

CHAPTER FIVE

This Is What a Feminist Looks Like

Fashion in the Era of Women's Liberation

On September 1968, over a hundred women gathered on the boardwalk of Atlantic City to protest the Miss America Pageant and what they conceived as its oppressive message to women. Organized by the feminist group New York Radical Women (NYRW), the demonstration included protesters parading signs that compared women's bodies to cattle, and staging a guerilla theater skit in which they crowned a live sheep as "Miss America." Protesters also threw girdles, high heels, hair curlers, bras, *Playboy* magazines, and other "instruments of female torture" into a "Freedom Trash Can." In a well-prepared ten-point statement they gave reporters, NYRW explained their agenda against the "Degrading Mindless-Boob-Girlies Symbol" and the "Consumer Con-Game," which forced "women in our society . . . to compete for male approval, enslaved by ludicrous 'beauty' standards [they] are conditioned to take seriously." Unwilling to succumb to gender expectations of "looking and acting like a lady" that magazines and pageants such as Miss America perpetuated, NYRW called on women to resist cultural practices and beauty methods that reduced women to sexual objects only meant to please men.¹

As many scholars have noted, the No More Miss America demonstration symbolized the "mythological birth" of the U.S. women's movement in the late 1960s. It brought women's liberation to the center of national public attention and consolidated the image of "the feminist" for generations to come.² Although no bras were burned during the event, the media, which

covered the protest extensively, was quick to describe protesters as angry, masculine-looking, radical "bra-burners," an image that became a code name for feminists who challenged gender hierarchies and norms, both in their looks and in their demands.³ Indeed, almost instantaneously the bra burner became the most potent image of feminists in the late twentieth century and beyond. Yet, what the media coverage (and many of the scholarly accounts) missed about the No More Miss America protest was that as much as it was against the popular fashion and beauty standards, protesters were not interested in forgoing these standards completely. "Our purpose was not to put down Miss America but to attack the male chauvinism, commercialization of beauty, racism and oppression of women symbolized by the Pageant," argued Judith Duffett, one of the organizers.⁴ Acknowledging that clothing could empower women if they had control over their appearance, NYRW feminists did not reject dealing with fashion or appearance, but protested against a fashion industry that prevented women from enacting their independence.⁵ In fact, these feminists were much more pro-fashion than the media gave them credit for. Despite the fact that the protest included the trashing of girdles, makeup, and other fashion items, photographs from the demonstration show that many of the protesters embraced the prevailing fashion trends, appearing in miniskirts, long hair, and feminine shoes, albeit mostly with flat heels (figure 5.1).⁶

The prevalence and endurance of the "bra-burner" myth led many to characterize feminism in the 1960s and 1970s as antifashionable and as hostile to all matters of adornment practices. However, while some feminists repudiated entirely the concept of fashion, the majority saw clothing as an important vehicle for expressing their identities and promoting their politics. Like the generation of early twentieth-century feminists who came before them, many feminists in the late 1960s and 1970s did not view fashion as alien to their struggle or as only a tool of oppression. For them, clothes became a central element in shaping feminist ideology and gender politics, and they turned fashion, and even fashionability, into an important site of political expression.

Feminists were not the only ones to utilize fashion as part of their politics during this period. Activists in various movements—New Left, counterculture, antiwar, civil rights, and Black Power—employed dress, hair, and beauty practices in their political activism, shaping the cultural, social, and political debates of the period.⁷ And, as activists in other movements had done, women's liberationists adopted the popular youth fashions of the time: blue jeans, army-surplus jackets, miniskirts, turtlenecks, Oriental- and African-inspired styles, T-shirts, and button-down work shirts. Whereas these styles



FIGURE 5.1: No More Miss America protest, Atlantic City, 1968. While feminists protested the commercial beauty culture that prescribed submissive roles to women, they did not reject feminine fashions and adopted popular styles as part of their political identity. (© Beverly Grant, photographer)

functioned differently for each movement, women's liberationists imbued these clothes with feminist meanings, using them to express and advance their political agendas.⁸

However, feminism has never been contained within a coherent single movement, but was an umbrella term that encompassed various groups and ideas, oftentimes with tensions between them.⁹ Liberal, radical, women of color, lesbian, and working-class feminists worked for different goals and with

different emphases. Sometimes they formed broad coalitions, with overlaps in methods and activists, and sometimes they adopted more combative and separatist approaches toward both society at large and other feminist groups.¹⁰ The diversity of feminist organizations, methods, and causes also created a vast array of images, looks, and fashions. Some feminists emphasized their feminine sensuality, celebrating women's power to assert themselves as sexual beings. Others abandoned gendered fashion attributes, adopting instead androgynous looks that expressed their gender critique of society and the capitalistic consumer market. Black feminists, many of them activists in civil rights and Black Power movements, also created their own version of feminist looks. They incorporated African motifs into their dress and adopted natural hairstyles as a symbol of racial pride. Whereas feminists often disagreed over the proper strategy and image activists should adopt, this variety of looks and images presented a more complex and nuanced approach to fashion than in the media and public discourse, which often flattened the diversity of visual and fashionable expressions that feminists adopted.¹¹

Feminists also differed in the ways they used fashion. For some, dress was a way to express their identities and political commitment to the movement, while others used it as a tactic to gain public attention and support. Yet, one's style and attitude toward fashion did not align along neat distinctions between liberal and radical. Some feminists used fashion and beauty practices to challenge gender, racial, and class hierarchies, asserting a new understanding regarding the meanings of womanhood and femininity. Others sought not to eliminate gender differences but to expand women's choices regarding their appearance and mode of dress. However, regardless of their position, as feminists cultivated personal styles that suited the various political agendas they pursued, they did not reject fashion but turned it into an empowering force.

This chapter delineates the various approaches and fashionable expressions that feminists employed during the late 1960s and 1970s, thus challenging the myth that all feminists in this period were antifashion. It analyzes the debates among feminists over the role of fashion in shaping ideas regarding women's liberation, femininity, and gender roles, in order to revise our understanding of the ways in which fashion worked within the movement and in influencing public discourse and opinion. Clothing and appearance provided a route through which women could both show solidarity with the struggle and shape what feminism meant in the era of women's liberation. Yet, more than breaking with their mothers' generation—as many feminists believed they were doing—their engagement with fashion proved to be a continuation of much of what came before the resurgence of the movement in the late 1960s.

As in the previous generation, the styles that feminists adopted in the 1960s and 1970s did not remain an alternative subculture but entered the fashionable mainstream. Some feminists lamented the commercialization of their looks, arguing that the market diluted the political message that stood behind them. Yet, the popularization of these styles offered more women a way to identify with the movement and its feminist ideology, without necessarily identifying with its activism. Indeed, as blue jeans, pantsuits, miniskirts, and unisex attire became popular fashions, so too did the ideas they represented. Through fashion, a broadening base of women adopted the feminist message of choice and empowerment, and enacted their rights to gain control over their appearance and their lives. These women incorporated feminist arguments in their fight for the freedom to wear miniskirts and pants, seeing them as a symbol of their liberation. In their efforts, they made fashion a central site not only of feminist politics, but also of what it meant to be a liberated woman in society in a time of great social change.

Feminist Attitudes toward Fashion

The question of “what a feminist looks like” and whether there is or should be a unified feminist look became an important part of feminist politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As in the generation before them, feminists were quick to make the connection between appearance and women’s status in society, seeing fashion not as a frivolous issue, but as central to their struggle for equality. For mainstream liberal feminists, represented by Betty Friedan and the National Organization for Women (NOW), fashion and appearance were part of their efforts to achieve full legal and economic equality. “As I become more myself and freer, I dress in a way that reflects that. I like clothes, I like color,” stated Friedan.¹² Promoting the concept of “choice feminism,” NOW feminists argued that just as women should have the choice of sexual partners, marriage, motherhood, or a career, they should have the choice to present themselves in the way that most suited their personal style and individual lives.¹³

Although NOW feminists were more skeptical toward the fashion industry than their suffragist foremothers, they also viewed fashion as an important political tool in the efforts to win hearts and minds for the feminist cause. Understanding the power of fashion to convey political messages, Friedan encouraged members to pay close attention to their outfits, and emphasized the importance of presenting a respectable, feminine appearance, especially when dealing with the media. Friedan herself—who was forty-five when she

cofounded NOW in 1966—tended to appear in matronly tailored dress suits, full makeup, and jewelry that not only reflected her mature taste but also conveyed a nonthreatening look that did not challenge gender norms. In fact, Friedan’s appearance was not so different from that of conservative women such as Phyllis Schlafly and Anita Bryant, who also adopted the respectable feminine style of tailored dress suits and carefully done hair and makeup. Both Schlafly and Friedan understood the power of femininity in shaping public discourse and they both harnessed fashion to construct their image as politically active women. However, Friedan used feminine attire to promote a message of gender equality, employing it as a tactical tool to garner public support. Schlafly, on the other hand, weaponized her feminine appearance to condemn feminism and especially radical feminists’ critique of gender roles.¹⁴

Other leaders of NOW, such as Shirley Chisholm and Bella Abzug, presented a more colorful appearance than Friedan, favoring bold colors and prints, striking hats, accessories, and large jewelry. Yet they too did not challenge gender notions of feminine appearance, understanding their political utility. Abzug confessed that her penchant for wearing hats stemmed from her desire to be taken seriously as a woman. “By wearing a hat, I was able to show everyone that I was there on serious business. In 1970, when I first ran for office, I was always pointed out as ‘the lady in the hat.’ I became recognizable that way.”¹⁵ Chisholm, like Abzug, saw in fashion a useful way to draw public attention to her feminist message. However, she cultivated her image not only as a feminist but also as a Black woman and a politician, offering a modern interpretation of Black femininity. Chisholm’s unique style of bold prints and colors did not abandon practices of beautification or breach the boundaries of respectability, but celebrated a fashionable role model for Black activists that symbolized her independent taste and her overall image of “unbought and unbossed.”

