⁷⁴ Letter from A.C. Pomroy to I.J. Taylor, dated 9 November 1942, TNA, BT 64/1361.

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tailors with the additional coupons needed for particularly cloth-consuming orders.⁷⁵ Up until then, outsize consumers were expected to tolerate the added burden of their unusual measurements.

The Board's tolerance of this practice was typical of civil servants' attitude towards outsize citizens. Officials' perception that outsize manufacture was enabled, either by the balance with small sizes or with the aid of a concession, meant that they were reluctant to admit that outsize citizens did not get their fair share of supplies. The Board's handling of outsize citizens was characterised by suspicion and hesitance. Even when officials took action to improve citizens' access to supplies, policies were miserly, aiding only those in extreme need. Complaints about the shortage of outsize garments were viewed as "grumbles" from the beginning of rationing.⁷⁶ While the policy line stressed the pointing system's fairness and equality, when outsize shortages appeared, it was easier to leave the problem at the hand of the consumer than it was to create a viable solution that would make outsize manufacture workable. Board of Trade rhetoric emphasised that outsize consumers were "only at a disadvantage if they have clothes made for them."⁷⁷ At the same time, Board officials encouraged consumers who could not obtain clothes to fit them to use this solution as an alternative, although it meant giving up more coupons for clothes which they should have been able to obtain for less. But, as I will discuss below, it was not only that Board representatives insisted that rationing was fair towards this section of the population despite making the manufacture of outsize garments disadvantageous. Civil servants saw

⁷⁵ Letter from P. Gordon to G.H. Andrew and H.G. Pollard, dated 28 April 1944, TNA, BT 64/1361.

⁷⁶ 'Clothes Rationing – Possible Difficulties,' TNA, BT 131/39.

⁷⁷ Draft Stock Letter RH403, TNA, BT 64/1361. See also: "Clothes Rationing Problems," *Yorkshire Post*, 2 June 1941; "Clothing Now Rationed," *Birmingham Daily Post*, 2 June 1941. See also: "Fashions Now Mean Coupons," *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 7 June 1941.

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outsized consumers as unconscientious citizens and concessions made for them as a threat to the policy of fair shares.

By 1942, outsized consumers began seeking solutions for their clothing problems with the BoT. Their letters to the Board were the results of shortages in a large variety of garments. Utility clothes presented a particular problem, since it was “almost impossible to produce an outsized ‘utility’ garment [...] within the price limit laid down.”⁷⁸ Despite repeated promises from BoT officials, shortages in outsized Utility and non-Utility garments persisted well into 1943.⁷⁹ It was only then that the Board finally conducted a survey to ascertain the distribution of body measurements in the population.⁸⁰ In the meantime, in July 1942, inner BoT correspondence reported “receiving heartbreak [*sic*] letters from people who owing to their abnormal height, or size, or weight, are unable to obtain extra extra large size underclothing and night attire from shops.”⁸¹ Unlike outerwear, underclothing, particularly of knitted material, were usually bought ready-made. CNS appointed a staff member to handle the correspondence with citizens in need, and Consumer Branch (CB), who dealt with “all types of clothing destitution,” began issuing supplementary coupons to consumers on a case-by-case basis until a better solution could be formalised.⁸²

⁷⁸ “Unlucky Women,” *Gloucester Journal*, 14 February 1942.

⁷⁹ “Unlucky Women,” Yesterday... I Heard... *Gloucester Journal*, 14 February 1942; “Cloth Economy Plans,” *Yorkshire Post*, 9 March 1942; “Coupons and Prices,” *Liverpool Daily Post*, 28 April 1942; “Women are Slimmer in South,” *Daily Mail*, 16 July 1942; “‘Outsized’: Reply to Mr. W. S. Liddall,” *Lincolnshire Echo*, 11 July 1942; “More Outsized Underwear,” *Daily Mail*, 30 January 1943; “Outsized Women Cannot Use Coupons,” *Lincolnshire Echo*, 22 May, 1943; “Clothes for the Large Woman,” *Yorkshire Post*, 23 September 1943.

⁸⁰ “Outsized Clothing Difficulty,” *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 29 June 1942. See also: TNA, 64/4094.

⁸¹ Letter from Miss Howell to Miss Gallimore, dated 24 July 1942, TNA, BT 64/1361.

⁸² Howell to Gallimore, TNA, BT 64/1361.

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These supplementary coupons were aimed at a section of the population whose proportion was small enough for BoT staff to accept that ready-made clothes were unavailable in their size.⁸³ Although certain large sizes were mass produced even before the war, the relative scarcity of British individuals who wore very large sizes meant that, as discussed in Chapter One, these sizes were less likely to be sold ready-made.⁸⁴ Unlike the Supply and Manufactures Branches at the Board that dealt with industry representatives, and defined outsizes in terms of girth measurements, CNS defined outsize according to weight. Individuals entitled to supplementary coupons were those weighing upwards of 16 stone. Since this was a small group (less than 1 percent of the British population), BoT officials believed its needs could be accommodated on the basis of individual circumstances.⁸⁵ It is unclear whether the combination between the manufacturing concession, which aided the manufacture of garments made to fit 46 inch hips and above, and the supplementary coupons for individuals weighing over 16 stone could meet the needs of outsize consumers. According to the 1951 *Women's Measurements and Sizes* survey the average hip girth for women weighing 16 stone was above 50 inches.⁸⁶ This meant that the manufacturing concession had to cover hip girths of up to 50 inches to meet consumer needs. Internal BoT reports demonstrate that manufacturers began cutting their sizes smaller, making it more difficult to determine the availability of garments.⁸⁷ In addition, as described above, shortages began appearing in garments that were not covered

⁸³ Minute from F. McLean to M.D. Kennedy, dated 8 May [1944], TNA, BT 64/1361.

⁸⁴ See: F. Chitham, "Some Problems of the Tailoring Trade," in Bridgland and Wife *The Modern Tailor, Outfitter and Clothier*, 1:5.

⁸⁵ W. F. F. Kemsley, "Body Weight at Different Ages and Heights," *Annals of Eugenics* 16 (1951): 319-20, tables 2-3; Morant to Fagg, TNA, BT 64/1361; Letter from L.H. Bayley to Miss Howell, dated 8 August 1942, TNA, BT 64/1361.

⁸⁶ An exact measurement was not available. Board of Trade, *Women's Measurements and Sizes*, 66, figure 2.

⁸⁷ 'Women's Clothing,' ADO report dated 11 September 1942, TNA, BT 64/1361.

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by the manufacturing concession, which only covered women's dresses and coats. Reports on shortages of large size garments in the North West and accumulating letters from citizens at the BoT made it clear that a formal, standardised concession was necessary to meet the needs that production could not fulfil.⁸⁸

In October 1942, a CB staff member drafted a new concession meant to answer those needs. She described the problems that came to the attention of the Board as ranging:

[...] from difficulty in obtaining appropriate sizes of underwear to insufficiency of coupons for made-to-measure garments, from necessity of exceeding 19 inch trouser-bottom restrictions to requests for the Board to induce retailers to accept special orders. Many of the letters combined two or more of these problems, but the majority included applications for coupons.⁸⁹

The new concession was designed to consolidate a solution on the consumer side, issuing coupons according to girth, initially only for women who were not covered by the trade scheme, with a parallel scheme for men to be introduced at a later date.⁹⁰ For lack of documentation, it is unclear when CB began issuing supplementary coupons for men on a similar basis to the women's concession. The scheme provided a generous supplement of coupons per year, taking into account girth, weight and height measurements to determine the issue of coupons, which could reach as much as 30 at the top end of the scale.⁹¹ While this concession seems liberal, the way BoT staff handled outsize shortages in general meant that on the whole, policy was stinting rather than generous.

⁸⁸ 'Clothing,' ADO report (North Western) dated 10 September 1942, TNA, BT 64/1361.

⁸⁹ Minute titled 'Outsize Adults,' dated 7 October 1942, TNA, BT 64/1361.

⁹⁰ See letters to and from I.J. Taylor dated October-November 1942.

⁹¹ 'Supplementary Issue to Outsize Adults – Women,' TNA, BT 64/1361.

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One problem was attention to the plight of outsize men. As part of the correspondence concerning the outsize consumer concession for men, CB staff commented that there seemed “to be a real need” for a scheme that would compensate menswear manufacturers, although the need was not as pressing as in the women’s wear sector.⁹² A Board’s Supply Branch official who responded to this suggestion, however, thought that there was no need to draft such a scheme when there was no demand from manufacturers.⁹³ Consumer problems were not the concern of the Supply Branch, so for such a scheme to be introduced, manufacturers had to seek it. Although civil servants at CB admitted that a manufacturing concession would “simplify matters” for them, they did not push the issue further.⁹⁴ In the menswear trade, pointing problems were mainly concerned with suits, and the limited demand for ready-made suits meant that a concession that was equivalent to the women’s ready-made scheme had to address the cheaper end of the made-to-measure and tailor-made sectors, as these were the more popular for outerwear.⁹⁵ But pressure from this sector to solve the problem of making outsize suits only materialised in 1944.⁹⁶ Even then, the Manufactures Branch did not consider the problem of outsize tailor-made urgent.⁹⁷ Despite citizens’ needs being evident two years earlier, CB only began pressing for a concession that would address men’s needs when complaints came from the trade.⁹⁸ Like the Manufactures Branch, they had their own agenda: they were anxious to diminish their

⁹² Letter from I.J. Taylor to A.C. Pomroy, dated 2 November 1942, TNA, BT 64/1361.

