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American Women's Adoption of Pants and the Changing Definition of Femininity during World War II

Articles from The New York Times and magazines including Consumer Digest, Journal of Home Economics, Scholastic, Time and Woman's Home Companion were analyzed in this study and focused on the following research questions: How did the social situation influence American women's adoption of pants during World War II? How were the social opinions of women's adoption of pants? How did American women's adoption of pants and the social opinions on women's pants represent the process of change in the definition of femininity during World War II? Women were encouraged to wear pants in work places because many women had to work in defense industries and farms. Women had to wear pants during the winter to keep warm in order to conserve oil, rubber, and other materials. In addition, wearing men's clothes became a fashion trend among college women during this period. However, practicality was often not the primary thing alone to consider in women's fashion. Femininity was still important in women's fashion. There were criticisms over the women's adoption of pants. Regulations against pants were imposed on women, while there were women who wanted to dress like ladies even at defense industries. An abrupt change in women's gender roles and the increased adoption of trousers aroused social ambivalence about the traditional definition of femininity. Even though many women returned to their homes after the war, the social demand of practicality in women's day-time clothes during the war offered women the

experience of comfort and practicality in pants. These experiences contributed to paving the way for more women to adopt pants and helped establishing a new definition of femininity after the war.

Bifurcated garments named bloomers were first introduced to American women in the mid-19th century (Foote, 1980). Dresses with wide and long skirts supported by layers of petticoats were the mainstream fashion style during this period. Due to the impractical and unhygienic features of the mainstream fashion of the time, bloomers were introduced as utility clothes for women. However, according to Foote (1989), bloomers failed to become a popular street wear. One of the reasons was that the trousers were deemed "heathenish" since they resembled the Turkish pants seen in Muslim culture. Some people criticized women in bloomers for exposing the ankles and legs. Some others referred to the *Bible* and said it was against the will of God for women to adopt men's clothes. Foote (1989) suggested that American society during the period was against bloomers mainly because people were afraid of a shift in conventional gender roles and the ultimate social disruption implied in women's adoption of trousers. Moreover, many women who participated in the women's rights movement adopted bloomers. Many people regarded the acceptance of bloomers and the acceptance of women's rights as a threat to the established relationship between men and women during the

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period. Ever since then, bloomers had been worn by American women mostly for leisure and sports activities until the early 20th century.

Many American women attempted to wear bifurcated garments named knickerbockers¹ without overskirts not only as leisure wear but also on the streets as American womanhood changed in the 1920s. Women wore other bifurcated garments that included pajamas, shorts, trousers, and slacks for casual occasions in the 1920s and the 1930s. Hollywood stars such as Katherine Hepburn and Marlene Dietrich also contributed to the popularity of trousers in the 1930s (Payne, Winakor & Farrell-Beck, 1992; Warner, 2005). These women wore trousers in films and offstage. Hollywood movie musicals also influenced the popularity of shorts and pajamas as leisure wear in the 1930s. Even though some women appeared in pants on campuses and for formal occasions, women's pants were not acceptable for serious activities in America – except in California where the lifestyle was casual with the warm weather – during the period (Warner, 2005). This conservative social convention was liberated during World War II, as many women gained the opportunity to wear pants.

Because many women replaced men in industries during the war, previous studies on women's pants during World War II have mainly focused on work clothes. Buckland (2000) focused on women's pants in defense factories in Akron, Ohio. Boris (2006) looked at women's suitable dress that included pants in industries in relationship to issues of sexuality and racial segregation during World War II.

The focus of this study will not be confined to women's industry work clothes. This research is to understand American women's adoption of pants during World War II within the broader social context of the time. The reasons for the direct and indirect influence on the increased adoption of women's pants were analyzed and interpreted in relationship to the overall social situation of the time. In addition, the public response to women's

pants was reviewed to interpret women's pants in relationship to the definition of femininity. Specific historical events and trends along with the actual voices of the public found in the primary sources were collected to form a larger picture. Articles from magazines and *The New York Times* were analyzed focusing on the following research questions: How did the social situation have a direct and indirect influence on American women's adoption of pants during World War II? How were the social opinions of women's adoption of pants? How did American women's adoption of pants and the social opinions on women's pants represent the process of change in the definition of femininity during World War II?