Gloria Steinem, always aware of her public image, also presented a similar approach to Friedan and other NOW leaders, stressing the need for feminists to carefully fashion their appearance in order to gain political influence. “Clothing should be totally aesthetic or practical in a just society,” she argued, “but at the moment and for some time to come, it has tactical implications.” Steinem admitted that “in a political sense, it is better to send a woman in a print dress and pearls, rather than a woman in blue jeans, to a meeting of the Democratic National Committee. Even if they say the same things, the woman in the dress has more of a chance for acceptance and therefore is more subversive.”¹⁶

In general, liberal feminists adhered to trends in mainstream fashions, but many young activists, emerging from “consciousness-raising” groups

organized by New Left activists, became frustrated by Friedan's leadership in NOW as well as by her attitude toward fashion. These young feminists pushed for a more radical change to the status quo than Friedan was willing to accept. They introduced the now-familiar concept of "the personal is political," arguing that feminist efforts should not only focus on legal equality and political representation, but also on the private aspects of life such as marriage, sexual relationships, and abortion. According to activists, these issues that were previously seen as private have also shaped women's status in society and thus entailed political import. As they shifted their attention toward these issues, culture and appearance became a significant aspect of radical feminists' "personal politics" agenda.¹⁷

Seeing fashion and appearance as more than just a political tactic, these feminists found clothing central to their identities as feminists and to finding sisterhood with other activists. Consciousness-raising groups included discussions about the role of fashion and beauty culture in women's lives. For these participants, finding a space to share their frustration with the need to uphold social norms of beauty on the one hand, and receive affirmation from fellow sisters for their decision to deviate from fashion norms on the other, became crucial to their process of becoming feminists.¹⁸

Radical feminist critique, which was grounded in Marxist theory and was inspired by the New Left, targeted its arguments against consumer capitalism and its effects on women. This critique was bound up with an anticonsumerist approach that criticized the fashion industry and its endless pursuit for profits, oftentimes with disregard to women's needs, health, or interests. According to these feminists, the fashion industry placed enormous economic and mental burdens on women to alter their appearance according to whimsical changes in styles, thereby contributing to their oppression.¹⁹ "Clothing is a political statement," one feminist claimed. "We have thrown off our former mindless and painful conformity to fashion. We show what women's liberation is all about: The individuality of women showing through in every facet of life."²⁰

These women's liberationists made a distinction between clothing, which they found central to their identities, and fashion, which they identified with the industry and interpreted as oppressive force. They did not dismiss the political value of appearance but sought to negate the influence of the industry on women's lives by creating an alternative to the mainstream styles. "The problem is not current fashion per se; it's the rigidity with which it is prescribed by the fashion industry," argued a feminist named Toby Silvey. Echoing previous arguments of feminists from the 1910s, this feminist did not reject the idea that fashion could be beautiful or empowering, but argued

that it was the idea of "choice," especially in matters of dress that was crucial to expressing a feminist identity. "We are not liberated unless we can choose freely between a hair shirt and a sequined dress," she maintained.²¹

Indeed, for many radical feminists, fashionable appearance did not necessarily stand in contrast with women's liberation. "Contrary to the variety of popular images, Women's Liberation is not a movement of hardened and coldly unfeeling females, shouting slogans, hating men, and scorning 'unliberated' sisters. . . . Women do not have to leave their husbands and lovers, abandon their children, throw away their make-up, burn their bras . . . or sleep with each other in order to be part of the movement," one feminist claimed.²² Pam Kearon from the radical group the Feminists argued that "people like to look nice for other people. It's just not true that we want to look like ugly freaks." Although they condemned seductiveness, or the need to beautify oneself to please men, feminists such as Kearon still valued the pleasure that came from fashion and beauty.²³ For these women's liberationists, looking attractive while wearing clothes they felt good and empowered in was an important aspect of their politics. They refused to turn themselves into sexual objects, however feminists were not willing to give up so easily the joy that dressing up gave them. "I'd like to dress up and look sexy," one feminist from San Francisco proclaimed. "But I want men to see me as a human being first and a potential sex partner second."²⁴ These feminists justified their choice in adopting a fashionable feminine appearance not as a tactical maneuver to avoid damaging stereotypes of the "bra-burning feminist" but as the true fulfillment of women's liberation. They wanted to be recognized for their humanity, but they were not willing to cast off their femininity.

Similarly, Black activists also viewed fashion as an empowering source of pleasure and an important feminist tool. The feminist lawyer and activist Florynce "Flo" Kennedy—who worked outside of NOW but joined with the organization on certain actions—saw fashion, and especially the adoption of soul style, as "a validation of our power, even if it is only style-deep." Although Kennedy adopted a more masculine look, using cowboy hats and pants, she did not challenge gender norms as much as norms of female propriety, especially when they pertained to Black womanhood. "I don't take diction from the pig-o-crat style setters who say I should dress like a middle-aged colored lady. My politics don't depend on whether my tits are in or out of a bra," she argued.²⁵

Many Black women also did not share radical feminists' critique of the beauty and fashion industries as exploitive, but celebrated Black models breaking into *Vogue* and *Glamour* as major victories and as a symbol of the

growing acceptance of Black beauty in mainstream culture. Indeed, in 1968, alongside the No More Miss America protest, another protest in the form of the first Miss Black America Pageant also took place. Challenging Miss America Pageant's racism and its segregated nature, the Miss Black America Pageant embraced beauty culture and femininity as a means of resistance. Unlike the No More Miss America demonstration, Black protesters did not criticize the fashion industry but sought to gain an equal standing in it.²⁶ As clothing and appearance were important means for African American women to claim access to the privileges of respectable femininity, they were more reluctant to relinquish their gains. In a society that often portrayed Black women as animalistic or masculine, forgoing femininity and fashionability did not seem so empowering for Black feminists.

Feminists such as Germaine Greer, and most notably Gloria Steinem, became the ultimate examples that one did not have to reject fashionability to claim a feminist identity. Championing a youthful, sexy, feminine look, that was often contrasted with depictions of "angry" activists, Greer and Steinem became the symbol of a feminist "radical chic" that offered a nonthreatening version of feminism.²⁷ They refused to adopt a separatist view that marked all men as the enemy and rebuffed the idea that a woman had to make herself unattractive in order to avoid being a sexual object. "I don't go for that whole pants-and-battle-dress routine. It just puts men off, and there's already been too much defensiveness in the movement," argued Greer.²⁸ Indeed, even when Steinem changed her style from miniskirts to jeans and T-shirt as she became more radicalized regarding the movement and its causes, she did not abandon her feminine look. She refused to forgo her pro-fashion attitude and the pleasure she received from dressing up.²⁹ As one reporter commented, in her "hip-hugging raspberry Levis, 2-inches wedgies and tight poor-boy T-shirt . . . long, blond-streaked hair falling just so about each breast and her cheerleader-pretty face made wiser by the addition of blue-tinted glasses," Steinem was "a chic apotheosis of with-it cool."³⁰ As her popularity grew in the 1970s, Steinem became not only the unofficial face and spokesperson of the movement but also a fashion icon of the new feminine ideal. Between 1971 and 1974, she appeared on the covers of *People*, *McCall's*, *Newsweek*, *Redbook*, and *New Woman*. *McCall's* named her "Woman of the Year," while *Newsweek* defined her as "The New Woman."³¹ Steinem also received favorable interviews in *Vogue* and the *New York Times*, which glorified her as the epitome of the modern liberated woman.³²

Through their appearance, Greer and Steinem offered a model through which women could claim their affiliation with the movement but not desert

heterosexuality or adornment practices. Steinem's signature look of long hair with highlighted stripes parted in the middle and a pair of aviation glasses became a fashion trend among young White women who identified with Steinem but also with the political message she promoted.³³ Yet, Greer's and Steinem's beauty (and race) also shielded them to a certain extent from attacks by critics who used the androgynous look of women's liberationists to frame them, and the movement as a whole, as a group of frustrated women who could not find suitable husbands. Even as they advocated radical views about marriage, child-rearing, and work, Steinem's and Greer's feminine appearance helped to legitimize these ideas. In its profile on Greer, *Life* depicted her not as a crazy radical but as an appealing woman, offering flattering images that positioned her as a "saucy feminist even men like."³⁴

However, this image that Steinem and Greer presented appealed mainly to White, middle-class, college-educated women. For White working-class women working in offices and the retail world, Helen Gurley Brown, *Cosmopolitan* editor and the author of the 1962 bestseller *Sex and the Single Girl*, was much more inspiring as a feminist role model. Brown's pro-commercial, pro-fashion, feminine style appealed to many working-class women who were happy to join the sexual revolution and aspired to achieve professional and economic independence, though they were less comfortable with radical feminism. Brown advocated the wearing of minis, makeup, and other sexy clothes that celebrated women's femininity instead of subduing it, seeing it as important part of the liberated working-woman identity.³⁵ Yet for Brown, wearing feminine clothes that emphasized one's sexuality was not just a means to an end but an enjoyable practice that was important for individual self-fulfillment and the building of self-esteem. "There's no reason you can't be a strong feminist and look sensational," she argued.³⁶ Brown became a fierce and unapologetic voice for sexuality and hyper-femininity, insisting that beauty and fashion practices were not antithetical with women's liberation but were in fact integral to it.

Brown's approach was often criticized by radical feminists, including Steinem, who saw in the image of the Cosmo Girl an unreal fantasy that further oppressed women by turning them into sex objects. Yet, as a *New York Times Magazine* reporter noticed, Steinem and Brown did not represent two opposite camps of feminism and antifeminism, but "Two Faces of the Same Eve."³⁷ In fact, in many aspects, Steinem, who pursued her career seriously and represented a liberated approach to her sexuality and relationship with men, was the perfect emblem of the Cosmo Girl Brown promoted.³⁸ The differences between Steinem and the Cosmo Girl were thus more in style than in

substance. The feature cover of the *New York Times Magazine* showed a split image of the same model. On the left she was dressed as a version of Gloria Steinem, with aviator glasses, turtleneck, and waist belt, and on the right as a sexy Cosmo Girl with deep cleavage that revealed her braless bosom, heavy makeup, and glittery outfit (figure 5.2). Both images portrayed a beautiful, fashionable woman who did not eschew beauty standards and gender norms but interpreted them with a different emphasis. And both images offered the media a fashionable image of “the feminist” that women could identify with.

To be sure, some feminists did reject entirely the concept of fashion and beauty. “Find what is comfortable and wear it,” argued an editorial by the radical feminist group Cell 16. “Stop following fashions, looking at fashion magazines, shopping,” it exclaimed. Founded by Roxanne Dunbar, the group viewed the notion of “creating ‘our image’ through the way we dress,” as nothing but exploitation.³⁹ As women were only being judged by their appearance, they argued, Cell 16 feminists sought to discard all forms of adornment and decorative elements as a way to challenge the notion that women are reduced to their appearance. Seeing self-expression through clothes as a form of neurotic disorder, these feminists hoped that women would not define themselves through their looks but through their actions and other attributes such as brains, personality, and character. If women would abandon fashion completely, Cell 16 argued, they would also begin to move beyond the need to uphold unrealistic ideals of beauty that were only setting them back. For Cell 16 members, adherence to fashion only kept women in bondage—psychological, economic, and physical.⁴⁰

Other radical feminists also rejected fashion. Andrea Dworkin, for example, saw fashion and beauty practices not only as a waste of time and an affront on women’s liberation, but also as a form of bodily torture. Dworkin argued that the emphasis on fashion caused women to internalize the message that enduring pain was necessary in order to be considered a “beautiful woman.”⁴¹ Others found that dealing with fashion only deterred them from the struggle and from developing their full potential as human beings. “I used to spend hours putting on make-up, which I now use more productively to read feminist and revolutionary literature,” a feminist named Ann confessed, justifying her decision to avoid beauty culture entirely.⁴²

However, if Cell 16 members found clothing and beauty practices a waste of time and mental power, many feminists did not agree with Dunbar’s extremist approach, and instead looked to create a compelling political statement through their clothes.⁴³ “Many women are just beginning to realize that, in the act of liberating themselves, somewhere along the way, they lost the aes-