⁹³ Letter from A.C. Pomroy to I.J. Taylor, dated 9 November 1942, TNA, BT 64/1361.

⁹⁴ Letter from I.J. Taylor to A.C. Pomroy, dated 17 November 1942, TNA, BT 64/1361.

⁹⁵ See: Sprecher, “Demob Suits,” 109-10.

⁹⁶ Minute addressed to M. M. Ord-Johnston, dated 12 April 1944 and subsequent correspondence, TNA, BT 64/1361. See also: “Defining the ‘O.S.’ Man,” *Times*, 12 April 1944; “The ‘Outsize Man,’” *Scotsman*, 12 April 1944; “Defining the ‘O.S. Man,’” *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 12 April 1944; “Outsize,” *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 12 April 1944. Although warnings came as early as 1941: “Clothiers May Stop O.S. Suits,” *Daily Mirror*, 1 September 1941.

⁹⁷ Minute dated 15 April 1944, TNA, BT 64/1361.

⁹⁸ Minute addressed to Ord-Johnston, dated 12 April 1944, TNA, BT 64/1361.

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correspondence with citizens who were complaining that their tailors were unwilling to accept their orders.⁹⁹ The eventual scheme, introduced in 1945, compensated tailors for the additional cloth needed to make outside garments, in effect formalising the illegal practice of split orders.¹⁰⁰

From an administrative perspective, this problem demonstrates the differing interests of the various BoT departments, and the limited room given to the interests of citizens. Partially, this was a matter of limited resources. Internal correspondence shows how anxious the various branches were to limit the amount of work under their responsibility.¹⁰¹ Civil servants were aware that the best solution would be one that ensured that outside clothes were manufactured and distributed in a way that made them available to those who needed them, but this was difficult to achieve without a large staff and a considerable amount of cooperation.¹⁰² Cooperation was difficult because of conflicting interests. A department that dealt with manufacturers and makers was only concerned with settling the trade's interests with those of the Board, and a department that answered citizens' complaints and requests was only concerned with settling those needs with the interests of the Board. The interests of the Board of Trade, though, were to keep the system running without having to extend its operations beyond what was necessary and without causing political unrest, and not necessarily to protect the interests of citizens. As individuals who sent letters to BoT departments, citizens had little chance of influencing policy. Their power to do so was equal to their political power as a group. Since outside citizens were not a cohesive group, they lacked the ability to influence the Board in any

⁹⁹ Minute dated 12 April 1944, TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹⁰⁰ Minutes dated 27 April 1944 to 23 February 1945, TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹⁰¹ Minutes dated 4 May to 3 June 1944, TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹⁰² Minute dated 12 August 1943, TNA, BT 64/1361.

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meaningful way. As a result, civil servants only helped them solve their problems reluctantly and when they were publically pressed by a group with power – in this case, tailors, represented by the NFMT. Although CNS was meant to represent the interests of consumers, they did not intervene on the behalf of outsize consumers.

Another problem was the obscuring of the consumer concession. At this point the Board had three concessions that concerned outsize clothing: supplementary coupon grants to those manufacturing significant quantities of outsize dresses and coats for women whose hip size was equal to or above 42 inches; supplementary coupon grants for tailors who made clothes for outsize consumers; and a scheme granting coupons on a yearly basis to individuals whose body measurements were not typically available ready-made. While the two former schemes were discussed in the trade press and referred to by BoT personnel on various occasions, the latter, which alleviated the needs of a minority within the outsize population, remained unpublicised until 1948. Unaware of the existence of the concession, one consumer proposed that a similar concession should be established.¹⁰³ In an internal memo from 1944, a CB employee stated that they “have resisted, and shall continue to resist, any pressure to make us make [the supplementary coupons] criteria public.”¹⁰⁴ Any official reference to supplementary coupons given to outsize citizens remained vague and discouraging, emphasising the availability of ready-to-wear garments while noting that supplementary coupons could only be given to individuals of “abnormal” measurements.¹⁰⁵

In a way, this was a regular administrative practice that grew out of the humiliating strategies of the “less eligibility” principle of the 1834 Poor Law (apparent in the use of

¹⁰³ “Letters,” *Daily Herald*, 8 March, 1943.

¹⁰⁴ Minute dated 27 April 1944, TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹⁰⁵ ‘R. H. 403,’ draft stock letter of reply to enquiries about supplementary coupons for outsize individuals, TNA, BT 64/1361. See also: “Letters,” *Daily Herald*, 19 April 1943. See earlier drafts: TNA, BT 64/1361.

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workhouses and the means test) and transformed into milder ways of keeping the demand for social services low.¹⁰⁶ In this case, by obscuring information about the service. It is crucial, however, that this was a departure from other aspects of rationing, which received coverage in the press and detailed explanations in clothing quizzes. Coupon issue and other concessions for industrial workers, for instance, merited five questions in the 1943 Clothing Quiz. The arrangements made for expectant mothers only merited one question, but the answer included several paragraphs of detailed explanations.¹⁰⁷ Outsize garments, however, were not mentioned at all, and when they finally appeared in the 1944 edition, the question referred to the position of traders, who were expected to “balance [losses on these garments] by gains on other types of garments,” unless they qualified for reimbursement.¹⁰⁸ BoT staff felt that the concession that entitled outsize individuals to extra coupons exposed the Board to accusations of inequality, since the grants were not carefully calculated and were granted on the basis of need.¹⁰⁹ Yet, as I will discuss below, even after grants were calculated more carefully, the criteria were still obscured. This distinction between the treatment of concessions for the outsize population and that of other populations testifies to the status of outsize citizens in the eyes of civil servants at the Board. In order to receive their fair share of clothing, outsize citizens had to actively seek help, and go through a more arduous bureaucratic process than other citizens. This made sure that less of them would eventually realise their right.

As befitting this bureaucratic tradition, civil servants were suspicious towards those who sought help. This attitude stemmed from a view of outsize citizens that predated war

¹⁰⁶ Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, 78, 132.

¹⁰⁷ ‘The 1943-1944 Clothing Quiz,’ TNA, BT 131/37.

¹⁰⁸ ‘The 1944-45 Clothing Quiz,’ TNA, BT 131/37.

¹⁰⁹ Minute dated 12 August 1943, TNA, BT 64/1361.

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and rationing, but which could easily be applied to the new circumstances. Zweiniger-Bargielowska demonstrates that weight gain was associated in the interwar period with the degeneration of the mind and body caused by excessive eating and inactivity, and was linked to a lack of self-control and superfluous consumption.¹¹⁰ As discussed in Chapter One, it was also associated with the image of the profiteer, and thereby with selfishness and bad citizenship. In the context of wartime clothing consumption, large bodied citizens were seen as consuming more than their fair share of cloth at the expense of others. A minute from April 1944 asserted that in letters that CB received from outsize individuals, the sender “nearly always complains that the articles required cannot be found in any of the shops. Sometimes the search has already been adequate and conscientious, but in the majority of cases it has not.”¹¹¹ Another document from May stated that “Failure to get outsize garments” was the result of, among other things, “the consumers’ laziness or choosiness or downright peculiarity of build.”¹¹² A third document suggested that outsize consumers were trying their luck after hearing about the scheme from a successful applicant.¹¹³ One civil servant even insisted that the outsize demographic are “nearly always illiterate.”¹¹⁴ Such accusations came from civil servants in all departments, both public facing and industry facing. It was present even in documents written by CNS staff, whose job it was to guard the interests of citizens. This approach is reminiscent of the general suspicion of consumers that Hilton describes as the legacy of Fabian thought.¹¹⁵ While these perceptions were not the only considerations in civil servants’ reluctance to

¹¹⁰ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body*, 216-22, 271-6.

¹¹¹ Minute dated 27 April 1944.

¹¹² Minute dated 4 May 1944, TNA, BT 64/1361. See also Minute dated 11 May 1944.

¹¹³ Minute dated 8 May 1944, TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹¹⁴ Minutes dated 10 May 1944, TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹¹⁵ Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain*, 149.

solve the problems facing outsize citizens, they influenced the way civil servants perceived the problems of outsize consumers and their willingness to help.

