

Suffragists or Slaves to Fashion?

Gender, Style, and the Fight for Enfranchisement

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In the 1910s, the pure white dresses and gold sashes of woman's suffrage marchers became iconic symbols of their cause, manifesting the feminine virtue they hoped to imbue in government. But by the 1920s, a new, liberated woman had replaced the freedom fighter of the previous decade. With her scandalous short skirts and masculine bobbed hair, the flapper appeared to betray all of the moral superiority that white suffrage costumes conveyed. However, newspaper and magazine articles on women's dress and civic duties during the 1910s and 1920s reveal a more complex picture than the simple image of flapper versus suffragist. Off the parade route and outside the dance hall, journalists associated both feminized and masculinized female fashions with progress and stagnation, freedom and tyranny, frivolity and deep political truths. Yet associations between gender, civics, and style did not remain constant during this period, as British and American women fought for equal rights to men.¹ Before and during World War I, both sides of the suffrage debate viewed male and female fashion as distinctive, citing the specific style elements of practicality, individuality, and pace as evidence of each gender's civic fitness. However, in the decade after the war, historians and contemporaries denied any positive correlation between fashion's masculinization, female emancipation, and enfranchisement.

The three elements of practicality, individuality, and pace surfaced repeatedly in analyses of fashion, gender, and suffrage from 1910-1930, although journalists drew vastly different conclusions about these aspects of women's dress. Practicality related to the simplicity, convenience, and time investment in fashion. Individuality involved the variety of styles worn at a specific moment, and pace was concerned with the speed at which these trends changed over

¹ Great Britain and the United States experienced suffrage movements at about the same time, witnessed a similar transformation in gender roles during World War I, and granted women the right to vote within two years of one another. Therefore, the two countries will be discussed together in this paper. The differences in British and American opinions on women's fashion in light of their separate suffrage movements deserve further investigation, but this analysis is outside the scope of this essay.

time. First, this paper explores how suffragists and antisuffragists evaluated women's and men's fashion in terms of these three issues before female enfranchisement. Then, it investigates how World War I acted as a turning point in both style and politics, as it brought women on the home front into more masculine clothes and roles. Finally, it analyzes how British and American women reexamined fashion's practicality, individuality, and pace in light of their supposed emancipation, when they earned the right to vote after the war. Despite the political and sartorial changes taking place during the two decades, style consistently remained a way to speak about gender roles in the 1910s and 1920s.

In the 1910s, male antisuffragists argued that a lack of practicality and individuality made women "slaves to fashion," unfit to participate in the political process. In 1914, Rev. Dr. Cyrus Townsend Brady gave a speech to the League for Political Education, in which he praised a woman's role within the home and ridiculed the dress of his mostly pro-suffrage audience. Observing the women in front of him, he declared, "It makes me wonder why any of you should fight for freedom when you are such slaves, and slaves to men. No woman here has been able to dress without the aid of her husband, her maid, or children."² Hence, Brady connected impractical female dress with a state of subservience, which appeared at odds with democratic values. If a woman could not even clothe herself, Brady doubted that she could hold her own political opinions. Brady believed that the similarity of these frivolous styles further showed that women could not think independently. He could not determine whether or not a woman supported suffrage based on her dress, and he thus chastised, "Your hats were universally ridiculous, your gowns absurd, and you all had foolishly small feet."³ For antisuffragists, this feminine absence of individuality contradicted the democratic value of pluralism and diversity of

² "C.T. Brady's Darts at Ballot Seekers," *New York Times*, Jan. 11, 1914, C5.