FIGURE 5.2: “Two Faces of the Same Eve: Ms. Versus Cosmo,” *New York Times Magazine* cover, August 1974. Despite stereotypes regarding the bra-burning feminist that circulated in the media, feminists represented a pro-fashion approach that sought to celebrate women’s sexuality, not subdue it. (The New York Times. © 1974 The New York Times Company. All rights reserved. Used under license.)

thetic pleasure of putting together colors and textures or the selfish sensuality of wearing something soft and clinging,” argued an article in *Ms.* magazine. “The Women’s Movement revolves around the importance of giving people options. Unless we all want to end up in uniform . . . perhaps style needs to operate on the same premise,” the article concluded.⁴⁴ For feminists who embraced fashion, clothing was not an enemy to fight against, but a source of empowerment. “The clothes I wear help me to know my own power,” argued lesbian feminist Liza Cowan.⁴⁵

As feminists grappled with questions of fashion, appearance, femininity, and beauty practices, they did not present a monolithic approach but a range of attitudes and looks. This diversity offered a more complex picture of feminism’s relationship with fashion in the 1960s and 1970s that in turn shaped, and broadened, public opinion regarding feminism and feminists. Indeed, despite media portrayals of feminists as drab, masculine-looking, and angry, the public—much due to the popularity of feminine-looking feminists like Steinem—formed a more nuanced opinion regarding feminists and their appearance.⁴⁶ In a 1970 opinion poll for the Virginia Slims company, only 12 percent of the 2,972 women polled associated “women’s liberation” with a “bunch of frustrated, insecure, angry hysterical, masculine-type women group.”⁴⁷

Moreover, although fashion could be a source of tension, both among feminists themselves and between feminists and nonfeminists, it could also offer a bridge and a way to form solidarity between groups. This was evident in one of the most iconic photographs of the feminist movement, featuring Dorothy Pitman-Hughes and Gloria Steinem (figure 5.3).⁴⁸ In this black-and-white photograph, the two women—wearing snug-fitting, long-sleeved turtlenecks—face the camera in a position of protest, raising their fists in the Black Panther salute in a show of solidarity for women’s rights.⁴⁹ Despite their identical clothes, Pitman-Hughes and Steinem did not portray an identical appearance, but instead presented a feminist image with different emphases and interpretations. But more importantly, they were not depicted as threatening but as fashionable models of a new feminist consciousness. The photo, which appeared in *Esquire* magazine in October 1971 as part of a profile on Steinem, offered a powerful response to the stereotype of the radical feminist. Earlier that year, in an article titled “The Feminine Mistake,” the magazine published an illustration of a defiant angry-looking woman, wearing a semitransparent short dress that revealed her braless nipples, with a “WITCH” button pinned to her dress, and a burning bra dangling from her upraised, fistful hand.⁵⁰ Providing a sharp contrast to this image, and using the documentary power of the camera, the photograph of Steinem and Pitman-Hughes presented

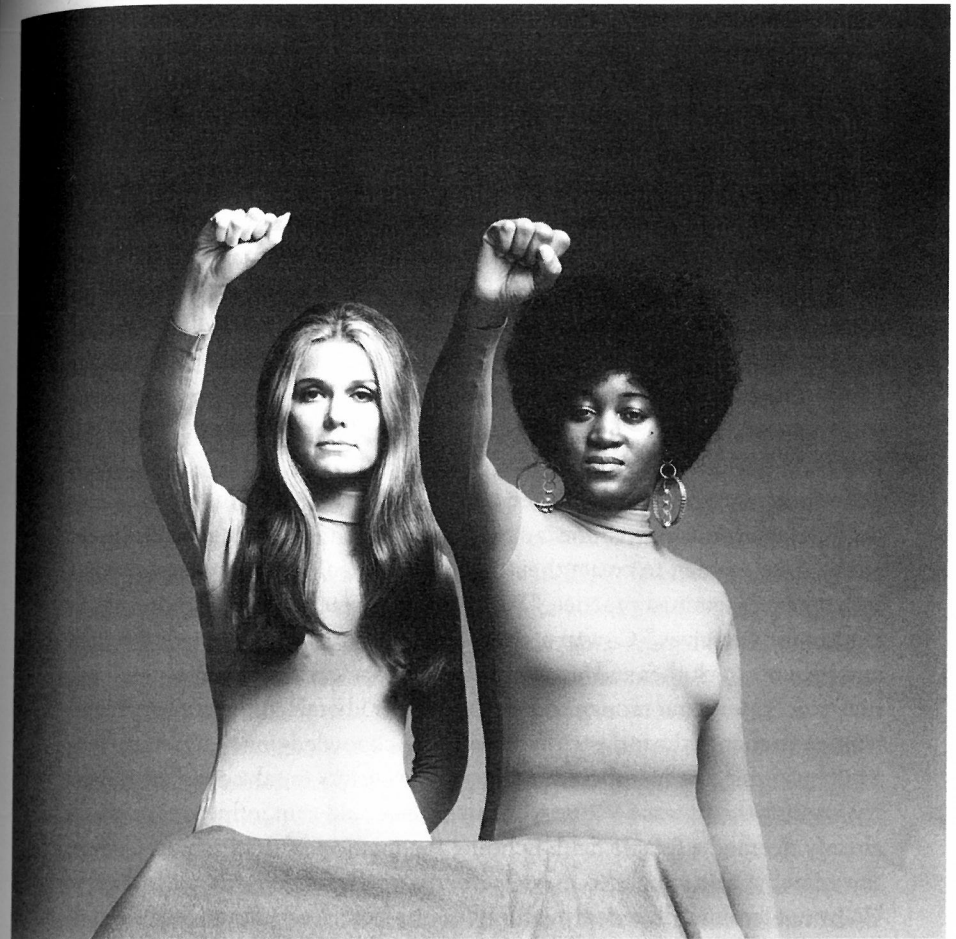


FIGURE 5.3: Dan Wynn’s iconic photograph of Gloria Steinem and Dorothy Pitman-Hughes showed how feminists used fashion not only to express their identities but also to convey political messages. Although there was not a unified feminist style that all feminists adopted, clothing served as a way to create a group consciousness and express solidarity with other struggles. (© Dan Wynn Archive and Farmani Group, Co LTD)

tangible proof that the bra-burning feminist image the media perpetuated was indeed just a myth. In real life, Steinem and Pitman-Hughes showed that what a feminist looks like could be both powerful and fashionable. Yet they also showed that fashion was a crucial realm where feminist messages and politics would play out.

Feminist Fashions and Construction of "the Feminist" Image

Feminists' various approaches to fashion and beauty practices affected the styles they adopted and adapted. Whereas some stuck to the popular fashions in their attempt to present a respectable appearance, other sought to create an alternative to the mainstream styles that would express their politics, yet without compromising on the pleasure of dressing up. "I am confident that there will begin to evolve a true Dyke fashion," argued Liza Cowan. "I have no idea what these clothes will look like, but I do know that they will be liberating, physically and psychologically, and they will be beautiful."⁵¹ For lesbian feminists and women's liberationists like Cowan, this search for alternative style was not a meaningless endeavor but an important political act of resistance and self-determination.

In their attempts to create alternatives to the fashion industry and consumer capitalism, some feminists opted for secondhand clothing, while others encouraged women to create their own clothes, seeing it as an empowering activity and a feminist practice. "We have got to start making and designing clothes for ourselves," Cowan argued. "If you know how to sew, you might make your own clothes and teach your friends to sew too. . . . Don't let men get rich (richer) with our money and ideas."⁵² Other liberal feminists encouraged women to change the industry from within. Acknowledging that fashion was a big business, one member urged her NOW sisters to take over the industry, arguing that it was a venue where women could gain influence, as it was already deemed a female field. Echoing the mission of the Fashion Group, this feminist also sought to make women a powerful voice in the industry. "Why not feminist designers owning feminist factories making a great deal of money from women who would be glad to buy and wear un-sexist clothes?" she asked. Instead of rejecting the industry all together, this feminist sought to build it as a feminist realm, where women's creativity, power, and solidarity could come into play.⁵³

Some feminists answered this call by establishing their own businesses, seeing it as a way to gain control over their images without succumbing to capitalist interests that were often determined by men. A mail-order company named Liberation Enterprises, for example, founded in 1972 by NOW members Rose Fontanella and Stephanie Marcus, sold a variety of clothes, jewelry, and paraphernalia with feminist messages. Creating clothes with feminist themes or slogans offered a business venue for feminists but also popularized and rallied support for the movement. According to the found-

ers, these items gave "women the opportunity to express the spirit of the women's movement" and served as "consciousness-raisers, by making the feminist spirit more visible." Using fashion as a form of political statement by literally wearing their feminism on their bodies, women could convey their support. Yet, more importantly, these feminist businesses offered women a way to harness their financial power in service of their politics.⁵⁴

Black women, while not necessarily driven by anticonsumerism, also saw in designing African-inspired garments a source of pride and creativity, as well as a form of feminist and race resistance. Indeed, the creation of soul style was largely a "do-it-yourself endeavor" due to many women's lack of access to more upscale Black boutiques that sold custom-made designs of African-inspired dashikis, caftans, boubous, *lapas* (wrappers) and *geles* (head wraps). College students who looked to adopt soul styles usually mixed and matched items found in thrift stores that looked or felt "African" or, if they had sewing skills, resorted to buying African textiles and making their own clothes.⁵⁵ Wearing self-made designs enabled Black women to identify with their cultural heroes and assert their pride in Black femininity. It also symbolized an act of resistance against the White fashion industry, which often ignored the Black consumer market. However, although soul style contained racial critique on the mainstream White fashion industry, it was not seen as a critique of capitalism, nor as a separatist move to create alternative styles. In fact, the Black community encouraged young women to become professionals in the fashion field, celebrating in the Black press the success of Black designers in the mainstream fashion industry and the commercialization of African-inspired styles.⁵⁶

Whether they designed their clothes or acquired them secondhand, feminists were interested in creating a style that would be a visual statement of their politics and their solidarity with one another. "I've learned out of boredom that clothing can be used by and for me to express myself in a non-oppressive way. I don't have to be a sex symbol or a male replica to wear clothing that is an extension of myself," argued a feminist named Anne Thompson.⁵⁷ However, feminists never detailed what un-sexist clothes would look like or what exactly a "feminist style" entailed. Some feminists suggested creating a "feminist uniform" that would express sartorially the wearer's politics without the need to adhere to consumerist or social pressures. The outfit was conceived as "an attractive, up to date dress . . . made in three colors; in cotton for summer and wool for winter." Like other forms of feminist activism, the proposed uniform was meant to become an arena of consciousness-raising and feminist practice. By wearing the same dress each day, proponents argued, feminists could

show their solidarity with the struggle. The greatest benefit of the uniform, however, was its ability to create a community in which feminists could recognize one another and claim their affiliation with the movement. A unified "feminist look" could create sisterhood between women, promoters of the feminist uniform argued, as it would eliminate competition among women over appearance that the male chauvinist culture perpetuated.⁵⁸

