An Investigation of the Impact of Changing Social Norms on Female Clothing Attire Pre and Post WW II

Introduction

Though many aspects of life seem to come to a standstill during times of war, fashion continues forward, sometimes at a rate even faster than usual.

These changes to fashion and dress are, in large part, due to the availability of time and materials during war periods.

A great example of these changing norms in women’s dress and fashion can be found in the time pre and post World War II.

As we look deeper at this period to understand how various parts of the world reacted to the war in the way they began to dress, we will gain a greater understanding of how times of war can affect social norms related to fashion.

Rationing

Rationing of materials and “Utility” clothing began after the United States entered WW II. Many materials including metal fasteners, zippers, and various textiles were allocated toward the war effort.

Rationing made it difficult for consumers to find items that would last or that appealed to their tastes.

New items such as turbans and pants were adopted to meet the needs of women in new roles.

The New Look

With the end of World War II came the desire for a change and Parisian fashion turned to a dramatic new style that was coined “The New Look” after Christian Dior launched a new line of clothing in 1947 that was very different from any war-time designs.

Though many fashion houses had closed during the war, the reopening and revival of designs from popular designers infused the world of fashion with new designs.

Figures 1 & 2

Schiaparelli introduced the turban in the 1930’s that became a crowd favorite during the war as it could be used to protect against fumes and accidents in factories, while still providing a sense of femininity.

“Christian Dior...here makes a variation of his market-woman skirt—stiffened, standout, pleated at a low mark...”

Illustration by Dagmar Freuchen Gale (Vogue April 1, 1947)

Conclusions

Although fashion is usually driven by tastes, desires, and new designs launched by popular designers, war brings pressures for fashion to change due to necessity.

No matter the cause or the new social norm influencing women’s fashion, all female consumers really want are designs that make them feel beautiful, or at least feminine, throughout it all.

Figure 3

All Utility clothing was required to show the CC Utility Mark, known as “the cheeses” simply to indicate the type of material used to create the items.