³ *Ibid.*

opinion. Yet in relation to men's style, a lack of individuality implied different political significance. According to Alison Matthews David, contemporary observers believed that male sartorial uniformity demonstrated democratic equality.⁴ While dress critics saw men's suits as particularly egalitarian because of their simplicity, in 1913, Unitarian minister Dr. Jenkin Lloyd Jones regarded the "barbarous aptitude for ornamentation" in women's clothing with horror.⁵ Jones agreed with Brady on the impracticality of female costume, contending that "feathers and frills...neutralize the democratic demand for rights on the part of women."⁶ Therefore, while male antisuffragists saw adorned yet uniform women's fashion as contrary to democracy, men's unremarkable dress manifested the most-prized values of a supposedly just government.

Not only did men believe women's dress hindered democracy, but female activists and fashion critics also portrayed feminine styles and suffrage as incompatible. Fashion correspondent Ella M. Robson proclaimed in 1913 that "in piquant contrast to the woman suffrage movement are the fashions of the season, which are softer, daintier, more feminine than they have been for many a day."⁷ Above a sketch of women wearing "feathers and frills" that Jones and Brady would certainly consider "universally ridiculous," Robson clearly associated suffrage with masculinity. Political wives like Second Lady Lois Irene Marshall also brought women's voting and clothing into conflict, and antisuffragists like Ohioan activist Florence Goff Schwarz further derided feminine fashions.⁸ Schwarz characterized clothing as the real cause of female oppression, claiming, "Suffragists proclaim that women are serfs and slaves because they have not the ballot. If permitted to vote they would yet be slaves. The iron heel of Fashion has ground the necks of our women since time began." She then criticized women's dress in terms of

⁴ Alison Matthews David, "Decorated Men: Fashioning the French Soldier, 1852-1914," *Fashion Theory* 7, no. 1 (2003): 7.

⁵ "Says Gowns Peril Woman Suffrage," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Jan. 27, 1913, 3.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ella M Robson, "Paris Fashions," *Town & Country*, April 19, 1913, 62.

⁸ "Says Modes Hurt Suffrage," *New York Times*, Jul. 28, 1913, 1.

practicality and pace. Schwarz stated, “the all-absorbing topic of fashion and beauty culture saps woman’s time to such an extent that she is unfitted to take up matters political or to study them understandingly,” a point also promoted by Jones.^{9,10} By citing this tendency to follow trends, rather than dressing for one’s own body type, Schwarz advanced Brady’s individuality argument, as well. Schwarz took Brady’s claims one step further, though, and declared that women’s fashion did not just subjugate the wearer. She blamed wives’ clothing expenditures for their husband’s oppressive debts, reflecting the belief that women should work as mothers and homemakers, not voters and wage earners. Furthermore, she found it hypocritical that female activists fought for suffering sweatshop workers, child laborers, and birds but bought all the latest feathers and bargain trends, as Jones also accused.^{11,12} Critiquing women’s fashion in terms of practicality, individuality, and pace, Schwarz suggested that instead of voting more, women could promote social causes by buying less.

In contrast, suffragists contended that Schwarz’ disenfranchised activism was not as effective as actual ballots, an argument fellow Ohioan Mary MacMillan even framed in terms of women’s fashion. While Schwarz quoted a “prominent suffragist” who also blamed style for feminine stagnation, MacMillan completely denied this assessment.¹³ “Woman is said to be the slave of fashion, but as a matter of fact her dress today is more convenient, comfortable and healthful than it ever was in the history of clothes,” MacMillan stated in 1912. Although regarded as “impractical, unresourceful, [and] extravagant,” women used the common sense attitude reflected in their dress to help their husbands make money, raise their children, and support themselves if left spouseless.¹⁴ Therefore, MacMillan directly addressed the natalist fears

⁹ Florence Goff Schwarz, "Woman's Suffrage Versus Fashions." *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Aug. 25, 1912, D7.

¹⁰ “Says Gowns Peril Woman Suffrage,” 3.

¹¹ Schwarz, D7.

¹² Says Gowns Peril Woman Suffrage,” 3.

¹³ Schwarz, D7.