Uniform advocates paid attention not only to the aesthetic value of the dress but also to the economic and social implications of clothing as a product of human labor. The feminist uniform, advocates suggested, would be "made by the 'Poor People's Corporation' so that we would be giving our money to a co-operative rather than a profit-making corporation." Adopting a feminist uniform was also a useful way to resist a consumerist ideology that demanded versatile wardrobes and the social pressures of changing one's outfit constantly. Instead of adjusting one's clothing to the social environment and physical activities they required, a woman could wear her functional feminist uniform throughout the day.⁵⁹ Some reacted positively to the idea, making suggestions to improve the design by adding pockets, opting for culottes (trousers) instead of a dress, and creating sleeveless versions for summer. Yet others rejected the idea of an official uniform, claiming it will only substitute one oppression with another.⁶⁰

For many lesbian feminists, adopting so-called dyke fashions—often consisting of work shirts and pants—became the style of choice. By discarding feminine fashions such as skirts, makeup, and high heels, these feminists created a style that symbolized their rejection of gender binaries and expressed their lesbian identity.⁶¹ As the manifest "The Woman-Identified Woman" by the feminist group Radicalesbians argued, "as long as we cling to the idea of 'being a woman,' we will sense some conflict with . . . that sense of a whole person. . . . [We need] to accept that being 'feminine' and being a whole person are irreconcilable."⁶² By removing feminine attributes from their appearance, lesbian feminists sought to challenge heterosexual social norms that prescribed separate roles to men and women.⁶³ "We're breaking down the old butch-femme roles which mimic heterosexual society," explained a San Francisco lesbian named Susan Walsh. "We're getting through all those layers and becoming real."⁶⁴ As they cultivated a more androgynous or masculine appearance, these feminists also challenged what it meant to be a woman, arguing that biological differences between men and women were not innate but socially and culturally constructed.

Short hair also served as an important symbolic gesture of gender non-conformity and androgyny. "Long hair is a patriarchal symbol of femininity,"

claimed Liza Cowan.⁶⁵ The act of cutting one's hair was for many radical feminists a political act of liberation. During the 1969 Congress to Unite Women in New York City, Cell 16 members took the stage and ceremonially cut off each other's hair, chanting slogans, and calling the audience to follow suit.⁶⁶ By cutting one's hair, these radical feminists not only showed their commitment to the cause, protesting against male-defined standard of beauty, but also formed a sense of community among activists. The collective haircutting events went beyond Cell 16's actions and became popular among other feminist groups, serving as a symbolic rite of passage into the movement. A woman from Iowa City described such an experience, seeing it as a pivotal moment in her evolution as a feminist. From having her hair down to her waist, this woman shortened her hair to below her ears, refusing, at first, she said, to let go her perception of being feminine and attractive. Yet, after attending a feminist conference and going through further consciousness-raising, she decided to join her friends and cut her hair extremely short. "Now my hair does not cover my ears, it does not swing in my face, it doesn't swing at all," she commented. Although she lost her hair, this woman felt more empowered, confessing that the act taught her to see how seriously she was actually taking herself.⁶⁷

Hair also played an important role in the politicization of Black women and their cultivation of an activist identity. By the beginning of the 1960s, young Black women—many of them active in Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)—started to wear their hair in natural styles. As they began organizing in rural areas in the South and consequently faced arrests, these female activists found that regular visits to the hair salon were not only unattainable but also futile. Maintaining what was then considered a respectable appearance as a political strategy, which for Black women meant straight and pressed hair, no longer proved useful in avoiding the sexual and racial violence many civil rights activists endured.⁶⁸ Yet, activists also justified their adoption of natural styles, most notably the Afro, in ideological terms, using the style to challenge racist beauty standards and creating a sense of solidarity and community among activists. For them, the decision to wear an Afro was an expression of their political and feminist identity. The Afro allowed them to celebrate their culture and African heritage and to reclaim Blackness as a source of pride.⁶⁹

In addition, some activists used the Afro to promote a feminist critique that connected White racism to consumer capitalism. Like White radical feminists, these Black activists denounced the commercial beauty industry, which according to them not only perpetuated White beauty ideals but

turned all women, both Black and White, into sexual objects. "I'm protesting against the black Anglo-Saxon and the white man," argued Lee McDaniel, an activist and a fashion designer of African-inspired clothing. "I'm tired of going through all these changes trying to look like Doris Day and Elizabeth Taylor. I'm not going to measure myself by their yardstick any longer!" she exclaimed.⁷⁰ Wearing the Afro became a public act of defiance not only toward White beauty standards, but also against understandings of femininity within Black communities, which perceived straightened hair as the hallmark of beauty. Asserting that "Black is Beautiful" through the celebration of natural hairstyles, these Black women expanded the definition of beauty to include a more diverse and inclusive types of Black femininity.⁷¹

Despite the preference to gender-bending or androgynous styles among radical feminists, the spectrum of gender appearances was broad among women's liberationists, allowing each woman to create her own interpretation of how a woman (and a feminist) should look like. "Fashions this fall are swinging with the vicissitudes of that oh-so-elusive sexual identity, from the butch look to the femme and everything is between," commented one feminist on the variety of "feminist fashions."⁷² A photograph of the editorial board of *Women: A Journal of Liberation* demonstrates the range of images feminists employed (figure 5.4).⁷³ The women posed for an article that dealt with the issue of androgyny, with the photograph capturing the different negotiations each woman chose regarding her self-presentation. Although none presented a hyper-feminine appearance, their fashions presented a range of gender attributes between masculine and feminine. All eight women are wearing pants, and either turtlenecks or polo shirts. Half have short hair, while the other half sport longer styles. Two wear visible jewelry and makeup. Seeking to break gender definitions, not only dichotomies, fashion served as a way for these women to express a more complex understanding of androgyny. "I am not masculine or feminine, or masculine and feminine; I am a person with myriad characteristics," one of them stated.⁷⁴ Claiming androgyny enabled these women to find pleasure in the ability to play with their appearance, changing between styles and identities. "I wear jeans and yellow ruffled dresses, too. . . . It's an unconscious harmony—the balancing of that part of me that needs the ruffles and security and tradition with that part of me so desirous of jeans and responsibility and independence," another wrote. "Should I classify and catalogue my needs under the rubric 'Feminine—Masculine' and regard them as 'natural' dissonance to be individually assaulted, compromised, and bastardized into an artificial image? No," she asserted confidently.⁷⁵



FIGURE 5.4: Whereas many lesbian feminists tended to adopt more unisex, androgynous styles, the spectrum of appearances remained broad, as demonstrated in this 1974 photo of the editorial board of the feminist journal *Women*. (*Women: A Journal of Liberation* Records, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.)

Whereas the adoption of unisex or androgynous styles offered freedom to many feminists, it also became a contested issue in the movement. For NOW leaders in particular, the rejection of feminine styles and attributes of many on the feminist Left was a cause of concern. Betty Friedan was especially bothered by the appearance of lesbian feminists, famously describing them as a "lavender menace." Seeing the importance of presenting a feminine appearance as a tactical move to gain public support, and perhaps feeling uncomfortable personally with gender nonconforming styles, Friedan criticized the need of radical feminists to "make yourself ugly" in order to feel liberated. Yet, more than a personal preference, Friedan was concerned about the impact that adopting androgynous styles would have on the movement.

She complained that the “sexual shock tactics and man-hating, down-with motherhood stance” of many women’s liberationists only alienated more conservative women from the feminist cause.⁷⁶ Moreover, like the suffragists a generation prior, Friedan believed that presenting a respectable appearance was the surest way to avoid accusations that feminists were ugly or masculine. Hence, she saw young activists’ choice to eschew mainstream feminine styles as a liability to the organization. Fearing that these activists’ appearance would mark all feminists as “men haters,” thus inflaming hostility toward the movement, Friedan sought to minimize their influence and visibility in the media.⁷⁷

Friedan was not completely wrong in her analysis. When Phyllis Schlafly’s STOP ERA campaign would start to gain popularity in the mid-1970s, it harnessed radical feminists’ appearance, especially those who favored unisex styles, to point to what the group characterized as the “dangers of feminism.” Schlafly and her anti-ERA supporters adopted a hyper-feminine appearance, often wearing pink dresses as part of their political strategy, trying to claim feminine fashionability as a conservative trait.⁷⁸ As youthful and more casual styles became popular, Schlafly and her supporters continued to cling to the boxy and more formal silhouette of the early 1960s and scorned feminists’ increasing tendency to adopt denim and pants into their wardrobe.⁷⁹

Working-class and minority women, who could not adopt radical styles as easily as their White middle-class sisters, also chafed at the androgynous styles. Although some feminists justified their adoption of denim and work boots as a statement of solidarity with the working class, they ignored the millions of women working as secretaries, waitresses, flight attendants, and teachers. For these women, abandoning skirts, heels, and makeup in favor of more androgynous alternative styles posed the risk of losing one’s job, which many of them could not take.⁸⁰ As one woman confessed, she could not get a job without wearing makeup or a miniskirt. After trying to interview with knee-length skirts and no makeup, and without securing a job, she returned to her miniskirt and “landed one right away.”⁸¹ Some radical feminist groups also showed hostility to activists who refused to abandon their feminine appearance, blaming them for betraying the feminist cause or accusing them of succumbing to conformity and false consciousness.⁸² Ignoring the economic reality of many working women, as well as denying the pleasure and the empowering feeling many women felt when they dressed up in skirts and makeup exacerbated class and racial tensions among feminists and led some to feel excluded from the movement.

Some Black women also found the pressure to conform with radical styles alienating. Florynce Kennedy pointed to “the fact that middle-class white women need to reject the tailored well-dress image shoved down their throats and often find jeans as the panacea, doesn’t mean that working-class or black or Spanish women too, will find in jeans a symbolic end to oppression.” For women who have had to wear “shapeless hand-me-downs for the majority of their lives,” Kennedy claimed, indulging in feminine fashions was a declaration of independence.⁸³ Moreover, not all Black women felt comfortable with the Afro, seeing it as “too masculine” and as a threat to feminine beauty. “I go along with being black, thinking black, and living black, but I don’t go a long with the new ‘Afro’ hair style on our women,” one *Ebony* reader wrote. “Disagree all you want, but think. The men look great and masculine in their Afro hair styles—our women look great and masculine too,” she argued.⁸⁴ While in general many championed Black-is-Beautiful sentiments and adopted African-inspired clothing and natural hairstyles, for many Black women, even for those who embraced feminism, maintaining femininity was no less important.