This treatment of outsize citizens not only saw them as a burden on the nation's limited supplies, it reflected the belief that this burden was unnecessary, since they were responsible for their own plight. These ideas were evident in public debates about outsize shortages. When shortages were predicted in the early stages of rationing, for instance, several women's columns used it as a way to encourage women to lose weight.¹¹⁶ While reporting the problem of shortages in 1943, a *Liverpool Daily Post* columnist concluded, "The poor outsize woman is a



Figure 28 – Portrait of Sir Walter Sydney Liddall at the National Portrait Gallery. Bassano Ltd, *Sir Walter Sydney Liddall* 1932, half-plate glass negative, NPG reference: x153782, National Portrait Gallery, London. Printed with permission from NPG.

nuisance to the Board of Trade, a loss to the manufacturers, and a sartorial calamity to herself."¹¹⁷ While the story discussed outsize clothing difficulties, this framing suggests that the responsibility for these problems was with the outsize woman herself. In 1942, Walter Liddall (Figure 28), Conservative Member of Parliament, asked Hugh Dalton about

¹¹⁶ "Eating Less to Be Slim," *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 6 August 1941; "Lazy Girls Grow Fat," *Daily Mirror*, 5 June 1941.

¹¹⁷ "The Good News – Port Repair – Young Drinkers," Our London Letter, *Liverpool Daily Post*, 17 September 1943.

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the shortage of outsize underwear for men.¹¹⁸ Newspaper reports about Liddall's question in Parliament pointed out that Liddall was an outsize consumer himself and ridiculed outsize difficulties.¹¹⁹ The problems large bodied citizens experienced earned them pity and ridicule, and were not met with solutions.

As discussed in the previous chapters, conspicuous consumption and selfishness were associated during this period with bad citizenship, since they were in conflict with the imperative of clothing economy and fair shares. In their communication with the public, Board of Trade staff outlined the behaviour of responsible citizens – making an effort in their consumption practices, and making do with the little available. A stock letter CB used to reply to citizens complaining of their inability to find clothes in their size emphasised that

[...] with the present scarcity of material and labour, it is not to be expected that every shop will always have in stock a full range of sizes and styles. Consumers must be prepared to try several shops before concluding that the goods they require are not to be had in their locality.¹²⁰

In light of the perception of outsize consumers reflected in BoT documents discussed above, this letter seems to suggest that citizens were not demonstrating responsible behaviour. Civil servants at the Board gave very little weight to applicants' reports that "clothes of this size are not allowed to be manufactured in wartime," dismissing these claims as "a shopkeeper's excuse," without taking into account the role they played in constructing the applicants' conviction that they should be allowed an alternative route to

¹¹⁸ 380 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1942) cols. 1355-6.

¹¹⁹ "Extra Outsize Underwear," *Manchester Guardian*, 17 June 1942; "Thin Man's Lament," *Edinburgh Evening News*, 17 August 1942.

¹²⁰ Draft stock letter, TNA, BT 64/1361.

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support their wardrobes.¹²¹ The suspicious approach the Board's employees demonstrated towards the outsize population marginalised their wardrobe problems and delayed the introduction of an appropriate solution. Since their appearance marked them as irresponsible citizens, they did not earn their right to their fair share of clothes.

Alongside the dismissal of citizens' experiences, BoT staff emphasised that the Board was doing all it can to have clothes manufactured according to citizens' needs and cannot provide them with more clothing coupons "unless [their] measurements are altogether abnormal."¹²² A letter that the Board's Director of Public Relations, C.C.J. Simmonds, published in the *Daily Herald* in 1943 tried to discourage outsize individuals from writing to the BoT for additional coupons by emphasizing that coupons were not easily acquired from the Board, and by avoiding the publication of any clear criteria for qualifying for additional coupons. Most importantly, however, his letter emphasised that outsize garments were available in the shops and that outsize citizens should buy these clothes rather than requesting for extra coupons to have clothes made for them.¹²³

A couple of days later, the *Herald* published a reply to Simmonds' letter. This reply demonstrates that, although BoT rhetoric implied outsize citizens wanted more than their share and were not responsible citizens, these citizens were not willing to accept this image of themselves:

As an unfortunate "outsize" I entirely disagree with C. C. J. Simmonds [...]
I should like to take him shopping with me. In three shops recently I've
been shown "outsize" Utility coats which I cannot wear, as they are far too
small. Each shopkeeper assured me outsize clothes are almost

¹²¹ Minute dated 27 April 1944, TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹²² "Letters," *Daily Herald*, 19 April 1943. See earlier drafts: TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹²³ "Letters," *Daily Herald*.

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unobtainable, and promises of more Utility clothing to come will not settle urgent problems.

Being over average size is not a joke at any time, and at these times it is maddening. Most shop assistants make one feel they seldom get asked to supply large garments; yet I'm not really a very enormous outsize - 48in. hips.¹²⁴

The woman who wrote this letter emphasised her conscientious search for outsize garments that fit her, and the obstacles she faced which she had no way of surpassing: shrinking sizes, lack of stocks and unhelpful retailers. She positioned herself as a responsible citizen, contrasting it with the unhelpful approach demonstrated by the Board and the retail trade. Another letter published in the *Manchester Guardian* the following week, presented the outsize problem not as the problem of the irresponsible citizen, but as one that particularly affected the patriotic citizen. The writer stressed that, as a patriotic citizen, she responded to the appeal to hold off buying new clothes until it was absolutely necessary and now she found herself having to buy "inferior and unlovely garments at more than twice the price," unlike those who ignored the appeal. She concluded: "The glow of conscious virtue may be warm but it gives no visible protection from nakedness."¹²⁵ By positioning themselves as disadvantaged despite demonstrating civic responsibility, both letter writers challenged the image of outsize citizens as lazy and selfish and established the Board's responsibility for their disadvantaged position.

Letters of this kind were scarce during the war, but there is evidence that outsize citizens were challenging Board officials' stance that the problem was in their own hands. The plethora of letters about which BoT personnel reported in internal correspondence

¹²⁴ "Outsize," *Daily Herald*, 21 April 1943.

¹²⁵ "Outsize Clothing," *Manchester Guardian*, 27 April 1943.

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testifies that complaints were frequent, even if the letters themselves did not survive. On one occasion, members of the Scottish Co-operative Women's Guild complained about the shortage of outsize clothes in one of their assemblies, bringing about a resolution to urge the Board of Trade to solve the issue.¹²⁶ The number of individuals affected by the shortage of large sizes was significant by the end of the war, particularly when it came to women's wear. By 1944, the smallest size qualifying for supplementary coupons under the manufacturing concession was 42 inch hip girth. This represented approximately 29 percent of the female adult population according to the 1943 survey.¹²⁷ In 1945, the last year of the war, this represented over five million adult civilian women.¹²⁸ Taking an equivalent definition for men, based on an inquiry that the BoT's technical officer conducted to examine the possibility of introducing a ready-made concession for menswear, about 9 percent of men (according to waist measurements) were in this category.¹²⁹ In 1945, this represented just over one million adult civilian men.¹³⁰ Although during the war these six million adults were mostly silent publicly about their wardrobe problems, the post-war era saw more of them complaining and challenging Board assumptions about their conscientiousness. There were also more attempts to organise and pressure the BoT to improve access to outsize clothes. Partially, this was done through the women's organisations, with resolutions similar the one made by the Scottish Co-operative Women's Guild, but mostly, this was political pressure exercised in the House of Commons by Conservative, and occasionally Labour, Members.

¹²⁶ "Protest Against Coupons for Towels Order," *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 29 May 1943.

¹²⁷ TNA, BT 64/4094.

¹²⁸ CSO, *Statistical Digest of the War*, 1, table 1, 2, table 3.

¹²⁹ Letter from E. Strange to I.J. Taylor dated 13 October 1942, TNA, BT 64/1361; TNA, BT 64/4094.

¹³⁰ CSO, *Statistical Digest of the War*, 1, table 1, 2, table 3.

Shortages and Responsibility under Post-War Austerity

Whatever they told the public, BoT officials were aware during the war that outsize individuals did not have access to their fair share of clothes. In April 1946, Board staff admitted in internal documents that the various schemes of outsize garments did not solve the problem of outsize production and that large bodied citizens were disadvantaged by the rationing scheme.¹³¹ There was some willingness to seek a solution that would relieve these consumers. A few adjustments to the consumer concession had the potential to “bridge the gap between the normal pointing and the actual coupon cost of certain XOS garments.”¹³² Manufacturing difficulties, meanwhile, grew worse, although it was unclear how to further encourage manufacturers to make more outsize garments. CB therefore expanded their consumers’ concession, while the Manufactures Branch organised a meeting with the trade to examine ways to improve production. These steps should be seen as more than the introduction of a more lenient policy. As discussed in the previous chapters, the immediate post-war era was the most difficult in terms of supplies and availability of consumer goods. The lower clothing ration in 1945-46 meant that outsize citizens were less able to mitigate the limited availability of outsize garments, while the problem of shortages was continually getting worse.¹³³ Board staff was therefore attempting to prevent the situation of outsize consumers from deteriorating rather than improving it.

The decreasing access to outsize clothes instigated vocal complaints from consumers, who felt more justified in complaining about the state of their wardrobe now

¹³¹ ‘Gilding the Pill,’ dated 3 April 1946, TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹³² ‘Note of a Meeting held on the 14th May, 1946, Supplementary coupon Issues to Extra Outsize People,’ TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹³³ ‘Note of a Meeting held on the 14th May, 1946, Supplementary coupon Issues to Extra Outsize People,’ and Letter from F.H. Shepherd to Barber, titled ‘Women’s Outsize Garments,’ dated June 1946, TNA, BT 64/1361.