¹⁴ Mary MacMillan, "Styles." In "The Suffrage Forum," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Jul. 7, 1912, B7.

of Schwarz and Brady, who believed that both fashion and voting distracted women from their wifely duties. MacMillan continued, “This is why she wants the ballot. The ballot is the practical little means to an end. It is the ready-to-wear garment of politics.”¹⁵ Using the practicality of female fashion as a metaphor, MacMillan thus portrayed voting as simply the easiest method for women to fulfill a maternal role and stimulate real social transformation.

Furthermore, MacMillan believed that the individuality and changing pace of feminine styles reflected this practical desire for political progress, which other journalists even implied made women more fit to vote than men. MacMillan admitted that not all women’s garments were as simple as the ready-to-wear dress. “We wear ball gowns to balls, and we like pretty lingerie; we buy neat-fitting pumps, and we have the color of our eyes in mind when we select a gown. We care for beauty always, thank goodness! But we recognize different forms of beauty and we don’t think it is pretty to drag mud and germs about in the trains of our dresses,” she explained.¹⁶ In describing women who saw different types of beauty and picked colors according to their personal characteristics, MacMillan showed that they did exhibit individuality in dress. Therefore, she challenged Schwarz’s and Brady’s claim that female sartorial uniformity signaled undemocratic subjugation. MacMillan continued, “When a style seems excessively inconvenient or a menace to health nowadays it is dropped, whether it be a dress or a monarch or a gang boss.”¹⁷ To MacMillan, the fast pace of women’s fashion thus evoked the speed of democratic politics, and the “style” of female disenfranchisement seemed excessively inconvenient. Hence, she contradicted Schwarz by stating that changing trends actually prepared women for the civic sphere. Other critics even contrasted this variety in women’s fast-paced fashion with men’s restrictive styles. A 1916 article entitled “Man a Slave to Fashion” compared unchanging,

¹⁵ MacMillan, B7.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

uncomfortable wool evening coats, worn even in the summer, with the “flexible conventions of woman’s dress.” The author asserted, “If sense in dressing were made a test of franchise, the men would be struggling and yelling for the right to vote.”¹⁸ By associating feminine fashion’s pace and practicality with political engagement, this article’s critique of men showed that women’s clothing and voting need not be opposed.

In contrast, other writers argued that men’s trends had assumed a rapid pace to match women’s fashion, entailing a feminine denigration of the political process. After a conversation with a London tailor in 1912, one woman observed that “men are the slaves of fashion, even those who pretend they do not care about their clothes,” because they “desire to be up to date in all the little details of dress – which change each season.”¹⁹ The same year, a *Washington Post* article called “Fashion’s Edict for Men” traced this male obsession with dress to the woman’s suffrage movement. The journalist specifically compared the speed of male tailoring trends with the progression of women’s rights, lamenting that “while women hang breathlessly over the news of suffragette victories at the polls, the men in their clubs loll about and discuss whether the styles are to be close fitting or loose this season and whether padding or natural curves are to be approved.” He then giped, “since women are bound to play politics, neglecting the joy of expressing their individuality in their clothes, it is but natural that the men should enter the field of fashion and vie with one another in dressing up like baby dolls.”²⁰ Hence, this author did not only argue that women should stay home and take care of their children, as Schwarz and Brady contended. Instead, with the terms “play politics” and “baby dolls,” he labeled both politically-engaged women and sartorially-minded men as childlike. The *Washington Post* author saw an entry into opposite gender spheres as not progress but rather immaturity. Thus, this article’s

¹⁸ “Man a Slave to Fashion,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Aug. 8, 1916, 6.

¹⁹ “Woman on Men’s Fashions,” *New York Times*, Apr. 21, 1912, C4.

²⁰ “Fashion’s Edict for Men,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 20, 1912, 6.

condemnation of male sartorial pace also revealed deep criticisms of women, which trivialized the suffrage cause.