METHODS

This study searched for primary sources in *The New York Times* and in magazines published between 1939 and 1945 in order to provide a deeper understanding of American women's adoption of pants during World War II. This study started with the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* and looked for magazine articles under topics and keywords such as clothing, dress, fashion, ethics, social ethics, and sexual ethics related to women's pants. The articles found from *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* were mostly about discussions and suggestions on women's pants and clothing behavior. These articles were of limited factual description and did not supply a clear picture of women's adoption of pants. On the other hand, *The New York Times* reported facts such as women's actual adoption of pants, regulations against women's pants, and campaigns to promote women's pants. In addition, the letters to the editor revealed the ideas of the readers on women's pants during the period.

Primarily due to the amount of information available in *The New York Times* as a daily newspaper that attempted to deliver news from a neutral stance and its reputation as the best paper in the country, sources from *The New York Times* provided the main frame for the research (Commager, 1950; Stolberg, 1954). As a newspaper

1. "Loose breeches banded below knee" are called knickerbockers (Picken, 1999)

with a national circulation, *The New York Times* covered news from all over America. Information from magazine articles found from *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* was integrated into the main picture formed as based on *The New York Times*. The articles referred to in this study were from *Consumer Digest*, *Journal of Home Economics*, *Scholastic*, *Time* and *Woman's Home Companion*. In addition, almost every issue of *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* was examined in order to enhance the understanding of women's fashion during the period.

Most of the sources were popular magazines with a wide range of male and female audiences. Even *Woman's Home Companion* originally tended to be a family magazine for both women and men (Mott, 1968). The discussions and reports found in *The New York Times* and *Time* tended to be somewhat neutral. On the other hand, *Journal of Home Economics* displayed conservative views, emphasizing the traditional femininity of women's wardrobes.

Secondary sources from academic journals and books on American history and costume history were referred in the interpretation of primary sources in relation to women's lives and fashion at the time. Academic journals referred to in this research include *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, *Dress*, *Feminist Studies*, *Historian*, and *International Labor and Working-Class History*.

The primary sources were analyzed to indicate the factors that had direct and indirect influence on American women's adoption of pants along with the social opinions on the popularity of pants among women. The results will be interpreted in relationship to the social background and previous studies. This study will be concluded with a discussion on the changing definition of femininity in terms of women's adoption of pants and the social opinions of women's pants.

SOCIAL BACKGROUND

The Importance of Conservation

Until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7th of 1941, many Americans wanted the United States to help the Allies; however, very few

Americans agreed to the direct participation of the United States in the war (O'Neill, 1993). The United States sold and lent armaments to the Allies and there was an important need to conserve raw materials to produce military supplies. In August 1941, the National Women's Undergarment Manufacturers Association proposed a plan to save 10% of the fabric used in fashion annually by shortening the skirts' length a few inches. Shorter skirts would need shorter undergarments, which would also contribute to fabric conservation ("Urge short," 1941). However, the founder of the Fashion Originators Guild of America, Maurice Rentner, opposed the plan. He believed that it was impossible to shorten skirts, since "dresses are just as short today as decency and grace will permit." An expert who worked for a popular price dress manufacturer also found it impossible to shorten the skirts, because the average skirt length was one inch below the knee. He suggested that narrowing the fullness of skirts would reduce the use of fabric. The National Dress Manufacturers Association's official also could not be sure whether women would adopt shorter skirts ("Dress men," 1941, p. 20).

American women had no choice but to wear shorter and narrower skirts for fabric conservation after the United States entered the war. The government imposed restrictions on fabric usage – L-85 – in women's wear for the fall and winter of 1942. However, the maximum length and sweep of dresses and skirts were within the range of length and sweep of the styles already presented at the time ("Apparel makers," 1942). When L-85 was revised in the summer 1943, the restrictions on sweep and details were tightened, while the dress and skirt lengths remained the same ("New curbs," 1943). Therefore, the skirt length itself was not much shorter than the period previous to the fabric restrictions.