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that the war was over. Shortages began appearing in large stock sizes as well as outsize, which meant that more people were affected by these shortages. Like wartime consumer complaints, outsize citizens after the war accompanied their grievances with a description of their own virtuous behaviour. A consumer wearing large sizes, who described herself as wearing size WX (one size above the average stock size), wrote a letter to the *Gloucestershire Echo*, in which she emphasised her willingness to curtail consumption during the war alongside her exasperation of continued shortages:

Many of the shops have not a large fitting garment in the place, yet their stands are filled with an almost pre-war abundance of attractive clothing for smaller women [...]

All thoughtful people are aware of shortages and the need for economy, but this cynical disregard of one section of the community by the Government and the clothing manufacturers is not in line with service or democracy.¹³⁴

By contrasting her responsible behaviour with the unfair treatment of consumers like her, the writer presented this problem as a reciprocal agreement in which she did her part, while the government and clothing manufacturers failed to do theirs. Other outsize citizens likewise presented their plight while emphasising the unfairness of the treatment they received or their own conscientious behaviour. The writer of a letter published in the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* complained:

[...] I can't get a suit to fit me. I'm one of those hard-hit people - the outsize woman. [...] I've just done a round of the shops and I'm thoroughly bad-tempered. Everywhere I'm told the same tale. The manufacturers don't like making outsize garments because they need material costing more coupons than they'll get in return for the finished article. [...] In one shop

¹³⁴ "Clothing Grievance of Larger Women," *Gloucestershire Echo*, 15 May 1946.

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they told me their proportion of outsize garments was two per cent. of what they used to get.

[...] One firm suggested making up a coat or suit for me, if I would pay coupons for the material.¹³⁵

This letter specified all the ways that those wearing outsize garments were disadvantaged – the scarcity of available clothes, the expectation that they should spend more coupons and the manufacturers’ disinterest with making garments that fit them. Yet it also demonstrated that the writer did everything she could to overcome the problem before complaining.

Although many of these letters of complaint were written by women, men had similar observations. In a letter to the *Nottingham Evening Post* in October 1947 a man complained that the shop assistant at a large outfitter in the city refused to take his order for a suit, explaining that he was “too large.”¹³⁶ He was indignant, since he “always understood that little ‘uns made up for big ‘uns.”¹³⁷ Another reader replied to his letter, confirming that she could not find a single tailor who would accept her husband’s order, and it was becoming “extremely difficult to keep up his appearance.”¹³⁸ She was worried her sons might soon encounter the same problems, and thought “It is time something was done about it.”¹³⁹ Letters that discussed the problems facing outsize individuals demonstrate that citizens responded to the messages that came from the government, and accepted the official position regarding civic conduct and the logical operation of the rationing system. At the same time, however, they expected the system to function in accordance with government declarations, and to reward their responsible behaviour. They accepted the

¹³⁵ “Outsize – That’s Me!” *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 21 February 1946.

¹³⁶ “That Waist Line,” *Nottingham Evening Post*, 10 October 1947.

¹³⁷ “That Waist Line,” *Nottingham Evening Post*.

¹³⁸ “Outsize Problem,” *Nottingham Evening Post*, 16 October 1947.

¹³⁹ “Outsize Problem,” *Nottingham Evening Post*.

guidelines for what constituted conscientious behaviour, but disputed BoT assumptions that they did not display these behaviours.

While outsize consumers expected the government and the clothing trade to accommodate their needs through the rationing system, renewed negotiations between the two failed to find a solution to their problems. A solution was unlikely to be swift for two reasons. First, was the inadequate representation of consumer needs. Unlike during the BoT's early debates with the clothing trade during the war, the first post-war meeting with trade representatives included a staff member each from CNS and CB to represent the consumer side of the problem. Looking at the role these representatives played in negotiations with the trade, however, shows that Hilton's view of CNS as a representative of consumer interests is overstated.¹⁴⁰ In effect, the Consumer Needs representative was only there to present the situation that consumers were facing in the shops and not to defend their interests, while the CB representative did not actively participate.

The meeting took place in July 1946, at which point half of the shops in Britain had no dresses in large sizes, and a third had no coats in sizes above W, affecting about 30 percent of the adult female population. These were only the garments covered by the manufacturing reimbursement scheme. There were also significant shortages of costumes, skirts and blouses. The main problem, noted one of the trade representatives, was among lower income groups, despite common belief that the outsize population was mostly middle-class.¹⁴¹ While CNS presented data about shortages of outsizes, retailers' representatives reported that they were overstocked with small sizes. The absence of representation for consumers' interests meant that manufacturers' interests were again

¹⁴⁰ Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain*, 141-2.

¹⁴¹ 'Women's Outsize Garments: Meeting held at Horseferry House on Wednesday July 10th 1946,' TNA, BT 64/1361; Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Slimming through the Depression," 179-181.

central to the proposed solutions. While in some cases those interests aligned, in others, manufacturers' interests overrode the interests of consumers. Manufacturers' pressure to expand the manufacturing concession to include firms with a smaller outside output as well as to bring additional garments under it would have benefitted both manufacturers and consumers. Complaints that ceiling prices were too low to make some outside ranges, however, were at odds with consumers' complaints that prices were too high.¹⁴² The trade paper *Draper's Record* demonstrates that the clothing trade was not entirely supportive of outside consumers. While it did not devote much space to the problem of the outside population, it did demonstrate contempt towards them through deriding caricatures, usually targeting the size and weight of women.¹⁴³ Without a strong representation for consumers, consumer needs were not kept in sight when the Board considered possible solutions.

Consumer needs were further obscured by the fact that negotiations over concessions soon turned into a power struggle between the Board and the clothing trade. The Board expanded the manufacturing concession in October and December 1946 to increase the coupon reimbursement per garment and include more manufacturers in the scheme.¹⁴⁴ Yet the suggestions of trade representatives were adopted slowly and after careful (and often long) deliberation. Only when Board officials were convinced that the trade could not overcome a problem did they adopt a concession suggested by trade representatives, regardless of what it meant to the population of outside consumers. A good example for this was the inclusion of blouses and skirts in the reimbursement scheme.

¹⁴² 'Women's Outside Garments: Meeting held at Horseferry House on Wednesday July 10th 1946,' TNA, BT 64/1361; "Outside Women Will Pay More," *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 8 December 1945; "Non-Utility Clothing," *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 11 June 1946.

¹⁴³ "Outside Department," *Drapers' Record*, 25 March 1944; "As they've put the outside department upstairs..." 6 May 1944; "Oh yes, I'll definitely..." *Drapers' Record*, 26 April 1947.

¹⁴⁴ 'Women's Outside Garments,' letter dated 14 October 1946, and 'Women's Outside Outerwear,' letter dated December 1946, TNA, BT 64/1361.

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Although Consumer Needs reported that supplies of skirts in outsizes were as bad as supplies of coats in those sizes and greater shortages were found in blouses, in December, the Board rejected the concession on the grounds that “evidence is insufficient to justify the inclusion of these garments.”¹⁴⁵ The civil servant writing to the trade about this implied that while manufacturers did occasionally incur loss when making these garments, this was not always the case and the concession was therefore not worth expanding. Only in January 1947 BoT officials began working on incorporating these garments into the reimbursement scheme.¹⁴⁶ Although the general supply position gradually improved throughout 1946, the increased ration for the rationing period announced in December 1946 was too minor to influence this decision. Board officials prioritised maintaining a strict and frugal policy for rationing over ensuring that all citizens had equal access to the clothes they needed.

When faced with consumer complaints, Board officials placed the responsibility over shortages with manufacturers. In May 1947, for instance, John Belcher, Labour MP and Parliamentary Secretary for the BoT responded to a query about outsize shortages that:

There is again a problem in the case of outsize people. Quite understandably the manufacturers of clothing are reluctant to spend available cloth on clothes which take a larger proportion of cloth than the normal ones. We do our best to deal with that situation, not only by exhortation. I am continually talking to manufacturers and begging them to look after the outsize people, of whom there are a very large number. [...] In addition to exhortation we go further and make available to these people additional coupons in respect of the outsize clothing they make. Having

¹⁴⁵ ‘Women’s Outsize Outerwear,’ December 1946, TNA, BT 64/1361. See also: ‘Women’s Outsize Garments,’ 14 October 1946, TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹⁴⁶ Letter from F.H. Shepherd to B.B. Judges, dated 21 January 1947, TNA, BT 64/1361.