This fear of breaking gender barriers even affected the woman's suffrage movement, who began to emphasize feminine dress. British author and social commentator H. G. Wells described that before World War I, English suffragists "argued that a 'masculine style of costume' discredited the movement and women were urged to dress with a maximum of feminine charm." Suffrage marchers even donned impractically-overpriced outfits to prove their femininity while fighting for their rights.²¹ American feminist Helena Hill Weed observed a similar tension in regard to gendered style. Looking back at the voting rights movement in 1921, Weed remembered having heard fellow suffragist Dr. Anna Howard Shaw declare that her largest sacrifice to the cause was not trimming her tresses, despite the time she wasted arranging her long, uncomfortable hair. Shaw felt that she must combat the stereotype that only "freaks" – "the short-haired women and the long-haired men" – wanted female enfranchisement, and she willingly forwent practicality to avoid alienating the general public.²² According to suffragists, the image of womanhood they could cultivate through dress outweighed their opponent's attempts to problematize women's fashion in the male political sphere.

However, World War I narrowed this perceived gap between womenswear and menswear, and commentators viewed women's new practical, slow-paced styles as proof that they deserved to vote. According to fashion historians Valerie Mendes and Amy de la Haye, female wartime styles included "sensible" suits, "practical" pockets, and "durable" fabrics, descriptions which resemble MacMillan's accounts of suffrage-worthy women's dress.²³ Mendes and de la Haye added that military-inspired – and therefore menswear-inspired – clothing

²¹ H. G. Wells, "The Woman and the War," *Ladies' Home Journal*, June 1916, 59.

²² Helena Hill Weed, "A Feminist Rises in Defense of Bobbed Hair," *New York Tribune*, Sep. 18, 1921, D6.

²³ Valerie Mendes and Amy de la Haye. *Fashion since 1900*, 2nd ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), 50.

became popular for women, and female factory and farm workers even wore pants, up to this point an exclusively male garment.²⁴ In addition to these trouser-clad women's labor contribution, in 1916, H. G. Wells argued that their commitment to simpler styles earned them the right to vote. He explained:

“It is not simply that the British women have so bountifully produced intelligence and industry; that does but begin their record. They have been willing to go dowdy. The mass of women in Great Britain are wearing the clothes of 1914. In 1913 every girl and woman one saw in the streets of London had an air of doing her best to keep in the fashion. Now they are for the most part as carelessly dressed as busy business men or clever young students might have been. They are none the less pretty for that, and far more beautiful.”²⁵

During the dark days of the war, Wells thus celebrated female styles' practicality and slow pace. In fact, he believed that the European fashion industry would stagnate altogether after the conflict, contrasting MacMillan's association of changing styles with societal progress.²⁶ Therefore, even if he came to the opposite conclusion on voting rights, Wells supported Schwarz's idea that fast-paced women's trends did not strengthen the suffrage cause. In a way, he did not regard female fashion but rather a lack thereof as evidence of women's civic value.

In fact, Wells argued that the practical women who appeared the least feminine in their dress best modeled civic commitment. The author described two extremes on a spectrum of women who emerged during the prewar suffrage movement, the overly-feminine and the overly-masculine.²⁷ He contended that in contrast to farm and factory workers, a woman who dressed as the “eternal feminine” during wartime could only justify her appearance when on a date with a soldier, during which time she must boost morale.²⁸ Therefore, Wells believed that “the conflict of the citizen-woman ideal with the loveliness-woman ideal, which was breaking out very plainly

²⁴ Mendes, 50-54.

²⁵ Wells, 60.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, 61-62.

²⁸ Ibid, 60.

in the British suffrage movement before the war, will certainly return after the war, and I have little doubt which way the issue will fall. The human being is going to carry it against the sexual being...The plain well-made dress will oust the ribbon and the décolletage.”²⁹ Wells thus painted feminine loveliness, sex appeal, ornamentation, and impracticality as contrary to citizenship and even one’s status as a “human being.” As he declared that the war would equalize gender relations, Wells still drew on assumptions of feminine inferiority in relation to fashion.³⁰ In fact, one can regard Wells’ denigration of explicitly female dress as antifeminist, under design historian Lee Wright’s framework that “assertion of gender *difference* challenges the power relationship more effectively than any attempt to emulate what is seen as male.”³¹ Therefore, in supporting female enfranchisement, Wells compelled women to conform to a decidedly male mode.