Americans voluntarily collected scraps including rubber, papers, fats, bones, and a variety of metals as part of the war effort. Victory gardens were cultivated in homes to supplement food production. The government urged civilians to "eat what you can and can what you can't" (O'Neill, 1993). Overall, conservation was emphasized under the patriotic

social atmosphere of the time.

Working Women

After World War II began, President Roosevelt asked Congress for \$1.8 billion for military spending in May of 1940. Roosevelt recognized the importance of air power and wanted 50,000 aircraft immediately built and a national capacity to produce 50,000 aircraft a year. Roosevelt's proposal seemed impossible to attain, since the United States was only producing 2,000 aircraft a year at the time. However, 20,000 aircraft were manufactured in 1941 and soon to 300,000 (O'Neill, 1993). The United States started to mobilize for national defense in 1940.

When the nation started to mobilize in 1940, 12 million women (26%) were working. Nearly 90% of these women worked in traditional women's jobs such as teaching, nursing, social work, civil service, and domestic services. In addition, most of these working women were single. In 1940, about 50% of single women were working, while only 15% of married women were working (Kennedy, 1999).

America's manpower shortage required the participation by women, as the country built up the defense program. Six million men left farms to serve in the military or to work in defense industries. The percentage of women in farm labor increased from 8% to 22.4% between 1940 and 1945 (Litoff & Smith, 1994). Women were urged to work in defense industries and drive tractors in place of men. By 1944, the percentage of working women rose to 36% or 19 million workers. However, historians pointed out that the increase of working women during the war years was not significant. Of the six million women who started work during the war years, nearly three million were young women who had graduated from schools and were already prepared to work. The remaining three million can be understood as a normal increase, considering the population growth during the war years (Kennedy, 1999).

Between these years, the number of married women in the workplace exceeded single women for the first time in American history. However, most of these women were over 35 years of age without small children. Kennedy (1999) pointed out that American

society criticized working mothers by exaggerating the juvenile delinquency problems, despite the fact that the percentage of working women with small children increased minimally. Working mothers with children under six increased from 9% in 1940 to 12% in 1944. According to a survey conducted by the Women's Bureau, only 32% of working women had any children under 14, and a half of these women had only one child under the age of 14. Women in defense industries primarily relied on their families for child-care and a survey result in 1944 indicated that 16% of mothers in defense industries had no child-care. Moreover, working mothers had no government arrangement to ease the burden of daily housekeeping chores. Therefore, war industry women were often absent or resigned from their work (Evans, 1997). Historian William L. O'Neill pointed out that the government made few efforts to employ more young mothers with children. With a few exceptions, childcare facilities were poor or nursery fees were too expensive for most working women to afford (O'Neill, 1993).

Despite the moderate increase in the number of working women during the war years, it is true that more women were working in the defense industry during the war. Among the two million women who worked in the defense industry, nearly a million were working in the aircraft industry, followed by 225,000 working in shipbuilding. The government campaigned to attract more women to the defense industry by featuring women in stylish working garments as 'Rosie the Riveter'. Riveting is a skilled job in industry. Contrary to the propagated image of 'Rosie the Riveter', most of women in defense industries were employed in low-skilled routine jobs (Kennedy, 1999). This was partly due to the requirements of strength for riveting and changes in shipbuilding that required more welding than riveting. Moreover, employers did not want to train women in high-skilled jobs, since they expected or believed women would return home after the war was over. The employers also intended to lower women's wages compared to men in the same work. However, unionized male workers protested against this intention for fear of losing their jobs to women receiving lower wages (Evans, 1997). There was an

important and significant increase of women in the labor force during World War II.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Increased Adoption of Women's Pants