Even among White radical circles, non-feminine clothes were a cause of tension. Some lesbian feminists felt uncomfortable with the androgynous styles, finding them too masculine. “I refuse to look to the dull dead male and his dull dead clothes for inspiration,” one lesbian feminist complained about work shirts and suits. “I’m a gay woman, free and beautiful to myself. . . . *I can be free, and strong, and work and play in anything*—closed or open fabric, dress or pants.”⁸⁵ Although some lesbian feminists welcomed the comfort and freedom of movement that characterized menswear, and were especially pleased to avoid the harassment that went along with the presentation of feminine appearance, they were also tired of blue jeans and suits. Instead, they sought to create a style in which they “could feel comfortable and confident wearing” but would not look like men’s clothes.⁸⁶ “I don’t like to see a woman who wants to look like a man,” argued Dixie McMills, a lesbian postal worker. “I hate Frisco jeans and I hate capri outfits too. A woman looks best as herself without trying to look like some dumb man,” she argued.⁸⁷

The question of how to create a feminist style that would not be an imitation of menswear yet would also not perpetuate patriarchal ideas about women’s roles in society became pertinent in feminist circles in the mid-1970s. Clothing and appearance offered a material route to engage with feminist ideas in everyday life, and thus feminists were invested in finding a style that would best suit their politics and identities. They adapted existing styles to their own use, either by repurposing work clothes, by claiming masculine

fashions as suitable for women, and by expanding the boundaries of sexual propriety. Even those who rejected mainstream feminine appearance did not place themselves outside the world of fashion. Clothing were a powerful political statement, and they utilized it to promote their agendas.

However, while some fashions, such as blue jeans and short or natural hair, were popular among many feminists, there was not one style that activists adopted, or agreed it best represented them and their politics. "We are everywhere, and we dress every way," argued feminist Maureen Turner in a *Boston Globe* article.⁸⁸ Even though there was not one feminist style that feminists could agree on, feminists and their clothing indeed seemed ubiquitous by the 1970s. The ready-made industry adopted (or co-opted, as some feminists would argue) some of the styles feminists wore, marketing them as the latest fashion trends. Yet, when these styles became popular, the ideas of freedom, choice, and empowerment that stood behind them also received popular acceptance.

The Popularization of Feminist Styles and the Commercialization of Feminism

Feminists' utilization of fashion constituted feminism not only as an ideology or political activism, but also as a cultural style and an everyday practice manifested through clothes. For feminists, fashion was a tool through which they could understand themselves and the world around them, form solidarities with one another, and promote change. Yet ironically, the alternative styles that women's liberationists and Black feminists promoted extended beyond activist circles and were adopted by the mainstream market. Despite some feminists' critique on the exploitive and racist nature of the fashion industry, retailers and the media embraced these feminist styles and marketed them to the general public. In that process, these styles lost their radical message, turning instead into fashion statements. However, if some feminists lamented the commercialization of their fashions, others saw it as the cultural success of the movement, pointing to the influence of feminism on public opinion.

The most notable contribution of feminists to mainstream fashion was the popularization of "unisex styles" and the androgynous look that appealed to many lesbian feminists. Retail designers and manufacturers responded to the growing demand of young women who searched for clothes that provided both comfort and freedom, recognizing the potential for profits.⁸⁹ They created women's lines for masculine items such as pants and jackets, while marketing identical shirts suitable both for men and women. "In our

sportswear-oriented world, young people are too busy trying to capture and control today's spirit to be bothered by thoughts of looking particularly like a man or a woman," explained designer Ed Baynard to *Women's Wear Daily*.⁹⁰ In addition, department stores began to include menswear in women's departments and created "unisex boutiques" that included both male and female changing rooms.⁹¹ Unisex fashions were marketed as the image of the "new generation" of young people who asserted a "new freedom in dressing . . . doing your own thing . . . wearing what you want when you want," and as a symbol of the true integration between men's and women's fashions (figure 5.5).⁹² However, rather than a true integration, or the masculinization of women's clothes, the unisex style was part of a continuing process in which menswear became more feminized, or no longer considered solely masculine. Indeed, although some items—most notably pants for women—became conventional mainstream fashion, there was never an attempt to create truly genderless styles. Masculine items were adjusted to fit women's bodies, and despite their name, were never meant for both genders.⁹³

Moreover, when radical feminists promoted the unisex styles, they did so as part of their challenge to gender differences and their effort to upset the very structure of society. When the industry promoted them, they looked to expand their profits, not to make a political statement. The industry promoted unisex items mostly to women. It did not seek to popularize feminine styles like skirts for men, and thus limited the revolutionary potential unisex styles could have had on society. While ads alluded to a growing recognition of the changing expectations of women, they also turned feminism into a commodity focused on individual freedom of choice, undermining the larger social and political message that androgynous fashions entailed.⁹⁴

The unisex look included a range of items and accessories, yet blue jeans became one of the most popular items, worn by all ages and genders alike. Seen as too casual and inappropriate in the 1950s, by the 1960s—much thanks to college students and the counterculture—jeans became popular everyday wear. Fashion magazines appealed to the growing student market and promoted casual wear and comfort to which jeans was essential component. The influence of Hollywood stars such as James Dean and Marlon Brando, as well as their association with rock and roll, also turned jeans into the uniform of youth.⁹⁵ The greatest appeal of jeans was their durability and price, two qualities that feminists valued. Yet, while one could buy a pair of Levi's or Lees for \$10 to \$15 (about \$45-\$70 today), by the mid-1970s, couture designers such as Valentino, Yves St. Laurent, and most notably Calvin Klein rebranded jeans as couture wear and as a sexy clothing item.⁹⁶ No longer the symbol of



FIGURE 5.5: The mainstream market quickly adopted feminists' styles, offering commodified versions of them to the general public. Yet, as these fashions became popular, they enabled women to engage with the ideas that stood behind these styles, popularizing feminism in the process. ("The New Generation," *Women's Wear Daily*, August 23, 1968. Image published with permission of ProQuest LLC. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission.)

rebellion against traditional gender and class prescriptions, jeans became the embodiment of sexual seduction and the capitalist market, turning full circle to join the mini as a symbol of the sexual revolution.

The publication of *Cheap Chic* (1975) and *The Woman's Dress for Success Book* (1977), two what-to-wear guides demonstrated the extent to which the market was able to incorporate feminist messages into a consumerist agenda. Written by two journalists, Catherine Milinaire and Carol Troy, *Cheap Chic* adopted the feminists' do-it-yourself approach and called for body acceptance and pleasure in fashioning a personal style. "Nobody knows better than you what you should wear or how you should look," the authors instructed readers. "Find the clothes that suit you best, that make you feel comfortable, confident,

sexy, good looking and happy," they advised, arguing that one does not have to spend a lot of money or follow ridiculous trends to be in fashion.⁹⁷

John T. Molloy's *Dress for Success* took a more utilitarian and didactic approach. Recognizing the growing presence of women in the workforce in influential positions, the book provided practical sartorial advice to the career woman in the masculine professional workplace. Molloy popularized the "success suit" outfit: a blazer-style jacket and a skirt hemmed just below the knee in a dark color that conveyed power and authority.⁹⁸ Although Molloy himself discouraged women from wearing a pantsuit to the office, revealing a more conservative approach regarding women's appearance than feminists, his book ultimately helped in legitimizing women's professional wear that included pants.⁹⁹ Both books championed fashion as an empowering force for women, and helped mainstream feminist ideas regarding careers and personal choice. However, none of these books advocated or supported the more radical gender critique of feminists in this period, and certainly did not help in legitimizing the movement or its demands. Molloy's book in particular did not seek to promote feminism, but instead sought to maintain the power relationships between the genders in the workplace.

The fashion industry also coopted the bra-less fashions and the so-called "natural look" of hippies and feminists into the mainstream market. High-fashion magazines, as well as more conservative ones such as the *Ladies' Home Journal*, recommended that women "rely more on nature, less on hardware" when it came to bras. And department stores displayed fashions meant to be worn without a bra, giving mannequins nipples for the first time.¹⁰⁰ Ignoring the irony that feminists were depicted as bra burners, and that discarding bras and corsets were a long-time symbol of feminist resistance, the mainstream fashion industry celebrated the new age of "bosom-baring" fashions not as a symbol of women's liberation but as the latest manifestation of the "natural" trend, emptying it of any radical meanings.¹⁰¹

Another natural look that became commercialized in the 1970s was the Afro, which transformed from a radical political statement into a fashionable style. The Afro became a national sensation after the FBI targeted activist-scholar Angela Davis and placed her on its Most Wanted Fugitives list, circulating images of her wearing a halo-shaped Afro, an African dashiki, and see-through sunglasses.¹⁰² The large Afro became so identified with Davis that it became a trademark not only of her activism, but also of a new image of Black beauty, as media portrayals of Davis focused not only on her political views but most notably on her looks.¹⁰³ Beauticians, wig makers, and the public framed Davis's appearance as both radical and glamorous, and turned

her look into a model for other women who identified with her political message, yet not necessarily with her actions. By adopting the Afro, Black women could engage with Black Power through appearance, showing their solidarity with the cause.¹⁰⁴

However, as the decade progressed, instead of being a symbol of radicalism and a rejection of the White beauty industry and standards, the Afro became yet another hairstyle that required maintenance through hair products and salon visits.¹⁰⁵ Black beauticians and Black-owned beauty companies marketed their products using themes of racial pride and Black beauty, but those were devoid of direct political reference and instead portrayed the natural style as one choice of many.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the popularization of Afro wigs by the late 1960s provided women the option of adopting the Afro not as a political choice to go natural, but as a hairstyle that could be changed depending on the circumstances. "You can change your hair style as easily as you change your mind," one ad promised.¹⁰⁷

If Davis lamented the reduction of her politics to a simple hairdo, her feelings were also shared by other feminists who resented the market's co-option of feminist styles.¹⁰⁸ These feminists argued that the main problem with the commercialization of these fashions was in the subtraction of their political meaning. As one feminist complained: "The establishment . . . spread the anti-establishment group's words/ideas, dress, etc., around society so successfully that you can't tell who's who anymore in clothes; and through misuse and overuse the words and clothes lose their original anti-establishment meaning. . . . The clothes are sold in Bloomingdales, and are no longer threatening or signify anything but the latest fashion." Turning the "liberated woman" and even the "radical feminist" into an advertising strategy did not indicate that the market had embraced these ideas, this feminist argued. On the contrary, it was through the commercialization of "the feminist" image that the market continued in its oppression of women. "THE PATRIARCHY IS MAKING MONEY OFF THE MOVEMENT, AND THAT IS PRECISELY WHY WE ARE ALLOWED TO EXIST," she exclaimed.¹⁰⁹ As this feminist and others noted, the commercialization of feminist fashions did not signal the movement's success and public legitimization. At best, it reduced feminism to a consumer product, and at worst, it actually contributed to the growing backlash against feminists.