With these claims, Wells directly contrasted suffragists’ fears about overly-masculinized dress, which illustrated a deeper gender conflict within the voting rights movement. One prevailing argument for suffrage portrayed women as unique and claimed that once enfranchised, they would assume a special, nurturing civic role that men could never fulfill. In contrast, other women argued that their equality to men, rather than differences between the sexes, rendered their disenfranchisement unjust. Therefore, the ability of both suffragists and antisuffragists to take a variety of stances on pace, practicality, and individuality in women’s fashion reflected wider rhetorical tensions regarding gender before World War I.

After the First World War, Wells’ predictions partially came true, as women won the vote and female fashion became even more masculinized. Contemporaries and historians traced the

²⁹ Wells, 62.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Lee Wright, “Objectifying Gender: The Stiletto Heel,” in *A View from the Interior: Women and Design*, ed. Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham (London, England: The Women’s Press Ltd, 1989), 15.

roots of these sartorial and political changes to the conflict. Just as Wells had foreseen, women's engagement in the war effort prompted female enfranchisement on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1918, before the Great War had even ended, the British Parliament passed the Representation of the People Act, which allowed women over the age of thirty to vote. In 1919, legislation for the Nineteenth Amendment made it through the United States Congress, and in 1920, woman's suffrage became an American constitutional right. At the same time as this political progress, fashion transformations swept the postwar world. Skirts and hair became shorter, waists dropped to the hips, chests flattened, and an overall "boyish" figure prevailed.³² Posing in her own flat-chested, waist-less gown, American-born Paris socialite Duchess de Richelieu attributed the new styles to the economic conditions of the war. She claimed that dresses had become shorter and straighter to meet demand during a material and labor shortage, and these French flapper styles spread worldwide after the conflict ended.³³ American fashion writer Anne Rittenhouse expanded upon this connection between World War I and 1920s fashion. According to Rittenhouse, French tastemakers had decided that "a well-nourished face was not patriotic" due to postwar scarcities, so they designed for a skinny, underdeveloped figure.³⁴ Additionally, historian Mary Louise Roberts contended that clothing "created a visual analogue of the freedom that many women of all classes had supposedly enjoyed during the war, when they had assumed traditionally male professions and responsibilities."³⁵ Therefore, like Wells had predicted, Roberts showed that the 1920s masculinization of fashion reflected women's triumphs as well as hardships during World War I.

³² Mendes, 59.

³³ Duchess De Richelieu, "The Negative Sex," *Red Book Magazine*, October 1928, 156.

³⁴ Anne Rittenhouse, *The Well-Dressed Woman* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1924), 80-83, quoted in Linda Przybyszewski, *The Lost Art of Dress* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 263.

³⁵ Mary Louise Roberts, "Samson and Delilah Revisited: The Politics of Women's Fashion in 1920s France," *The American Historical Review* 98, no. 3 (1993): 682.