According to the primary sources, there were a few reasons that served to increase women's adoption of pants during World War II. Women in the defense industry and farms were encouraged to wear pants for work safety and efficiency. 'Rosie the Riveter' was often featured in smart working slacks to promote women's safety in industry. Articles from *The New York Times* reported the specific efforts made by American government to promote safe working garments for women. At Mrs. Roosevelt's press conference in the White House in August of 1941, a denim coverall with a short-sleeved blouse was introduced as a mechanic's suit for female factory workers. A suit composed of a jacket and slacks was also introduced for women who had to replace men on farms. Both suits had a matching hat or a cap, and slacks were closely fitted at the ankle ("First lady," 1941). The Women's Bureau recommended that women wear proper clothes instead of wearing cast-offs of the home closet to prevent accidents and lessen fatigue. Short-sleeved blouses with slacks or coveralls were presented as proper clothes for aircraft industry workers, while women in bench assembly could wear short-sleeved dresses ("Be well," 1941). The Bureau of Home Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture also suggested that women in the defense industry or on farms wear two-piece slack suits composed of shirt jackets and slacks ("Defense inspires," 1941). Designers introduced functional clothes such as one-piece slacks called defense suits. Big bags that could carry knitting and a first-aid kits were also a part of functional accessories influenced by the war ("War brings," 1942). The Office of Civilian Requirements of the War Production Board arranged to send low-cost work garments such as slacks, coveralls, shop aprons and overalls directly to war factories, offering priority sales to the workers during the time of material shortages in 1945 ("War plants," 1945).



Figure 1. *Women's Coveralls from November 1943 Issue of Bazaar*, p. 85

Examples of coveralls worn by two women mechanics are shown in Figure 1.

The indirect influence of war on women's adoption of pants could be found in shortages of rubber, fuel, and other raw materials. Many Americans stopped driving cars in order to save rubber and fuel; *The New York Times* reported in early 1942 that many suburban housewives were using bicycles to travel to markets due to tire rationing. Bicycle tires were going to be rationed soon, but the ones already manufactured were to be sold for the year. Mrs. Roosevelt also bought a bicycle to learn how to ride. The most effective attire for bicycling women was composed of culottes² with an over skirt, a pullover with a leather jacket or windbreaker, a hood tied under the chin, and mittens ("War increased," 1942). For bicycling, bifurcated garments were recommended for women.

The New York Times also helped to promote making women's slacks out of men's, in order to encourage fabric conservation. For example, a stenographer in the Colorado State Capitol who made her slack suit from her boyfriend's sport suit was introduced as looking good. Her friend at the statehouse also planned to remake her slacks out of her husband's suit, after he went into the army

2. Culottes are "Informal trouser-like garments having leg portions that are full that fall together to simulate skirts" (Picken, 1999)

("Wears boy," 1942).

In preparation for the fuel shortage, junior misses were urged to wear slack suits for warmth. After gasoline rationing was started in December 1942, women needed to wear slacks in order to walk long distance and keep themselves warm in cold weather. For this reason, Glen Rock junior high School in New Jersey allowed female students to wear slacks in cold weather by relaxing the rule banning girls in slacks. Chicago councilmen also agreed to remove the old law which forbade women from wearing slacks on the streets ("Chicago urges," 1943). Such social situations somewhat influenced women to adopt pants and let women to experience the practicality of wearing them.

When America started to mobilize for war in early 1940, college women also started to shop for masculine garments such as right-buttoned jackets, coats, shirts, sweaters, moccasins, and even trousers in college men's stores ("College girls," 1940). These college stores advertised that women in good colleges should look just like "Princeton sophomores" ("Girls will," 1940, p. 10). At Wellesley, the faculty campaigned against students' slacks. However, faculty members quickly dropped the campaign against slacks when the First Lady of China, Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, visited Wellesley campus in navy blue slacks ("Boston honors," 1943; "Trousers no," 1943). "Durability and chic" accounted for college fashion; women's slacks and blazers represented these features ("Durability and," 1943). College women wore pants for the practical reasons and for the sophisticated look.

Masculine garments were popular among college women and also among women in general. *Consumer Digest* suggested in the April 1941 issue that a slack suit should be found in a well-selected woman's wardrobe (Jarett, 1941). High school girls wore slacks, especially on rainy or snowy days. In 1942, a Dean of Girls in a high school told a reporter in *Scholastic* that she would lose her job if she banned girls from wearing slacks, because there would be no girls in the school if she sent all the girls in slacks back home ("The range," 1942). In the same year, *Woman's Home Companion* presented movie star Ingrid Bergman, who told that she always wore

comfortable clothes such as slacks off the screen, as one of the eight women who represented the "psychological types" of American women (Hawes, 1942).