Indeed, feminist fashions were mainstreamed *despite* feminists' attempts to create an alternative to capitalism. Whereas most feminists did not reject fashionability as a concept, they were less invested than previous generations were in making feminism fashionable. They sought to create styles that

would be both comfortable and appealing, seeing clothes as a tangible way to express their politics and to put feminism into practice. Yet, they remained ambivalent toward the commercial success of their ideas. However, despite this ambivalence, it is important to remember that the popularization of feminist fashions—even among women who did not belong to radical feminist groups—offered a tangible way to complicate the popular image of "the feminist" and to shape the meaning of the liberated woman. These women, who gladly adopted unisex styles, Afros, and minis, did not interpret liberation as a critique of patriarchal conventions, whether of femininity, beauty, or capitalism, as many radical feminists did. For them, liberation was about choice and empowerment, claiming their right to shape their own image. And as feminist fashions increasingly became mainstream, it was this message of choice that resonated, not more radical claims for equality.

The Battle of the Hemlines: The Mini-Midi Debate

If many radical feminists chose to adopt a more unisex or androgynous appearance as a way to challenge conventions of gender, other women found the celebration of women's sexuality more appealing. They found the adoption of a hyper-feminine, hyper-sexual appearance more suitable to express their identities as liberated women. The miniskirt, despite not being a fashion that began in feminist circles, became—perhaps more than any other clothing item of the period—a potent symbol for the changing cultural attitudes toward women's sexuality and the growing influence of youth as a market. First introduced in 1965 in Britain by the designer Mary Quant and popularized by the model Twiggy, this high-thigh style became popular in the United States in the late 1960s. High school and college students, many of whom were also active in New Left and civil rights movements, adopted the skirt as part of their political identity. Indeed, although couture designers included the mini in their collections and supported this style, it sprang from the streets as young women began rebelling against fashion dictates that demanded comportment and the respectability of ladyhood.¹¹⁰ "This generation stepped out and away and did things their way," noted *Vogue's* editor Diana Vreeland, who did not seem concerned about the decreasing influence of Paris designers and fashion professionals like herself. "No one is obliged to wear anything she doesn't want to, and one can go as far as she wants. She can wear absolutely anything that is wildly becoming."¹¹¹ Vreeland in general supported the mini, seeing it as a positive fashion development. Predicting that "the mini-skirt will be-

come more and more miniscule," Vreeland suggested to "not worry about it. . . . Let us just enjoy what suits us. It's part of fashion. Part of our freedom."¹¹²

The ready-made industry was more ambivalent regarding the mini than Vreeland.¹¹³ Still, as the popularity of the mini grew almost instantaneously among the teenager market, retailers responded quickly to consumer demand, albeit often by adding an inch or two to the European versions. By 1967, the style became ubiquitous, spreading beyond teenagers to become a popular trend. "Virtually women of all ages want shorter skirts than in past seasons," a retail executive confessed. The mini's popularity crossed ages, classes, races, regions, and partisan lines. "Girls on the New Left wear them. Young Republican women wear them. Matrons wear them. If they're rebelling, they're in the majority already, so they've won the battle," commented Martin Marty, a University of Chicago professor.¹¹⁴

Women could choose to wear their minis in a wide variety of designs and lengths, ranging from the micro-mini, mid-thigh, to the more modest one or two inches above the knee, making the trend impossible for retailers to resist.¹¹⁵ However, not everyone welcomed the shorter minis. Some women complained about the impracticability of wearing a very short skirt, finding it difficult to sit or cross their legs without risking unwanted underwear exposure. One woman confessed that she could not wear her favorite mini cocktail dress to dates, as it was too short to sit down in it. The fashion designer Anne Klein also admitted that "now I never budge without a scarf, which I try to drape across my knees without looking as if I were setting a table."¹¹⁶ Yet, other women found the shorter, thigh-length mini fun and liberating. "I wear my skirts about three inches above my knees. I feel attractive, young, and free in this dress length," one woman wrote to *Women's Wear Daily*.¹¹⁷ Ultimately, the question of length was often determined by one's age and class status. The older one became, the longer was her hem. "I've shortened my skirts about an inch since last summer, but I won't go above the top of the knee—that's enough if you're over 25," confessed one woman to the *New York Times*.¹¹⁸ Elite matrons and professional women were also less likely to adopt the shorter mini, preferring knee-length skirts.

Although women differed in their preference of mini length, they imbued the skirt with political meanings, seeing it as a symbol of liberation, of their ability to choose, and of being independent women. Associated with youth, freedom, and sexuality, many viewed the mini as a mark of the "new freedom," connecting it not only to general rebellious attitudes that defined the 1960s, but to the women's movement and its politics specifically. One teenager as-

sociated the mini with the "new feminine drive for full freedom and equality," calling her skirt "my independence flag."¹¹⁹ Together with the birth-control pill, miniskirts became the epitome of the sexual revolution that provided women with unprecedented freedom to assert themselves as sexual beings, equal to men.¹²⁰ However, it was this revived understanding of female sexuality with which the mini was most identified, not with concrete demands for gender equality that feminist activists called for.

The sexualized nature of the miniskirt stirred the most public debate and concerns. Many of the arguments for and against the mini sounded very familiar, invoking much of the 1920s debates over the flapper and her short skirts. Miniskirts were blamed for corrupting the morality of youth, for deteriorating women's health, and for destroying women's feminine charms or respectability.¹²¹ Some argued that the skirt was unfeminine because of its lack of modesty. However, unlike the boyish connotations of the flapper, the unfeminine aspects of the mini were not related to its association with masculinity or gender-bending appearance. It was the mini's hypersexuality that conservatives interpreted as unfeminine and as a threat on the family and social system.¹²² High schools and colleges across the country banned the miniskirt, arguing it led to a "distraction" among fellow students, and Republican lawmakers in California barred legislative employees from wearing miniskirts, which they deemed an impropriety for public workers.¹²³ Whereas by the early 1970s the public grew accustomed to knee-length or just-above-the knee hemlines, the very short and hypersexualized micro-mini was more controversial. Although some businessmen "relished" the view of a secretary bending over to reach the bottom drawer of a filing cabinet, others felt uncomfortable with the "for-goodness-sake-don't-bend-over style" and banned them from the office.¹²⁴ Although it was often one's age and professional status, not their politics, that determined their attitude toward the mini, the skirt nonetheless became part of the political culture of the period.

The importance of the mini as a political symbol of sexual liberation and youth reached its visual apex in 1970, when the industry pushed for longer hemlines. Marketed as "midi" or "longette" (to give it a French flair), the campaign for this mid-calf skirt was led mainly by *Women's Wear Daily*. It was justified as a means of boosting the industry in difficult economic times. According to manufacturers' logic, the change in styles would force women to change their wardrobe and thus to spend more money in department stores.¹²⁵ Whereas women were not oblivious to the economic interests behind the shift in styles, they interpreted the move as an attack on their personal freedom.

As in previous times when women resisted changes in skirt lengths, the battle over the mini became a political site, as women organized to fight the longer hemlines and to protect what they constituted as their right to choose.

The detest for the midi crossed age, class, and racial lines.¹²⁶ Women complained that the midi made them look “old, or ugly, or dumpy, or sawed-off—or all of these,” and demanded that department stores “keep the mini on the market.”¹²⁷ According to a poll by *Chicago Today*, out of the 14,770 responders, the anti-midi sentiment ran four to one among the women. A Louis Harris Company poll also showed similar results, when 59 percent of the women responders favored the mini compared to only 32 percent who favored the midi. And in a survey for the *New York Amsterdam News*, the majority polled voted wholeheartedly for the mini.¹²⁸

Some women engaged in direct action to resist the midi trend. Like the generation before them who fought against the lengthening of skirts in the late 1920s, women all across the country circulated petitions and organized protests. In an open letter to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, one such protester assured that “the American woman is too individualistic to give up her diversified wardrobe. . . . The midi (mid-calf) will be seen on Main Street, USA, but, make no mistake, the above-the-knee look is not out!”¹²⁹ Some took their protest into the streets, picketing in front of stores that promoted the midis by staging “clip-ins,” in which they publicly cut midis with scissors. While these tactics—which were similar to those radical feminists used—drew media attention, anti-midi activists found that organizing boycotts proved most effective.¹³⁰ “Our best weapon is to stay away from the stores,” argued Mrs. Michael Deem, the thirty-three-year-old cofounder of FADD (Fight Against Dictating Designers). Juli Hunter from POOFF (Perseveration of Our Femininity and Finances) also supported a boycott, arguing that “if we boycott the midi and just don’t buy, the store will have to give us what we want.”¹³¹

The response was swift, widespread, and well-organized. Inspired by the more militant feminist protests of the era and adopting many of their arguments, protest groups such as POOFF, FADD, GAMS (Girls/Guys Against More Skirts), and the Madison Avenue Women’s League for Preservation of the Right to Select Our Own Skirt Lengths framed their campaigns as part of the rise of women’s consciousness and their ongoing battle for rights. “You forget you are dealing with a new generation that no longer accepts the pronouncement of the fashion industry—or anyone—as dictates,” one of FADD’s leaders cautioned.¹³² Another activist echoed this sentiment, announcing that “the time has passed when women were powder puffs and pushovers.” Refusing to adopt the midi, she reminded the reporter that “we

belong to a generation that isn’t going to be pushed into wearing something we don’t want to wear simply because it’s new.”¹³³ For these activists, a woman’s right to choose her appearance, free from the dictates of the fashion industry, was the meaning of women’s liberation.

In general, these women did not identify as feminists or declare an affiliation with NOW or other known feminist groups at the time. Particularly, mini advocates tried to distance themselves from the popular image of radical feminists, which they feared would hurt their cause. “We were not originally a war-like group,” one of POOFF’s leaders explained. “When we organized and incorporated POOFF . . . we very carefully said we’re not against anything. We were merely for women being allowed to dress in a manner most flattering to them as individuals.”¹³⁴ Yet, when POOFF members used arguments of individual choice and their right for sartorial freedom, they echoed the main of feminist activists’ messages. In demanding their right to wear what they please, and by utilizing protest methods like demonstrations, boycotts, parades, and even legal measures, they also turned their battle into a realm of feminist activism. “A lot of people might say we’re a frivolous lot to spend our time on something like this when there are much more important issues to worry about. Granted, clothes are not the most important thing in the world,” Juli Hunter commented. She justified her decision for the protest: “But suddenly someone is interfering with our lives. And they’re trying to make fools of us. There are millions of women who can’t afford to change their fashion every whipstitch. And yet many of these ladies *want* to be fashionable. Who looks out for them?”¹³⁵ For Hunter and her fellow mini supporters, demanding their right to dress as they pleased, as well as to claim their status as fashionable women, were parts of a broader discourse of women’s rights that feminism promoted and legitimized. Even if the only issue these women took on was their right for sartorial freedom, in their actions they expanded the range of topics that feminism addressed.

Contemporaries also identified the feminist aspects of the protest. Some retailers admitted that the issue was not about skirt length but represented a broader debate about women’s social status. “It seems to me that your fight is more than just for length,” a Saks Fifth Avenue designer replied to a POOFF activist. He defined the struggle as being about “a way of life. You want to be able to choose.”¹³⁶ Indeed, although pro-mini advocates did not join the movement, and as already noted not every woman felt comfortable identifying as a feminist, the underlying message of power and choice appealed to them. Pro-mini advocates found new ways to engage with feminism, which was based on sartorial expression. Yet, through their struggle, these women

not only turned fashion into a suitable arena to fight for women's freedom and rights, but also facilitated the feminist idea of choice spreading to the general public.