While some suffragists immediately connected these contemporaneous changes in costume, civics, and gender roles, historians did not see a correlation between women's political freedom and allegedly practical, masculinized fashion. In 1921, Helena Hill Weed proclaimed that the modern woman "with her short hair, her unconfined waist, her sanitary short skirt and freedom of motion is a creature clad for efficiency, comfort and health," echoing the language that MacMillan used to describe women's practical dress in support of suffrage. Weed even directly linked enfranchisement and masculinized hairstyles, when she recalled "the moment I received the word that Tennessee, the thirty-sixth state, had ratified the Federal Suffrage Amendment, I seized the shears and cut my hair."³⁶ She felt that after achieving suffrage, she was finally free from feminine beauty ideals, like long locks. However, in her article on this very hairdo, Mary Louise Roberts asserted that the bob and other 1920s trends were less practical than advertised and continued to subjugate women. Though newly-masculinized styles did offer more mobility than prewar dress, the effort, expense, and body image involved in flapper fashions only offered an illusion of freedom.³⁷ Roberts focused her article on France, where these trends originated, and labeled this sartorial liberation an "elaborate marketing ploy," because women there lacked suffrage until 1945.³⁸ However, historians noted that even in countries that had enfranchised women, these masculine styles still served as only a fantasy of liberation. Mendes and de la Haye stated that "the garçon look was in fact aspirational rather than rooted in reality, since relatively few women actually experienced radical social, economic, or political freedom." They detailed that British women could only vote with certain qualifications until 1928, and even fully-enfranchised American women had to return to the private sphere after the

³⁶ Weed, D6.

³⁷ Roberts, 678.

³⁸ Ibid, 680.

war.³⁹ Therefore, Weed's cause for celebration was short-lived, as both governments and the deceptively impractical *garçonne* style continued to limit women more than men.

Indeed, American primary and secondary sources attributed the popularity of masculine styles not to the fact that women had equal civic rights to men but rather the reality that despite suffrage, they still faced prohibitions based on their sex. Linda Przybyszewski explained that regardless of female enfranchisement, "since being a woman in the 1920s meant not getting to do a lot of things that men could do, some girls preferred to opt out of looking like women as much as possible."⁴⁰ In 1928, Duchess de Richelieu came to a similar conclusion, observing that "in trying to be free and equal with men it seems a majority [of American women] are trying to make themselves as masculine as possible. They seem to scorn, as a sign of their former dependence and servitude, all that savors of femininity. They cut their hair like boys; they ape the dress of boys; they starve themselves to achieve the slim, flat boyish figure; they act like boys." Yet de Richelieu regarded this behavior as hypocritical. She wrote of the flappers, "You hear them asserting that, being liberated, they have the right to do anything males may do. You do not, however, find them emulating serious young men in their studies and struggles, their burning of the midnight electricity toward careers and real achievement."⁴¹ Therefore, while Wells predicted during World War I that women's masculinized clothing would make them like "clever young students," de Richelieu viewed these fashions as only a fantasy, which exemplified women's failure to achieve as much as men.

Similarly to de Richelieu, American author Fanny Hurst saw false sartorial emancipation as a sign of women's own civic and societal shortcomings, highlighting fashion's impracticality as especially deceptive. Seven years after earning the vote, Hurst claimed that American women

³⁹ Mendes, 58-59.

⁴⁰ Przybyszewski, 263.

⁴¹ De Richelieu, 151.

did not recognize their own actions as barriers to true civic freedom, just as flappers on either side of the Atlantic did not acknowledge the lack of real liberation in their clothing. Like Roberts, she connected this fashion illusion to a marketing ploy. She admitted that although she had found joy herself in the “new simplicity and emancipation in women’s dress,” she had “been taught to do so by advertising and industrial propaganda.”⁴² Directly opposing Weed, Hurst cited the bob as a particularly impractical style, because the time involved in its upkeep made women “slaves to the beauty parlor” like never before in history. In addition to their sartorial regression, Hurst found that females had made very little social or political progress since earning suffrage. Instead of pursuing self-improvement, they benefited from modern conveniences and continued to use their sex as an excuse for special treatment. Therefore, Hurst exclaimed “Less clothing, glory be, yes! But an elaborate and subtle and expensive simplicity, this, that enslaves even while it liberates. No, our emancipation in dress does not bear close analysis any more than our emancipation in morals.”⁴³ Hence, Hurst echoed antisuffragists’ arguments about the impracticality of women’s dress. However, she published these criticisms to encourage female political participation, not to portray women as inherently inferior in terms of civics and style.