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regard to the overall shortage of clothing, it is bound to be extremely difficult to deal with these end-of-the-range classes.¹⁴⁷

By drawing attention to the Board's efforts to eliminate shortages, Belcher overlooked the persistence of shortages since the introduction of rationing in 1941. Coupon reimbursement for manufacturers who produced outsize women's garments was available throughout that period, doing little to encourage production. While the most recent amendments to this concession exercised more generosity in reimbursing manufacturers for the coupons they used to make these sizes, continuing shortages imply that this was either not sufficiently generous to prevent a coupon deficit, or that after six years in which outsize manufacture was disadvantageous, manufacturers were reluctant to re-enter it.¹⁴⁸ While Belcher saw outsize shortages as the responsibility of the trade, Harold Wilson targeted outsize consumers as responsible for solving their own problems. When shortages came up again in June 1948, Wilson indicated that the solution to these shortages was in the hands of consumers, and that increased demand would convince manufacturers to produce more outsize clothes, overlooking the persistence of demand for outsize garments since 1942.¹⁴⁹ Whether or not manufacturers showed goodwill in catering for the outsize population, or responsive to the demand for outsize clothes, the clothing trade operated under a heavily regulated system, making it the Board's responsibility to ensure these garments were produced. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Board's responsibility for solving the problems that affected consumers was implied in its own rhetoric of fair shares. Although post-war propaganda emphasised the responsibility of citizens – whether manufacturers or

¹⁴⁷ 437 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1947) col. 2747.

¹⁴⁸ See for instance: 'Women's Outsize Garments: Meeting held at Horseferry House on Wednesday July 10th 1946,' TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹⁴⁹ "No Off-Ration Sheets Yet," *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 24 June 1948.

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consumers – for improving material conditions in Britain, continued controls meant that citizens still saw the Board of Trade as responsible for ensuring fair shares.

While, as seen above, few citizens mentioned the government or the BoT in their complaints about outside shortages, more organised action approached the Board as the entity responsible for solving these problems. The post-war period saw several resolutions pass in women's organisations across the country to apply pressure on the Board to improve outside production. In Stirlingshire, at their 1946 annual conference, the Women's Community Service Clubs decided to send a resolution to Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade, to request increased production of outside clothes.¹⁵⁰ The Women's Institute issued a similar request later that year, emphasising that the system was unfair towards outside women and that the Board of Trade should work to increase supplies.¹⁵¹ In April 1947, representatives of the Women's Cooperative Guild decided to ask the Board of Trade to provide extra coupons for outside women to allow them to overcome shortages.¹⁵² These organisations represented a variety of women from various classes and political denominations. Whether they supported controls or were against them, however, they held the BoT accountable for any problems they encountered as consumers.

This was not just true for essential production problems, but for issues of variety and style as well. Some of the complaints about outside clothing in this period drew attention to the unattractive designs of outside clothes for women. Early calls to invest in better outside styles came in 1947, when shopkeepers protested against the styles they received from manufacturers, arguing that more attractive styles would make these clothes

¹⁵⁰ "Women's Clubs: Resolutions Passed at Falkirk Conference," *Falkirk Herald*, 9 March 1946.

¹⁵¹ "W.I. Plea for More Outside Clothes," *Lincolnshire Echo*, 21 September 1946.

¹⁵² "200 Women Are Asking Two Favours from Cripps," *Daily Mirror*, 18 April 1947.

more profitable for all involved.¹⁵³ The press supported this message. A *Yorkshire Evening Post* columnist, commenting on a recent fashion show, pointed out that the BoT, designers and manufacturers should work together to create designs that would flatter the outsize figure and be economical to produce. This, she thought, would solve the “over-stocking” of smaller sizes.¹⁵⁴ Just a few days before the announcement of the end of rationing, the *Daily Mirror* editorial made similar comments, asking “what the dickens does the clothing industry mean by failing to give [outsize women] their fair share of clothes that are attractive?”¹⁵⁵ Expecting that the clothing industry would not solve the problem on its own, the editor suggested that “the public will have to step in and do it for them through their representatives, the Board of Trade.”¹⁵⁶ Demands that the Board would influence the styles that manufacturers chose to produce continued well after rationing has ended, coming from private citizens, women’s organisations and the press.¹⁵⁷ As the *Daily Mirror* editorial suggests, citizens began to see the BoT as representing their interests as consumers, and as the point of contact for all their consumer grievances. They borrowed the Board’s rhetoric of fair shares to underline their entitlement to be treated as other consumers were treated.

Alongside these complaints about shortages and styles, outsize problems were also a constant source for debate in the House of Commons. Demands to improve the position of outsize consumers came from across the political spectrum, but Conservative members of Parliament were more prone to treat this as a systematic problem related to controls rather than merely a problem of shortages. Throughout 1946, Conservative and Unionist

¹⁵³ “Plea for Smarter Outsize Dresses,” *Nottingham Journal*, 25 August 1947.

¹⁵⁴ Kay Boughton, “Mrs. Gill, Aged 92, is Everybody’s Friend,” A Woman’s Point of View, *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 4 February 1948.

¹⁵⁵ “Outsized Grouse,” *Daily Mirror*, 10 March 1949.

¹⁵⁶ “Outsized Grouse,” *Daily Mirror*.

¹⁵⁷ See for instance: “It Took Four Days to Find a Dress That Fits,” Kay Boughton’s Page for Women, *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 2 June 1949; “W.I.s Demand More Outsize Clothes,” *Worthing Herald*, 29 April 1949; “Give Us Pink Say OS Women,” *Daily Herald*, 13 October 1949.

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members raised the issue with the BoT. In February, Major Henry Spence, MP for Aberdeen and Kincardine Central, discussed his experience as a textile manufacturer, emphasising the difficulty in producing outsize garments under the ceiling prices and measurement specifications set by the Board.¹⁵⁸ In June, Lord Willoughby de Eresby, MP for Rutland and Stamford, sent a written question to the Board of Trade, asking whether the President of the Board intended to make a concession for outsize men since “shops are unwilling to supply clothes of this size as the coupons received do not cover the coupon-value of the material used.”¹⁵⁹ In December, Ian Leslie Orr-Ewing, MP for Weston-super-Mare, raised outsize shortages twice, specifying that outsize men “cannot obtain a suit on the coupons permitted,” and asking what will the Board do “to enable such people to be decently clad.”¹⁶⁰ All of these questions referred to ways that elements of the rationing system were not functioning properly, highlighting Conservative dissatisfaction with the prolonging of controls.¹⁶¹ As these cases suggest, they were also more prone to raise issues that concerned manufacturers or the elite trade than Labour members were.

Labour members of Parliament, by contrast, presented outsize shortages as a problem their constituents were experiencing and that they were bringing to the attention of the BoT for it to solve by revising the scheme rather than abolishing it. When Grace Colman, MP for Tynemouth, brought up shortages of outsize garments in May 1947, she presented them similarly to the way private citizens writing about this issue did. Colman began by emphasising the civic virtue of her constituents, highlighting their awareness of the country’s economic constraints and the necessity of controls. At the same time, she

¹⁵⁸ “Hard on Outsize Women,” *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 15 February 1946.

¹⁵⁹ “In Brief,” *Daily Mirror*, 21 June 1946; Document dated 24 June 1946, TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹⁶⁰ 431 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1946) cols. 39-40. See also: 431 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1946) cols. 1966-7.

¹⁶¹ See: Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 214 *passim*.

presented outside shortages as “a very real problem to many people” but as one that was unnecessary and should be solvable.¹⁶² Unlike private citizens, she accepted the Board’s response that measures were in place to enable the production of outside clothes and that the solution was in the hands of manufacturers.¹⁶³ In 1947 and 1948, two other Labour MPs brought stories of their constituents’ difficulties in finding clothes that fit them to the House of Commons.¹⁶⁴ Both members used these stories to draw attention to the shortage of outside garments, and one of whom, Frederick Skinnard, suggested that the Board should increase control over the clothing trade rather than decrease it.¹⁶⁵ Unlike the Conservatives, who highlighted outside shortages as reason for the removal of control, Labour MPs used shortages as evidence that controls were not tight enough.

While consumers and their representatives were all looking to the Board of Trade to solve their problems, Board officials made no public attempt to take responsibility for outside shortages. Belcher’s assertion that shortages were the responsibility of manufacturers, mentioned above, was typical of the Board’s post-war approach. As discussed in Chapter Two, post-war propaganda portrayed the role of the government as a guiding hand whose influence on the nation’s fortunes was secondary to the work of its citizens. When communicating with the public, Board officials tended to emphasise their reluctance to intervene with trade practices to a greater extent than they were already involved, referring instead to manufacturers’ role in solving problems of supply.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² 437 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1947) cols. 2740-1.

¹⁶³ Grace Coleman [sic], “No Government Grant for Swimming Bath,” *Fortnightly Parliamentary Review*, *Shields Daily News*, 4 June 1947.

¹⁶⁴ “Scots in Kilts: No Trousers, Says M.P.,” *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 18 December 1947; “Questions in the House: ‘Out-Size’ Men’s Clothing,” *Harrow Observer*, 5 February 1948.

¹⁶⁵ 446 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1948) cols. 130-1w.

¹⁶⁶ See for instance: “They Say Women’s Outside Clothes Are ‘Frumpish’,” *Daily Mirror*, 5 September 1947; 446 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1948) col. 259w.