By the spring of 1942, slacks sales had increased substantially and many designs featured masculine garments (Valentine, 1942). Filene's in Boston and J. L. Hudson in Detroit sold women's slacks. Marshall Field's, The Fair, and Goldblatt Bros. in Chicago reported sales increases of five to ten times compared with 1941. The total sales of women's slacks increased about fivefold compared with the previous year ("Pants," 1942). The Commerce Department predicted that women would continue to demand "comfortable, informal clothes and sensible shoes" after the war ("Sees buying," 1944, p. 24). Masculine styles of clothes including pants were popular among some women as a fashion trend, while some other women bought those styles out of necessity and a practicality that was influenced by the social conditions of the period.

Demands of Traditional Femininity

American society, had to overlook women in slacks during the emergency conditions of World War II. However, according to primary sources, practicality was not often the primary thing alone to consider in women's clothes. A group of New York women insisted that serious fashion readjustments were needed due to the influence of the war on women's fashion. They discussed that "durability and simplicity should be the outstanding qualities of a war-time wardrobe, but that femininity must not be sacrificed, even in defense workers' uniforms" ("Style readjustment," 1941, p. 18). In December 1941, the American Red Cross ordered its ambulance drivers to discard slacks and wear skirts ("Women's uniforms," 1941). A group of female plum canners in a factory in Hartford, Connecticut, protested against the company order that required all employees to wear slacks for safety, because they did not look good in slacks ("Hit order," 1942). Women office workers at the Ford Motor Company wore dresses against the company law that required all women workers to wear slacks. A secretary at Ford said that "they want to feel like ladies" ("Ford's office," 1943, p.

18). According to a survey done by *Scholastic* in October of 1942, those high school students who were against female students in pants thought that traditional femininity was the primary motive to consider in women's appearance. A student from Connecticut said that girls should endure the cold weather for the sake of beauty. Some others were against girls in pants, because girls did not look feminine in pants and that they would not receive proper consideration from men. Some of those who agreed to girls' pants emphasized practical reasons such as enduring cold weather or saving stockings. However, how women looked in pants was important for other students. They said "yes" to women's pants, only for those women who looked good in them ("Boy dates," 1942, p. 30-31). How women looked was important to many students whether they were in favor or against women's pants. Overall, the American public believed that the traditional femininity often represented with skirts was still an important character for women.

The American government could not ignore the social demands of traditional femininity when it made efforts to promote safe garments for women. In response to the social demands of traditional femininity, the Bureau of Home Economics of the Department of Agriculture offered an advice that "women's work clothes should be pretty as well as practical." Culottes were suggested for those women "who wanted work clothes to look like a dress" ("Women's work," 1942, p. 10). Ironically, the Women's Bureau also was "very careful not to make any overall recommendations even for such fundamentals as the question whether women workers should wear trousers or skirts" ("Safe clothes," 1942, sec.2, p. 4).

The social importance of traditional femininity also could be understood in relationship to women who served in the military. During World War II, many American women served as soldiers in the official military branches. The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), which was later changed to the Women's Army Corps (WAC), was established in May 1942; 140,000 women served in the WAAC or the WAC during World War II. Some WAACs and WACs served overseas. The Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) of the

Navy and the women's Coast Guard (SPARs) also started to train about 100,000 and 13,000 women in 1942. The Marine Corps Women's Reserve (MCWR) was established in 1943, and attracted 23,000 women. Some 1,000 women also served in the Women Air force Service Pilots (WASP) during the Second World War (Litoff & Smith, 1997).

Women's military branches met the challenge of bad rumors and public criticisms. For example, the public suspected that the WACs were organized to provide sexual pleasure to male soldiers, while many others thought women in the army were of a masculine orientation or lesbians. To overcome this social suspicion and criticism, women in the WACs were often depicted as asexual, modest, and well educated. The WACs women were often scrutinized in terms of sexual orientation and dates (Meyer, 1992). The uniform designers for the women's military had to consider the complex social conditions and needs of the time. Mainbocher tried to combine femininity and practicality in his uniform designs for WAVES which was eventually adopted by the SPARs later; the outdoor uniform consisted of a tailored jacket and a six-gore skirt, and the summer working uniform of a seersucker dress with a jacket (Samek, 1993). The uniform designs had to convince the public that women in the army did not lose a traditional femininity.