While Hurst and de Richelieu both regarded flappers’ masculinized fashion as an illusion, they disagreed on whether women should seek political equality to men. De Richelieu began her article by citing the same lack of female civic engagement as Hurst, but she signaled right away that her primary focus was “other and bigger” false modes of emancipation. The duchess lamented that in spite of suffrage, “a vast proportion of women have lost more than they have gained” in postwar society. Apparently, American flappers no longer cared about monogamous relationships, raising a family, or finding intellectual and personal fulfillment.⁴⁴ After a targeted

⁴² Fannie Hurst, “What of It?” *Red Book Magazine*, August 1927, 62.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ De Richelieu, 55.

attack on suffragist Lydia Milton, “a woman almost without sex,” de Richelieu characterized all civically-engaged women as “childlike,” just like the author of “Fashion’s Edict for Men.” She argued, “neglecting their homes and children, [women in politics] make a mimic play of what is really a men’s game,” evoking the natalism of Brady and Schwarz.⁴⁵ Although American women could finally vote, de Richelieu still portrayed politics as an exclusively male endeavor. Yet even Hurst attempted to appeal to the image of women as wives and mothers. She repeatedly called her fellow females “mothers of men” and concluded “we may bob our hair, paint our fingernails, whittle down our silhouettes, and wear next to nothing, next to nothing,” but a woman “still rocks the cradle, one way or another. And makes as good a job of it as she ever has. Maybe better.”⁴⁶ Though she criticized women for emphasizing gender specialization, here Hurst also highlighted motherhood. The novelist thus demonstrated that women in the 1920s had to maintain a particularly female balance between political participation and maternal obligations. Even if they increasingly resembled men in their styles and official civil rights, short hair and enfranchisement did not allow women to altogether abandon gender roles.

In addition to their maternal negligence and masculine styles, de Richelieu condemned flappers’ fashion uniformity, while Alma Whitaker argued instead that sartorial individuality and pace reflected political progress more in women’s styles than men’s dress. De Richelieu instructed her readers:

“Consider the outward signs of [American women’s] emancipation in their appearance and actions...If you go into any drawing-room, restaurant, theater, or cabaret you will see that *en masse* they dress alike, over-make-up alike, act alike, look alike, talk alike, and have mostly all the same stereotyped expressions. They have the same bobbed hair, and like peas in a pod are similar in the same cut-and-dried fashions. If you seek for any originality in attire – or of opinion, for that matter – you will seek in vain.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ De Richelieu, 154-156.

⁴⁶ Hurst, 108.

⁴⁷ De Richelieu, 55.

Therefore, de Richelieu connected fashion conformity with women's alleged inability to think for themselves. Before the war, antisuffragists like Schwarz and Brady had used a similar argument, claiming that this tendency to uniformity disqualified females from democratic participation. In fact, de Richelieu viewed disenfranchised French women as more independent than Americans, because of the greater originality of their dress and their thought.⁴⁸

Contrastingly, *Los Angeles Times* columnist Alma Whitaker celebrated the relationship between individuality and pace in American women's dress. In 1926, she mirthfully chastised the woman who "simply would not dream of bobbing her hair at her age" as having "lost her pep" and claimed that constantly-changing fashion "keeps us in the march of progress."⁴⁹ She illustrated her point with a satirical sketch of a marionette-like woman, wearing a busily-printed, dramatically-trimmed, and certainly-unique coat. According to Whitaker, these sartorial puppet strings kept women active and politically-engaged, rather than making them all slaves to the same fashions. Then, Whitaker expounded, "During the height of the suffrage campaigns throughout the world, women's fashions were changing drastically, quickly and offered endless variety, and for that matter, they have ever since. But during that same period men's fashions changed ever so slightly and the variety of their apparel was almost nil... As standardized dowds, escaped from the tonic Whip of Fashion, [men] are slipping backward, lagging behind in the race, letting down."⁵⁰ Therefore, Whitaker contradicted Brady's pre-suffrage and de Richelieu's post-suffrage claims that all American women dressed and thought similarly. In accordance with MacMillan, Whitaker also struck down the idea that its fast rate of change rendered women's fashion inferior, supported by antisuffragists like Schwarz and suffragists like Wells alike. In fact, Whitaker even addressed the mockery of sartorially-minded males in

⁴⁸ De Richelieu, 156.