The attitude that dictated that treatment of outsize consumers differed from the treatment of consumers who wore stock sizes during the war still governed outsize clothing policy at the Board. Frequent mentions of problems in obtaining outsize tailor-made suits into the late 1940s demonstrate that there was little awareness among consumers and tailors alike that there was a scheme in place to solve these problems.¹⁶⁷ The first explicit mention of this concession in the newspapers was on 31 March 1948 in the *Yorkshire Post*, in an article that cites the *Board of Trade Journal*.¹⁶⁸ The connections that the *Post* had with the Leeds tailoring trade raise questions about the Board's consent to the wide publication of the scheme at this point. It was only mentioned in a national daily two months later, when the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Herald* quoted Harold Wilson on the subject.¹⁶⁹ Wilson replied to a question from a Conservative MP, who pressed him to allow tailors to use additional cloth for outsize suits – not knowing that a scheme was in place to enable this since February 1945.¹⁷⁰ The criteria for qualifying for the consumer concession was similarly obscured as late as January 1948.¹⁷¹ While citizens wearing stock sizes received their ration according to clear and publically available criteria, and had access to information about the ways they could use their ration, citizens wearing large sizes were not deemed eligible for this transparency.

The reasons for this unequal treatment were complex. The Board's limited resources meant that every surge in the number of citizens applying for a concession overwhelmed its over-stretched staff. They were therefore eager to keep the number of applications down by

¹⁶⁷ See for instance: "Tailor's Problem," *Nottingham Evening Post*, 20 October 1947; 431 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1946) cols. 39-40; "Questions in the House: 'Out-Size' Men's Clothing," *Harrow Observer*.

¹⁶⁸ "Suits for Men of Ample Build," *Yorkshire Post*, 31 March 1948.

¹⁶⁹ "Big Man to Get Suit for 26 Coupons," *Daily Mirror*, 1 June 1948; "Suits the OS Man," *Daily Herald*, 1 June 1948.

¹⁷⁰ "Outsize Disadvantage," *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 27 May 1948.

¹⁷¹ Letter from A. Jackson to Seaborn, dated 12 January 1948, TNA, BT 64/1361.

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obscuring the existence of concessions that involved correspondence with the general public.¹⁷² In dealing with manufacturers, BoT staff saw manufacturers' attempts to increase coupon compensation for outsize garments as suspect and fought to keep compensation as low as possible. This uncompromising line meant that manufacturers were reluctant to make outsize garments, and many discontinued their larger lines.¹⁷³ And this was the case in the sector favoured by the Board – the ready-made trade.¹⁷⁴ BoT officials were even less willing to help when it came to garment making according to individual measurements, since, as noted above, it was viewed as a luxury trade despite being the main way in which consumers outside the normal range of sizes tended to buy clothes.¹⁷⁵

Alongside practical problems, perceptions of outsize citizens – their demographic distribution and character – impacted the way outsize shortages were treated. As Patrick Joyce argues, the way the state functions relies heavily “upon the views and prejudices of state servants.”¹⁷⁶ If wartime temporary civil servants like Meynell and Reddaway did not always come from a traditional civil service background, BoT staff after the war returned to its usual composition. At least one of the workers who regarded outsize consumers as responsible for their plight continued being a prominent figure in the formulation of outsize policy.¹⁷⁷ Thus, although the perception of outsize citizens as lazy and self-indulging,

¹⁷² See: Minute addressed to C.C.J. Simmonds, dated 8 April 1943 and Letter from A. Jackson to Seaborn, dated 12 January 1948, TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹⁷³ ‘Women’s Outsize Garments: Meeting held at Horseferry House on Wednesday July 10th 1946,’ TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹⁷⁴ Minute signed by P. Gordon, dated 27 April 1944.

¹⁷⁵ See for instance: “Suits and Standards,” *Times*, 16 January 1940; “Not Up to Standard,” *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 10 January 1940; ‘Minutes of Meeting held at Horseferry House on Friday 31st January [1947],’ TNA, BT 64/1361.

¹⁷⁶ Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 196.

¹⁷⁷ See: Minute dated 4 May 1944 and Letter from F.H. Shepherd to B.B. Judges, dated 21 January 1947, TNA, BT 64/1361.

discussed above, was challenged by the citizens in question, it also kept dictating the way rationing functioned.

Failure to solve outsize shortages was not only a matter of disregarding the needs of that group. Partially at least, it was a matter of understanding the demographic composition of those impacted by shortages. Zweiniger-Bargielowska argues that obesity was perceived as a problem that mostly affected middle-class middle-aged men and women.¹⁷⁸ Yet, as discussed in the previous chapters, women's clothing problems tended to gain more support from the state than men's clothing problems. In the BoT it was therefore often perceived as a middle-class women's problem. Although, as stated above, there were more outsize women than men, this did not mean that men did not suffer from these problems. As we have seen, the problem affected the menswear bespoke and made-to-measure trade, but it also affected the availability of working trousers and other items bought at the lower end of the trade.¹⁷⁹ The general shortage of menswear, discussed in Chapter Four, affected outsize men worse than it did men in stock size, who were at least able to purchase ready-made garments.¹⁸⁰ In the women's wear sector, it was the lower end of the trade that experienced the most scarcity after the war.¹⁸¹ Outsize women's problems gained more attention than men's problems did, leaving outsize men short. In the menswear sector, problems in the medium and high trades were most visible, obscuring problems at the lower end.

The problem of resource allocation was not only demographic, it was geographic as well. Although there were indications that the population in certain regions was more prone

¹⁷⁸ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Slimming through the Depression," 179-82.

¹⁷⁹ "Small Hope for the Big Man," *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 13 December 1947.

¹⁸⁰ "Outsize," Readers' Letters, *Daily Mail* (Hull), 18 March 1948; "Viewpoint: Shirts," *Daily Mirror*, 7 June 1948.

¹⁸¹ 'Women's Outsize Garments: Meeting held at Horseferry House on Wednesday July 10th 1946,' TNA, BT 64/1361.

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to be outside, the direction of distribution failed to meet these local needs.¹⁸² Local newspapers in Scotland and in regions across the North of England gave far more space to the outside problem than the national dailies, most of which were located in London. Despite these regional differences, correspondence with outside citizens was handled centrally rather than through the Board's regional offices. While there is no direct evidence of the role centralisation had in perpetuating the problem of obtaining outside garments, it is possible that the disconnect between the central state operation and local selling and buying habits played a part in it. As James Scott suggests, a state's lack of willingness to incorporate local knowledge into centrally organised schemes endangers the success of these schemes.¹⁸³

Although the post-war period marks a shift towards a more open debate about outside shortages, as well as a more active approach to alleviating these shortages within the Board of Trade, at the end of the decade there was still no solution to outside shortages. Board of Trade officials thought the solution to shortages was in the hands of manufacturers, a view they held even when rationing still imposed significant restrictions over the industry. Outside citizens, however, continued to view the Board of Trade as responsible for solving these issues both under rationing and after it had ended. British citizens saw the Board of Trade as the entity which represented their interests as consumers. This was not consumer representation of the kind that involved consumers in the decision making process, which Hilton describes as the original idea behind the

¹⁸² See: "Scotland's Big Women," *Sunday Post*, 31 August 1941; "Not So Slim in North," *Chester Chronicle*, 25 July 1942. This is also supported by: W.F.F. Kemsley, "Weight and Height of a Population in 1943," *Annals of Eugenics* 15, no. 1 (1949): 161–83.

¹⁸³ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 4–6.

Consumer Councils.¹⁸⁴ There were hardly any consumers directly involved in negotiations between the Board of Trade and the clothing industry, and consumers were first involved in the operation of rationing only in July 1948 – when Wilson was working towards its abolition.¹⁸⁵ Yet while they were not actively involved, citizens expected the Board of Trade to protect their interests as consumers and ensure their access to “fair shares.”

Although the BoT was supposed to represent their interests, for the Board, outsize citizens represented the excessive consumption of scarce materials. They were the epitome of the irresponsible citizen, not only because their bodies’ appearance suggested the excessive consumption of food, but because they required the consumption of more cloth. But in explicitly tying elements of civic virtue to conscientious shopping practices, Board officials gave outsize citizens the opportunity to construct themselves as good citizens. Unlike pre-war representations, which did not encourage responses from those who were outside the prevalent range of sizes, the rhetoric around rationing included concrete ways in which outsize citizens could demonstrate their civic virtue. Outsize citizens used this language to show that they were responsible, conscientious citizens, and were therefore worthy of equal access to the nation’s resources.

Conclusion

Shortages of outsize clothing lasted for nearly eight years of rationing and left a lasting impact on the clothing industry even after rationing ended. At various times throughout that period, this problem affected women and men, underwear and outerwear, troubling nearly six million individuals and attracting criticism from various regions in

¹⁸⁴ Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain*, 145-9.

¹⁸⁵ “She Will Be an Outsize Champion,” *The People*, 11 July 1948; “Clothes Rationing: Housewives to Serve on Advisory Committee,” *Manchester Guardian*, 12 July 1948.