According to the primary sources, the emphasis on women's traditional femininity could also be found in off-duty garments. Women who wore masculine garments during the day at their work were urged to wear feminine garments off work in the evening. It was believed that feminine evening gowns would "go a long way toward bolstering up the morale of the service man on leave or the overworked business man who keeps the wheels of industry at top speed." Three major American designers, Jean Schlumberger, Lilly Daché and Valentina insisted that "men in service when on leave wanted to get away from the military influence," and it was women's responsibility to entertain these men with their feminine gowns in the evening ("Colorful styles," 1941, p. 23). A spring fashion show given in Los Angeles for retail store buyers also displayed feminine garments with

ruffles, flounces, flowers, and frills. The show stylist explained that “the women have to do their part to take the attention of their menfolks away from their more serious duties” (“Femininity will,” 1942, p. 16). An article in the February 1943 issue of the *Journal of Home Economics* directly indicates that women were “dressing to please the men this season, and no doubt about it” (Blake, 1943, p. 73-76). It was the responsibility of women to entertain men, despite the fact that some of these women were tired with their all-day work in industries, offices, and voluntary jobs.

It was reported that women were eager to adopt feminine clothes after work, being tired of their masculine work garments. A female fashion editor for *The Los Angeles Examiner* said in 1944 that the readers of her section were “more interested in the feminine type of fashions than ever before,” because women readers asked for more information on feminine dresses introduced in her section (“Editors report,” 1944, p. 20). *The Journal of Home Economics* also stated that “after a girl has worn trousers all day on the assembly line, when the whistle blows she wants to hustle into something soft and feminine” (Blake, 1943, p. 73-76). Women felt tired of masculine garments in the workplace and wanted to adopt feminine garments when off duty. However, it is also possible that social encouragements to wear feminine garments after work influenced women to demand such styles.

Since many Americans still believed that traditional femininity was important for women, American society was not absolutely tolerant of women’s pants. Female students in Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn had to strike against the rule banning slacks in their school (“Pants,” 1942). Girls in Knoxville Junior High School in Pittsburgh also protested against a ban on slacks. The school allowed girls to wear slacks “providing the fad does not create distractions” (“Pittsburgh girls,” 1942, p.14). The school superintendent regarded the popularity of slacks among the students as a fad, which was a passing trend. In a local court in Nashville Tennessee, a judge ordered women witnesses not to wear slacks in his court. A woman witness was sent home to change into a skirt (“Court

bars,” 1942). In addition, an opinion letter to *The New York Times* complained that women were consuming more material by wearing pants which the person thought did not suit women, especially those with big hips. He demanded that the government “put them back in skirts where they belong,” in order to “mount the saving of material to something” (“Women’s slacks,” 1942, p. 14). A father of a 15-year-old girl also wrote to *The New York Times* that he spanked his daughter with a hairbrush for appearing in dungarees in front of his guests. He said that his daughter “has been a lovely girl ever since” (“Hairbrush still,” 1944, p. 18).

The American women’s adoption of pants increased during World War II, because of practicality and the popularity of masculine styles as a fashion trend. American society became more permissible to women’s bifurcated garments due to the social situation and the increased number of women in pants. On the other hand, women’s pants were not fully free from social criticism and regulations, since there still were some opinions that emphasized the importance of traditional femininity in women’s fashion. While the Commerce Department predicted an increase in the popularity of wearing pants by women after the war, some parts of America did not want to accept women in pants as a long-term trend.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The shortage of labor required many women to take traditional male jobs in factories, farms, and participate in military service during World War II. The gender role of women was changing due to social conditions and this along with the necessity of conservation, influenced more women to adopt pants. Dressing in college men’s clothes such as right-buttoned blazers, coats, shirts and other items formed a fashion trend among college women. According to Ewen and Ewen (1992), women needed simpler, masculine garments that included pants as their social participation increased. Their suggestion explains the gender role change caused by women’s increased social participation and its

influence on the formation of the masculine fashion trends during the period. Women's simple and masculine garments, along with pants symbolized women's increased mobility during World War II.