⁴⁹ Alma Whitaker, "The Whip of Fashion." *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 7, 1926, K15.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, K15.

“Fashion’s Edict for Men,” as she saw not only the girls but also the boys who dressed flamboyantly as the cleverest in their class.⁵¹ It is important to note, though, that Whitaker did not credit the masculinization of styles in linking women’s dress with suffrage. Instead, she emphasized how elements of specifically female dress reflected women’s political achievement.

Soon after Whitaker defended women’s dress in terms of individuality and pace, a British movement addressed its impracticality vis-à-vis men’s styles. In 1929, a group of concerned Englishmen founded the Men’s Dress Reform Party (MDRP). A decade and a half after the *Cincinnati Enquirer* published “Man a Slave to Fashion,” the MDRP reiterated the aforementioned article’s praise of women’s lighter-weight, cooler, and less-restrictive dresses as more healthful than men’s stiff suits.⁵² However, Barbara Burman claimed that the MDRP was partially motivated by a fear of falling behind women, rather than an impulse to celebrate them.⁵³ Furthermore, MDRP trends never really caught on, in part because their less-tailored garments “challenged the long-standing differentiation between the appearance of men and women.”⁵⁴ Hence, the year after British females won full suffrage, prejudice and an emphasis on gendered aspects of dress remained. In fact, both the MDRP’s admiration for some women’s styles and the public’s reluctance to adopt allegedly-feminized reform garments called into question whether female dress had become more masculine. Acquiring similar political rights to men did not cause women to look more like the opposite sex. Instead, examinations of practicality, individuality, and pace show that despite some masculinized trends, women’s fashion remained distinctive in the 1920s, as did their social and political roles.

⁵¹ Whitaker, K15.

⁵² George H Copeland, “At Last Overclad Man Threatens a Revolt,” *New York Times*, Aug. 11, 1929, SM6.

⁵³ Barbara Burman, “Better and Brighter Clothes: The Men’s Dress Reform Party, 1929-1940,” *Journal of Design History* 8, no. 4 (1995): 287.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 282.

In 1914, a *New York Times* article called the discussion of fashion in relation to suffrage an absolute failure. “The way a woman dresses does not denote the absence of the natural qualifications of a voter. Neither does it denote their presence. In fact it denotes nothing at all except her taste or her determination to dress as other women do,” the author declared.⁵⁵ And on the most basic level, this journalist was correct. Fashion has absolutely no correlation with the legitimacy of one’s political opinions. A woman’s attire on voting day will not affect whether or not her ballot counts. However, this truth does not invalidate an analysis of gender, democracy, and dress. The degree to which suffragists, antisuffragists, newspaper columnists, and fashion critics wrote about the pace, practicality, and individuality in civics and style in the 1910s and 1920s indicates that fashion was a language to discuss femininity. By celebrating and critiquing their garments, authors conveyed assumptions about women as a whole. Before women could vote, fashion framed a debate on female political roles. After suffrage, commentary on dress became a way for women to celebrate and criticize their place in a supposedly-emancipated society. The prewar suffragist and postwar flapper may have represented different forms of womanhood and held different voting rights, but they both faced discrimination on account of their sex. However, they also expressed their views on gender by wearing and writing about masculine and feminine dress. Once enfranchised, females could finally use ballots as well as white dresses and bobs to demonstrate their social and political opinions. No matter whether they dressed like them, women could now practice a right previously reserved for men.

⁵⁵ “Dress and the Suffrage,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1914, C6.

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