If POOFF was not a feminist organization per se, its battle was taken up by the movement. Self-proclaimed feminists and activists also addressed the mini-midi debate, treating the issue as part of their agenda. NOW activists, for example, commented that "thanks to the atmosphere of freedom that has started surrounding women more and more, due to the movement, they have actively resisted being strait-jacketed just to be 'fashionable.'" Seeing this debate not as a frivolous issue that meant to distract women from promoting equality, but as another issue feminists should rally against, NOW feminists also put out a call to resist the midi.¹³⁷ For them, the mini-midi debate served as a recruiting opportunity, drawing more women to the feminist cause. NOW activists hoped that by rallying women to fight for their sartorial right to choose, they would introduce activism into other realms of women's lives. Even the radical feminist newspaper *Off Our Backs* addressed the issue, advising its readers to boycott the midi in order to "prove to the industry that perhaps fashions can no longer be dictated to women."¹³⁸

By late 1970, it was clear that the majority of women voted with their purses against the midi. Yet, as in the late 1920s, what could be seen as the big battle of the hemlines ended with a compromise rather than a victory for either side. Despite designers' and *Women's Wear Daily's* efforts to push the midi as the only fashionable option for women, the mini did not disappear, although some hemlines did fall. Most women refused the midi, choosing knee-length or just hovering-the-knee lengths.¹³⁹ Although it is tempting to dismiss the mini-midi debate as another example of the cooption of the feminist agenda into commercial interests, its influence reached beyond the fashion industry. As women asserted their right to choose the length of their skirts and to independently shape their bodies and appearance, they also legitimized the feminist concept of choice in the popular mainstream.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, the feminine and sexual associations of the mini also complicated the popular misconception that a true feminist cannot endorse fashion and beauty, or that feminine clothing always stands in the way of women's liberation. Through their support of the mini, women could show solidarity with ideas of freedom and choice that feminists promoted.

Furthermore, although the hemline debate ended in a compromise, its unintended consequence was to popularize, and more importantly to legitimize, pants for women, especially in the workplace. Amid the controversy over

skirts' length, more and more women began to see pants as more flattering, practical, and modest than either the mini or the midi. As a consequence, they bought pantsuits, which became a new symbol for women's empowerment and economic independence.¹⁴¹ Defining it as the "real revolution in fashion," the *Los Angeles Times* announced that the fall of 1970, instead of being characterized by the hemline war, "will be the greatest season for pants ever."¹⁴² Contemporaries were also quick to associate wearing a pantsuit or a pair of trousers with the feminist struggle, connecting it to women's demands to gain influence and status in the workplace as career professionals.¹⁴³ For some, the demand to wear pants provided an entrance to the movement, as they expanded their battles over fashion to other realms of life. A union organizer for the Distributive Workers of America, for example, credited her feminist politicization to an office fight over secretaries' right to wear pants for work. Mobilized by their success, these women also pursued other "subversive ideas of 'feminism,'" such as an end to sex discrimination at work, the right to be treated with respect, and an increase in wages.¹⁴⁴

Whereas not all women who wore pants to work affiliated themselves with the movement as this union organizer did, "it became," as the feminist activist Susan Brownmiller argued, "a feminist statement to wear pants."¹⁴⁵ Just like the mini, pants challenged traditional notions of femininity and asserted a new presence in the public sphere. Yet, if the problem with the mini was its overt sexuality, critics of pants found their masculine association to be the most threatening aspect to society.¹⁴⁶ Some argued that pants could be feminine just like skirts and dresses, especially when they were paired with soft, ruffled blouses or long tunics. However, women's decision to adopt pants as part of their working wardrobe was viewed not as a mere fashion decision but as a reflection of a larger social change.¹⁴⁷ "There is a question as to whether . . . sex differentiation by clothing will continue in the world of the future, especially in view of the change which is now taking place in the power and position of women," an article in the *New York Times* warned of the dangers of women wearing pants. "The trend towards similarity in dress reflects the end of the patriarchal system."¹⁴⁸

While jeans became acceptable leisurewear for both genders, tailored pants were more controversial because they were associated not only with women's appearance but with their changing status in the workforce. Indeed, the mini-midi debate and women's adoption of pants demonstrated the political importance of fashion: it could express power and be a liberating force, not just a tool of women's oppression. Marking another episode in the long

struggle of women in the twentieth century to gain sartorial freedom for their legs (and bodies in general), the mini-midi debate of 1970 and its aftermaths further politicized fashion as a useful site for activism.

Fashion as a Feminist Practice

The politics of style and self-presentation became central to how feminists and the public interpreted the meaning of women's liberation in the 1960s and 1970s. For some, clothing and appearance served as a visual and material means to resist the fashion and beauty industries, and to challenge gender, race, and class norms and hierarchies. For others, fashion was a way to celebrate women's bodies, sexuality, and freedom of choice. Yet, although fashion was oftentimes a contested site of struggle for feminists and nonfeminists alike, for the women who chose to express their politics and their identities through the clothes they wore, fashion became both a feminist symbol and a political practice. Although the popularization and commercialization of feminist fashions subdued some of the radical message these clothing carried, they also helped turn feminist ideas of freedom and choice into a palpable, popular, and fashionable ideology.

Fashion would continue to be an important part of how feminists viewed and expressed their politics and identities. When a new generation of feminists appeared on the national stage in the 1990s, they would also engage with the question of "what a feminist looks like," continuing the long relationship feminism had with fashion. Just as their forebearers, they did not reject fashion and beauty practices but saw them as a path for liberation and self-expression. These "lipstick feminists" or "Girlies," as they would come to be known, asserted their right to wear fashionable, feminine clothes while still maintaining their political commitment to ideas of gender equality. They sought to reclaim fashion not only as a realm of power but also as a realm of pleasure, arguing for a more inclusive and expansive vision of feminist styles.¹⁴⁹ In their efforts to create an image that would express their identities and politics, the debates over fashion from the era of women's liberation would reverberate once again. These debates began not in the 1960s and the 1970s but the early twentieth century, when women sought to express their freedom through their clothes, proving that fashion was a feminist issue all along.

EPILOGUE

The Fashionable Legacies of American Feminism

In 2006, the outspoken feminist magazine *BUST* dedicated its entire August/September issue to fashion. "The culture of clothing has been central to women's lives for centuries, and we think it's as important to find out what could be right with it as it is to pinpoint what's wrong," editor Debbie Stoller told readers. Rather than just criticize fashion, Stoller decided to focus on the aspects of clothing that feminists like her could embrace: an expression of fun, pleasure, and empowerment.¹ This approach, which adopted a pro-market, commercialized viewpoint, characterized many young feminists coming of age in the 1990s and 2000s. These Girlie feminists—as some called themselves—reclaimed girl culture, beauty practices, and femininity as spaces of pleasure and feminist consciousness. They viewed fashion as liberating and empowering feminist praxis and rejected the notion that celebrating femininity and sexuality is participating in one's own oppression.²

Although some interpreted Girlie feminists' pro-fashion attitudes as a generational revolt against more purist critique of their predecessors, this book points to how *BUST* editors were in fact part of a long feminist tradition. In a sense, Girlie feminists did not need to reclaim fashion as a feminist form of expression, because it has already been an important element of feminism's history and culture.³ And indeed, the articles in the issue acknowledged this legacy, highlighting the significance of fashion and its role in empowering women, and connected the current fashion scene with a broader feminist

127. Strassel, "Redressing Women," 175–76.
128. Sylva Weaver, "New Series of Fashions Designed for War Workers," *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1943, A10; "Give Civilian Women Workers Streamlined Clothes," *Fashion Group Bulletin*, July 1943, 1, folder 15, box 144, FGI.
129. "At Home in Pants," *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1944, 110.
130. Elizabeth Hawes joined the war effort as a machine operator at Wright Aero-nautics and later abandoned her career as a fashion designer and became a union organizer for the UAW. Hawes's *Why Women Cry* (1943) was a memoir of her wartime experience in which she discussed the changing status of women in the workforce. Denning, *Cultural Front*, 456–58; Strassel, "Designing Women," 35.
131. Kirkland, "McCardell," 254; Yohannan and Nolf, *Claire McCardell*, 67–68.
132. "The Pop-Over," *Harper's Bazaar*, November 1942, 54.
133. Helen Valentine quoted in "Fashion from 3 Vantage Points," December 1950, Monthly Luncheon Meeting, folder 5, box 145, FGI.
134. "Address by Miss Dorothy Shaver."
135. Mildred Smolze quoted in "Fashion Personalities Agree We Will Share Post-War Leadership With Paris," *Fashion Group Bulletin*, November 1944, folder 16, box 144, FGI.
136. "Fashion Group Luncheon Meeting, November 17, 1941," minutes, folder 12, box 73, FGI.
137. On the backlash against women and the return to domesticity, see Elaine Taylor May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). A growing body of literature complicates this narrative, most notably Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946–1958," *Journal of American History* 79, no. 4 (1993): 1455–82; Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with Mass Media* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1994); Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992). Anna Lebovic demonstrates how *Vogue* served as a site where feminist ideas of individuality and independence were encouraged and propagated throughout the 1950s. See her "'How to Be in Fashion and Stay an Individual': American *Vogue*, The Origins of Second Wave Feminism, and Mass Culture Criticism in 1950s America," *Gender and History* 31, no. 1 (March 2019): 178–94.
138. Cole and Deihl, *History of Modern Fashion*, 209–10.
139. "First Notes from the Paris Collections," *Harper's Bazaar*, April 1947, 186.
140. Cole and Deihl, *History of Modern Fashion*, 210–11.
141. "Resistance," *Time*, September 1947, 14.
142. "WOWS War on New Styles and the Wow Public," *Oakland (CA) Tribune*, 23 August 1947; "Resistance," 14.
143. "Protest Launched on Skirt Lengths on Coast," *Women's Wear Daily*, August 11, 1947, 4; "Southwest Women Protest Skirts Are Too Far South," *Women's Wear Daily*,

- August 18, 1947, 4; "Women in Dallas Deride Long Skirts," *New York Times*, August 24, 1947, 24.
144. Lake, *Bonnie Cashin*, 45.
145. "Counter Revolution," *Time*, September 15, 1947, 87–88.
146. Strassel, "Redressing Women," 268–71.
147. "Paris Tendencies," *Vogue*, March 1, 1950, 124–25.
148. "Gibson Girl Is Retailers' Heroine," *Women's Wear Daily*, October 6, 1947, 34.
149. "Gibson Girl Clothes: They Accent Hips and Sweetness," *Life*, August 25, 1947, 113–14, 116; "American Resort Idea—The Gibson Girl Dress," *Vogue*, November 15, 1951, 128–29.
150. On the influence of college students in popularizing casual wear, see Clemente, *Dress Casual*, esp. 54–69.
151. "Real Gone Garb for Fall, Beat but Neat," *Life*, August 8, 1959, 48–49; Linda Walters, "The Beat Generation: Subcultural Style," in Walters and Cunningham, *Twentieth-Century American Fashion*, 158–64.
152. Cole and Deihl, *History of Modern Fashion*, 235–36; Milbank, *New York Fashion*, 179.
153. Lake, *Bonnie Cashin*, 68; Arnold, *American Look*, 195; Milbank, *New York Fashion*, 175.
154. Virginia Pope, "Fashions of Today . . . and Fashions of Tomorrow," *New York Times*, October 11, 1942, SM28.
155. "The American Look," *Time*, May 2, 1955, front cover, 85–90.
156. Betty Friedan, "The Gal Who Defied Dior," *Town Journal*, October 1955, 98.
157. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, with a new introduction by Anne Quindlen (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), originally published 1963.