According to Foote (1980), Foote (1989), and Arnold (2001), the definition of femininity has been modified with the change in women's gender roles. Masculine garments that include pants were quite outside the boundaries of traditional femininity. However, the traditional meaning of femininity was challenged, as women's adoption of pants prominently increased with changes in women's lifestyle during World War II. Pants were getting ready to become a part of femininity in women's fashion. The evidence could be found from the source that regarded women's slacks as chic ("Durability and," 1943). In addition, slack suits were also recommended for women's well-selected wardrobes (Jarett, 1941).

An abrupt change in women's gender roles and the increased adoption of trousers aroused social ambivalence about the definition of femininity. While a new definition of femininity was to be established with the popularity of pants among women, traditional femininity and how women look were still important in women's fashion for many Americans even during the war years when practicality and effectiveness should have been the primary consideration. Traditional femininity could not be ignored in work clothes for industries and farms. Women's off-duty garments were expected to be feminine, for the reason that women were to boost the morale of men on vacation from the military or who worked hard to keep American defense programs going. There also were criticism and regulations which tried to ban women from wearing pants. Many women themselves were not ready to adopt pants. Fashion critics campaigned for traditional femininity in women's fashion. On the other hand, Boris (2006) pointed out that women in tight-fitting sweaters and snug colorful slacks were banned and criticized for distracting men in some of the work places. Women were patrolled to doff decorative garments and jewelries. They were urged to wear proper garments that included loose pants that concealed their sexuality under the name of safety for the same reason in work places.

In relation to the female factory workers' adoption of pants during World War II, Buckland (2000) conducted a case study that applied the concepts of Symbolic Interactionist (SI) Theory. The SI Theory consists of five steps that included human ambivalence, appearance-modifying commodities in the capitalist marketplace, symbolic ambiguity, meaning negotiation and style adoption, and ongoing dialectic: ambivalence and style change (Kaiser, Nagasawa & Hutton, 1997). The study by Buckland focused on the promotion of pants by retailers in Akron Ohio, where the employment of women in industries was the second largest in America during the war. According to the findings by Buckland, human ambivalence took place when the country needed women (who traditionally stayed home) in work places (especially factories) that were previously dominated by men. Pants emerged as appearance-modifying commodities by the advertisements of retailers in the capitalist marketplace. The symbolic ambiguity of pants was shown in advertisements where pants as working clothes were coordinated with feminine and decorative fashion items. However, the meaning was negotiated and pants were socially accepted as women's work clothes over time.

The findings of this study can be discussed applying the stages of the SI Theory. Women had to adopt pants for direct and indirect reasons because America needed women to work and conserve. This explains the first two stages of the theory: Human ambivalence and appearance-modifying commodities in the capitalist marketplace. The traditional feminine style of garments did not suit women's lifestyles during the war and created ambivalence. Pants were the appearance modifying commodities for women. At the next stage, the symbolic ambiguity of female pants could be observed in the controversies about women's adoption of pants and the social emphases on traditional femininity. The meaning of pants could be partly negotiated and the style was adopted through the public promotion of pants within the patriotic mood of the time. Meaning negotiation and the style of adoption continued after the war. Despite the sales increase in pants during World War II, the definition of femininity that embraced pants as a part of women's

wardrobe had more to be settled through an ongoing dialectic.

Women's traditional roles as homemakers were still important to many women after the war. The employment rate of females decreased from 36% in 1944 to 28% in 1947. According to a researcher who interviewed a group of women who worked during the war, 76% of these women were eager to return home and quit their jobs after the war. A Census Bureau survey conducted in 1951 revealed that 50% of women war workers believed that their primary responsibilities were to take care of their homes (Kennedy, 1999). It is conclusive that women believed traditional femininity was important during the period.

Even though femininity was still important in women's fashion during the war years and many women returned to their homes after the war, the social demands of practicality in women's day-time clothes during the war offered women the experience of comfort and practicality in simple masculine garments, especially pants. These experiences were not to be forgotten and contributed to the adoption of more women wearing pants after the war.

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