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Britain. Unlike the average-sized citizen, Britons of large proportions could not gain equal access to clothes to sustain their wardrobe. Either they could not find a way to spend their coupons since garments their size were not available, or they had to give more coupons than other citizens so they could have garments made in their size. Unlike other problems of inequality that the rationing system presented, this one was not easily or quickly solved, leaving the outsize population with limited access to clothes. Understanding the reasons underlying these shortages, and why no solution was found for them despite the vast number of people they affected, provides commentary about how social perceptions of good citizenship shaped not only concepts of fairness, but affected the way the Board of Trade allocated access to scarce supplies. The design of the scheme did not properly consider the needs of this population and when administrators faced complaints, their responses demonstrated their views of outsize citizens. These views also determined who they chose to listen to, since they trusted the opinions of trade representatives more than those of citizens facing shortages. Finally, social perceptions shaped the way that citizens expressed criticism of the scheme, as they felt obligated to highlight their conscientious and patriotic behaviour in order to assert their right for fair shares.

The problem of allowing for the production of a sufficient amount of outsize garments demonstrates the limited information the British government had about its citizens and the significance of this information for planning when regulations occupied a meaningful proportion of the state's activities. The lack of accurate data about the population's body measurements meant that it was difficult for civil servants to plan the rationing scheme in a way that accommodated the production of outsizes. Information was also lacking about production in the clothing trade – the census of production did not reflect

the measurements of garments being made or the proportions in which particular sizes were being sold and made it difficult to plan coupon pointing accordingly. The need for a better coordination both within the clothing industry and between that industry and the British state resulted in the establishment of the Clothing Industry Development Council (which later became the Joint Clothing Council) and to the commission of the *Women's Measurements and Sizes* survey. The survey provided information that would have been invaluable during rationing – it detailed the proportions of different body shapes in the population, correlations between height and girth. While early discussions of this survey intended to include “both sexes and [...] various age groups,” this survey only represented women’s measurements.¹⁸⁶ It was not deemed necessary to make a similar survey of men’s measurements, although some voices in the trade thought the menswear sector was in greater need of a new approach to sizes.¹⁸⁷

Despite their willingness to solve the outsize production problem, BoT officials were only willing to give manufacturers the minimum conditions to allow them to make these garments. While there is little comment from manufacturers on their position when it came to outsize production, the shortage of outsize clothes in the shops, coupled with an abundance of clothes in smaller sizes demonstrates that the incentives the Board of Trade offered were not attractive enough to balance the advantage of producing stock sizes. Stock sizes involved smaller bureaucratic effort, and manufacturers could produce and sell more of them from the limited supply of cloth available to them. Consumers held the BoT accountable for enabling this situation, expecting officials to handle the clothing trade in their name.

¹⁸⁶ Minute dated 11 March 1949, TNA, BT 70/247, “Survey of Human Measurements.”

¹⁸⁷ Mr Brockhurst, “Men’s Sizes – Scrap All Present Sizes,” *Manufacturing Clothier* 4, no. 5 (May 1948), 166-7.

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While the reasons for the initial appearance of this problem were logistical, the persistence of shortages cannot be explained by technical difficulties alone. After all, some information on the size of the outside population was available by 1943, while shortages persisted long afterwards. The Board's uncompromising position against the trade and its demand management strategies were the result of a tight supply position, but the ambivalent attitude of officials in their handling of outside shortages marginalised the needs of outside citizens nonetheless. Although Board officials insisted that rationing meant "fair shares," the term was ambiguous. In the eyes of outside individuals and those who took up their cause (for whatever reason), their inability to find clothes that fit them meant that the scheme did not represent fair shares. Their physical appearance meant that they did not receive equal treatment in the context of the rationing scheme. Board officials, however, held that a flat-rate approach meant equality, and that concessions undermined claims for fairness. While this meant a gap in the interpretation of the meaning of "fair shares" it also meant that not all needs were considered on equal footing. Groups that were capable of pressuring the Board were able to secure concessions that adjusted rationing conditions to their circumstances. While several groups placed outside shortages on their agenda on various occasions, there was no group that represented this population and was able to prioritise this problem. As a result, it was easy for civil servants at the Board of Trade to postpone a solution to this problem.

Throughout the war and post-war period, Board representatives maintained that they were doing the best they could for outside citizens, even, as in wartime, when they were aware that rationing did not give outside individuals the same level of access to clothes as it did the rest of the population. The Board's ambivalent approach to the problems that

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outsized citizens were facing set these citizens apart from the rest of the population because of their appearance. Outsized consumers embodied qualities that were at odds with the ideas behind the rationing scheme. At a time when frugal consumption was a sign of good citizenship, they represented excess and were seen as unconscientious, greedy and lazy – they were the war profiteer incarnate. For the Board of Trade, an entity which was mainly concerned with issues of production, the additional raw materials required by the bodies of outsized citizens represented a departure from the principals of fairness. Their body measurements made them less deserving of the fair shares that the clothes rationing scheme promised British citizens. Bodily appearance became a factor that qualified citizens' access to equal treatment.

Conclusion

In July 1950, MO decided to send a survey to their panel of volunteers, following up a survey conducted in April 1939. The topic of the survey was Personal Appearance. The answers given to these surveys by a buyer from Birmingham, who was a member of the panel throughout this period, are telling. The buyer considered personal appearance to be a particularly important aspect of life. In both answers, he regarded personal appearance as an indicator of character, considering in 1950 that “people who have a clean, neat and tidy appearance, are careful and orderly in their work and everyday life,” just as he did in 1939.¹ The only difference in his answers is a sense that he was slightly less comfortable with a straightforward connection between appearance and character in his 1950 answer, evident in his addition of the aside

[...] although I quite agree that a person may take little or no interest in his or her personal appearance without it reflecting on the way that person conducts his or her life and work.²

Which he immediately countered with the remark: “what is personal appearance but part of life.”³ He could not quite settle this new idea with the values that organized his outlook. For those who placed a high value on a respectable appearance, austerity did not change much. Years of consumer controls and shortages did not shake their conviction that a respectable appearance meant a respectable character, and that in appearing respectable, they belonged to the respectable class.

¹ MOA, DR 1216, replies to April 1939 and July 1950 Directives.

² MOA, DR 1216, reply to July 1950 Directive.

³ MOA, DR 1216, reply to July 1950 Directive.

This appearance represented a particular kind of morality, which had its roots in nineteenth-century middle-class respectability – a respectability then considered necessary to become a citizen.⁴ Although the values it was thought to represent remained, on the surface, true to their nineteenth-century origins, belonging was as much based, if not more so, on conformity in appearance as it was on conformity to the values that this appearance allegedly represented.⁵ The conflicts that rose at the beginning of the war show precisely how important appearance was for belonging. It was important enough for women to be chastised for being unpatriotic if they chose to stop conforming to dress codes. And when men feared they might no longer be able to conform to pre-war dress norms, they were eager to make sure they had enough stocks of the right suits to keep up appearances. The right appearance was interpreted as having the right character, and could be translated to a defence against the authorities, job security, status and belonging, because ultimately, a respectable appearance still meant being a worthy member of society.

It was in this context that the material conditions of the nation necessitated the government's intervention in the clothing market and in Britons' clothing choices, inserting the state into the relationship between individual and society and complicating what it meant to belong. During the Second World War, the scarcity of raw materials and working hands meant that war production had to come at the expense of the manufacture of consumer goods, including clothes. When the war was over, the export drive took the place of war production, diverting resources away from the home market. Throughout the austerity period, the British government controlled prices, the consumption of clothes and

⁴ Bailey, "Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?" 338.

⁵ Something which British secret agents on the continent understood and used during the war, see: Juliette Pattinson, "'Passing Unnoticed in a French Crowd': The Passing Performances of British SOE Agents in Occupied France," *National Identities* 12, no. 3 (2010): 297–9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2010.500469>.

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the manufacture of clothes to a varying extent. Of these, consumer rationing did most to restrict and regulate the level of access individual consumers had to clothes. Alongside shortages, which were caused by the redirection of resources away from the home clothing market, rationing meant that many consumers had less access to clothes than they did before the war. These regulations were accompanied by propaganda that attempted to reframe consumption in citizens' minds and make clothing economy a desirable patriotic action, a civic duty and a moral imperative. This new framing of consumption and appearance meant that responsible members of the national community had to be frugal about their purchases, take care of their garments meticulously, keeping themselves neat despite increased shabbiness and conserve scarce national resources by using as little cloth as possible. Whether citizens adhered to this moral dress code was evident in their appearance: their clothes could be sensible or flash; they could be shoddy, worn but neatly mended or suspiciously new; they could be skimpily sewn or use fabric lavishly.

The new national dress code, constructed by government propaganda, did not completely discard old norms. True, some were bluntly denounced as obsolete by government officials – that shabbiness was pronounced patriotic is a good example of that. But many of the practices that held cultural and social value before the war were central to the government's framing of clothing controls – neatness of dress and meticulous calculation of expenses are two instances where new and old ideas about dress and appearance overlapped. Excessive consumption, both before and during austerity, was a selfish act; it was only the boundaries of what counted as excess that changed.

As the three case studies in this thesis demonstrate, the recasting of dress norms from an issue of symbolic personal morality to one that had material impact on the greater

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good – or from an issue of cultural citizenship to one that was concerned with its social and legal registers – made dress norms a matter of public and private debate. For men and women who wore large sizes, this meant that, on the one hand, pre-war prejudices framed the government clothing policy and affected their wardrobes, yet on the other hand, it also meant that they could fight these policies by emphasising their own virtue as citizens and as consumers. Those arguing against them cast the outsize as lazy, conspicuous consumers, who were not satisfied with their fair share of supplies and were unwilling to sacrifice time and effort when supplies were short. This depiction came at a time when “fair shares” and “equality of sacrifice” were values appreciated and upheld by the British public. Yet the government’s image of good sartorial citizenship provided large-bodied citizens with a set of attributes and actions they could emphasise in defending themselves in this public debate and fight for their right to belong. As citizens, they felt justified in demanding better treatment from the industry, since, if clothes were regulated by the state, the state could be held accountable for the disadvantageous position of particular groups.

While citizens wearing outsize clothes could use the debate around dress to bolster their status in the national community, men in white-collar occupations experienced the opposite effect. There was little room in the national debate for the elaborate ways that this occupational community defined a respectable appearance. Their place and status within that community depended on the appearance of respectability – white collar and cuffs and a shirt and suit in good condition. This was not only difficult to achieve under austerity, it was framed by the state as obsolete and unpatriotic. As state officials insisted that placing the needs of the state above one’s personal appearance was a civic duty, white-collar

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workers were made to choose between belonging to their occupational community and belonging to the national community.

In the case of young working-class women, the reframing of appearances reinvigorated the old battle against Americanisation, as well as reinforced notions about the appearance of morality and respectability. What was previously frivolous, selfish spending on clothes that made young working-class women mindless, bored and less likely to contribute to the community through active citizenship, now came at the expense of the nation and against the requests of the state. The excessive make-up that once marked women as morally questionable, now marked them as participants in an underground economy that allowed them to overcome the shortage of cosmetics. The slackness that once marked them as unworthy future wives and made them unemployable now meant that they did not do their work meticulously – work on which the nation’s survival and prosperity depended.

Yet, aside from the new framing that gave this chastising greater moral force, what had also changed was that young women could now feel justified in asserting their own viewpoint. Having done their duty to the nation by contributing to the efforts of production through work, they felt entitled to enjoy the money they earned the way they saw fit, even if that did not fit the ideals of those who chastised them. Their disregard of established notions of what they should look like was echoed two decades later in Katharine Whitehorn’s influential article “Sisters under the Coat,” which attempted to remove some of the shame that accompanied the term “slut” by proudly reclaiming it.⁶ Like her predecessors, Whitehorn was acutely aware of what she was supposed to look like, and similarly to them, she asserted her dissent as fact – affecting no one but herself.

⁶ Katharine Whitehorn, “Sisters under the Coat,” *Observer*, 29 December 1963.

What Whitehorn's need to rebel against the same social norms that attempted to regulate her predecessors' appearance demonstrates, more than young women's ability to assert themselves in the face of these norms, is the persistence of those norms two decades later. Although austerity briefly gave young working-class women the opportunity to legitimise their non-normative appearance, this opportunity was short lived. The norms that governed young women's dress and appearance still had an unshakeable status in the 1960s.

The same could be said about the norms that are the focus of the two additional case studies. The post-war spotlight on the menswear market suggests that there was a desire to go back to familiar patterns of dress. Although the morning suit was slowly disappearing from the streets, the lounge suit remained the quintessential item of the office worker's attire and the epitome of respectability.⁷ Once supplies were plentiful again, the need for men to be well-dressed in the interest of the British clothing industry and for the prosperity of Britain was asserted not to contrast their shabbiness, but to contrast their conservative tastes.⁸ Men continued to adhere to conservative patterns of dress, which marked them as respectable citizens.

Unlike the norms that governed white-collar workers' appearance, the norms that governed the appearance of large-bodied consumers had not been put to one side, yet the legitimising language that they used to assert their rights lost its relevance. Today, plus-sized individuals are still seen as a burden on the state and on the community, and although the British state had taken marginal responsibility over what is termed an "obesity epidemic" the responsibility for this condition is still ultimately seen to be with the

⁷ Christopher Beward, *The Suit: Form, Function and Style* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016), 61.

⁸ Alison Settle, "Ambassadors of Fashion for Men," *Observer*, 27 August 1950.

individual.⁹ Given the growing presence of men and women of large proportions among the British public, the one thing that has changed is their access to clothes, although, even then, the types of clothes available are often limited.¹⁰ This is no longer seen as a realm in which the state can legitimately intervene.

This reinstating of norms of appearance once the end of austerity made them possible to achieve, and the de-legitimisation of the performance of duties towards the state as a tool for social inclusion both indicate the depth of the separation between these two realms outside the context of a national crisis. Norms of appearance were woven tightly into the social fabric, organising ideas about belonging in the various communities that comprised British society; too tightly for the state to replace them with alternative norms or really alter the meaning they had in a social context. The state had no place in what was or was not socially acceptable, who did or did not belong and how citizens should conduct their private business: their home economy and their appearance. It was only the most socially marginalised group among the cases explored above who felt they could gain more by expanding state intervention. Other than the outsize population, the intervention of the state in the framing of social norms was only acceptable for those for whom it did not change much, like the middle-class observers discussed in Chapter Three.

As I am writing this conclusion in the midst of a global pandemic that necessitated state interference in the social patterns of everyday life – whether it is mask wearing or social distancing – I am acutely aware of the limitations of such intervention. What this

⁹ S. Hilton, C. Patterson and A. Teyhan, “Escalating Coverage of Obesity in UK Newspapers: The Evolution and Framing of the ‘Obesity Epidemic’ from 1996 to 2010,” *Obesity* 20, no. 8 (2012): 1688-1695 <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1038/oby.2012.27>; Jennifer Dixon, “What Should Nanny Do Next? The Government and Obesity,” The Health Foundation, accessed 8 August 2021, <https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/podcast/episode-02-the-government-and-obesity>.

¹⁰ Lena Dunham (@lenadunham), “I've always been a fluctuator, but it wasn't until I got into my thirties and had a hysterectomy that I started to really settle into my adult body and- spoiler alert- she wasn't a size 4...” Instagram photo, 6 April 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CNVDHwfLh_1/.

research demonstrates is twofold. First, that in considering state intervention, we must consider all aspects of the realm into which it inserts itself. Clothes, as this thesis has shown, are not just a commodity, they are a tool of appearance that plays an important role in social interactions and in defining communities. Without understanding that role, it is impossible to fully understand what rationing them meant for citizens' everyday lives. Second, that if we want to understand how citizens thought about good citizenship and how they recognised this trait in themselves and in others, we need to expand beyond the spheres traditionally defined as civic. In *The State of Freedom*, Patrick Joyce demonstrates how the lives, education and culture of civil servants shaped the way the state operated, or rather, the way civil servants operated in the name of the state, constructing what knowledge was significant and what forms it should take.¹¹ The way citizens understood citizenship is just as complex, and just as dependent on their culture, their everyday social interactions, on how they read the world and what they valued. By demonstrating the way appearance was used to understand citizenship and belonging, this thesis demonstrates the broader ways citizens understood and constructed their citizenship and the need for historians to attend to what are often thought of as trivial, even frivolous matters. The apparent frivolity of dress and appearance obscured the ways that they were interwoven in the patterns of daily life and their function in understanding aspects of citizenship: in marking the cultural boundaries of belonging, in symbolising adherence to the rule of law and in signalling civic virtue.¹² Dress and appearance are often subjects that social historians leave to fashion historians, but in doing so, they leave social questions about the

¹¹ Joyce, *The State of Freedom*.

¹² Grant, "Historicizing Citizenship in Post-War Britain."

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historical context of dress unanswered. This thesis demonstrates that dress is anything but frivolous and it deserves to be studied in accordance with its social and cultural role.

List of Abbreviations

BIPO – British Institute of Public Opinion

BoT – Board of Trade

CB – Consumer Branch

CNS – Consumer Needs Section

IWM – Imperial War Museum

MO – Mass Observation

MOA - Mass Observation Archive

MoI – Ministry of Information

NFMT – National Federation of Merchant Tailors

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Closer: The Home of Longitudinal Research, UCL Research Institute

Imperial War Museum (IWM) Archive Online and London

Art and Design Collection

Documents Collection

Film Collection

Ministry of Information Second World War Official Collection

Sound Archive

Leonard Woolf Papers, University of Sussex Library Archives

M&S Company Archive, Leeds

Mass Observation Archive (MOA), Online and Sussex

MOI Digital

Movietone: The Digital Newsreel Archive

The National Archives (TNA), London

BT – Board of Trade and Successors

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CAB – Cabinet Office

INF – Central Office of Information

RG – General Register Office, Social Survey Department, and Office of Population
Censuses and Surveys.

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Daily Mail

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Daily Worker

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Edinburgh Evening News

Falkirk Herald

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Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail

Illustrated London News

Leicester Evening News

Lincolnshire Echo

Liverpool Daily Post

Manchester Guardian

Newcastle Evening Chronicle

Nottingham Evening Post

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Observer

People

Staffordshire Advertiser

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Scotsman

Southern Reporter

Sunday Pictorial

Sunday Post

Times

Western Daily Press

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Yorkshire Observer

Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury

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Contact

Men Only

Picture Post

Pilot Papers

Punch

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