Chapter 5. This Is What a Feminist Looks Like

1. "No More Miss America," in *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 184–85.
2. Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963–1975* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 62; For further discussion on the No More Miss America Protest, see Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 92–101.
3. Art Buchwald, "The Bra Burners," *New York Post*, September 12, 1968, 42; Helen Lawrenson, "The Feminine Mistake," illustration by Asian, *Esquire*, January 1971, 82.
4. Judy Duffett, "WLM vs. Miss America," *Voice of the Woman's Liberation Movement* 1, no. 4 (October 1968): 4, emphasis in original.
5. Ellen Willis, "'Consumerism' and Women," in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation; Major Writings of the Radical Feminists* (New York: Radical Feminism, 1969), 72–73.

6. "Miss America Beauty Pageant Protest," Bev Grant Photography, <https://www.bevgrantphotography.com/miss-america>, accessed January 15, 2021.
7. For more on the politics of fashion in 1960s social movements, see Betty Luther Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars: Styles and the Politics of Self-Presentation in the 1960s and 1970s* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015); Tanisha C. Ford, *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen? Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
8. Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars*, xvi, 62.
9. Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006); Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*.
10. Of course, these are not clear definitions, and women did not necessarily define themselves under one label. Many women were members of both NOW and other women's liberation groups, and not all lesbian feminists belonged to separatist organizations. In general, I use the term "liberal feminist" to describe women who were members of mainstream organizations like NOW, and "radical" or "women's liberationist" for younger women who belonged to leftist and radical groups. I define "lesbian feminist" as women who identify as such or wrote specifically on these issues in periodicals.
11. Bradley, *Mass Media*, 81, 84–85.
12. Betty Friedan quoted in Trucia Kushner, "Finding a Personal Style," *Ms.*, February 1974, 85.
13. Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars*, 81–82.
14. Kaye Northcott, "At War with the Pink Ladies," *Mother Jones*, November 1977, 21–28.
15. Bella Abzug quoted in Kushner, "Finding a Personal Style," 47.
16. Gloria Steinem quoted in Kushner, "Finding a Personal Style," 83.
17. Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars*, 65–66; Rosen, *World Split Open*, 196–201; Bradley, *Mass Media*, 48–49; Joshua Clark Davis, *From Head Shops to Whole Foods: The Rise and Fall of Activist Entrepreneurs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 136–37; Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 214–16.
18. Evans, *Personal Politics*, 214–16; Rosen, *World Split Open*, 196–201.
19. "No More Miss America," 184–85; Willis, "Consumerism and Women," 72–75.
20. "Rita Right on Radical Fashion," *Lesbian Tide*, February 1973, 11.
21. Toby Silvey, "Letters," *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement* 1, no. 4 (October 1968): 11.
22. Ellen Maslow, "I Dreamed . . . I Took Myself Seriously in My Maidenform Bra," *Up from Under* 1, no. 1 (May–June 1970): 23.
23. Sara Davidson, "An 'Oppressed Majority' Demands Its Rights," *Life*, December 12, 1969, 69.

24. Barbara Falconer, "Are Blue Jeans Mandatory?," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 3, 1970, 18.
25. Kushner, "Finding a Personal Style," 83–84.
26. Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?*, 14; Linda M. Scott, *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Fashion and Feminism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 270; Georgia Paige Welch, "'Up against the Wall Miss America': Women's Liberation and Miss Black America in Atlantic City, 1968," *Feminist Formations* 27, no. 2 (2015): 72, 78.
27. Bradley, *Mass Media*, 94, 154.
28. Jordan Bonfante, "Germaine Greer," *Life*, May 7, 1971, 30.
29. Judy Klemesrud, "And a Word from Our Leader: Gloria, Our Leader," *New York Times*, March 4, 1973, 84, 87, 114.
30. Richard Boeth, "Gloria Steinem: A Liberated Woman Despite Beauty, Chic, and Success," *Newsweek*, August 16, 1971, 51.
31. Scott, *Fresh Lipstick*, 268–69, 297; Bradley, *Mass Media*, 150–54. *Newsweek*, August 16, 1971, front cover; *McCall's*, January 1972, front cover.
32. Liz Smith, "Coming of Age in America: Gloria Steinem," *Vogue*, June 1, 1971, 90–92, 150, 158; Klemesrud, "And a Word," 84, 87, 114.
33. "Gloria in Excelsis: It's the Steinem Look," *Life*, August 11, 1972, 66–67.
34. *Life*, May 7, 1971, front cover.
35. Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl* (New York: Pocketbooks, 1962), 171–86; Jennifer Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere: The Life of Helen Gurley Brown* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 103–4, 113–15, 177.
36. Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, 182–85, quote on 185.
37. Stephanie Harrington, "Two Faces of the Same Eve: Ms. versus Cosmo," *New York Times Magazine*, August 11, 1974, 10–11. Jennifer Scanlon argues that despite Gurley Brown's erasure from histories of second-wave feminism, her views on sexuality and beauty practices, as well as her pro-capitalist approach made her an important voice of the women's movement. Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, xi–xiv, 98–117.
38. Bradley, *Mass Media*, 144.
39. "What Do You Women Want?," *No More Fun and Games* 2 (February 1969): 11.
40. Dana Densmore, "On the Temptation to Be a Beautiful Object," *No More Fun and Games* 2 (February 1969): 43–48.
41. Andrea Dworkin, *Women Hating* (New York: Dutton, 1974), 113–16.
42. "Rita Right on Radical Fashion," 11.
43. Anne Thompson, "Dress," *Women: A Journal of Liberation* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1974): 24.
44. Kushner, "Finding a Personal Style," 88.
45. Liza Cowan, "What the Well-Dressed Dyke Will Wear," *Cowrie* 1, no. 2 (June 1973): 6.
46. Lawrenson, "Feminine Mistake," 153.
47. "Virginia Slims American Women's Poll 1970," August 1970, Louis Harris & Associates (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research,

1970), dataset, <https://doi.roper.center/?doi=10.25940/ROPER-31107583>, accessed January 8, 2021.

48. The photograph by Dan Wynn (fig. 5.3) was reenacted many times over the years, and again by Steinem and Pitman-Hughes in 2014.

49. Leonard Levitt, "She: The Awesome Power of Gloria Steinem," *Esquire*, October 1971, photo by Dan Wynn, 88.

50. Lawrenson, "Feminine Mistake," illustration by Aslan, 82.

51. Liza Cowan, "What the Well-Dressed Dyke Will Wear," *Dyke: A Quarterly* 1 (Winter 1975–76), 23.

52. Liza Cowan, "What the Well-Dressed Dyke Will Wear," *Cowrie* 1, no. 3 (October 1973), 12.

53. Linda Buzzell, "The Haircut," *NOW News LA*, 1972, Periodical Collection, SSC.

54. Kirsten Grimstad and Susan Rennie, eds., *The New Woman's Survival Catalog* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1973), 182; Davis, *From Head Shops to Whole Foods*, 140–42.

55. Ford, *Liberated Threads*, 112–15.

56. "Pacemakers in the World of Fashion," *Ebony*, September 1966, 131–35; "Fashion's Flower Child" and "It was 'Goodbye Paris, Hello Seventh Avenue,'" *Ebony*, March 1968, 56–63; Eunice W. Johnson, "Some Together Black Designers," *Ebony*, December 1972, 184–89.

57. Thompson, "Dress."

58. Vivian Rothstein, "Women vs. Madison Avenue," *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement* 1, no. 3 (August 1968): 7.

59. Ibid. For a visual interpretation of how "feminist uniforms" would function in a feminist's daily routine, see Cherie Westmoreland (photographer), "New Looks for Spring!," *Branching Out* 4, no. 1 (March/April 1977): 35–40.

60. "Letters," *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement* 1, no. 4 (October 1968): 11.

61. Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars*, 72; Scott, *Fresh Lipstick*, 289; Astrid Henry, "Fashioning a Feminist Style, Or, How I Learned to Dress from Reading Feminist Theory," in *Fashion Talks: Undressing the Power of Style*, ed. Shira Tarrant and Marjorie Jolles (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 18.

62. "The Woman-Identified Woman," *Radicalesbians*, 1970, <https://dukelibraries.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15957coll6/id/771>, Women's Liberation Movement Print Culture Collection, <https://repository.duke.edu/dc/wlmpc>, Sally Bingham Center for Women's History & Culture, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

63. Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars*, 70–71.

64. Susan Walsh quoted in Mary Jean Haley, "What Gay Women Wear," *Rags* 10 (March 1971): 20.

65. Cowan, "What the Well-Dressed Dyke Will Wear," *Dyke*, 21.

66. Rosen, *World Split Open*, 86; Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 162.

67. "Notes on Cutting My Hair," *Ain't I a Woman?* 1, no. 11 (January 29, 1971): 2.

68. Ford, *Liberated Threads*, 75.

69. Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?*, 92.

70. Phyl Garland, "The Natural Look," *Ebony*, June 1966, 144.

71. Susannah Walker, "Black Is Profitable: The Commodification of the Afro, 1960–1975," in *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America*, ed. Philip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2001), 256, 263.

72. Charlotte Anne Heavirapp, "On the Yin Side: Fall Fashions for Feminists," *Second Wave* 2, no. 2 (1972): 45.

73. "Our Own Feelings about Androgyny by the Journal Women," *Women: A Journal of Liberation* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1974): 32.

74. "How Do I Feel about Androgyny?" *Women: A Journal of Liberation* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1974): 33.

75. "Our Own Feelings about Androgyny," 33.

76. Betty Friedan, *It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women's Movement* (New York: Random House, 1976), 138.

77. Rosen, *World Split Open*, 85–88.

78. On political conservative use of fashion, see Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars*, 86–87; Northcott, "At War," 21–28.

79. Daniel James Cole and Nancy Deihl, *The History of Modern Fashion* (London: Laurence King, 2015), 310–11.

80. Nancy Willamson, "The Case for Studied Ugliness," *Second Wave* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1971): 11; Sheilah Drummond, "Hairy Legs Freak Fishy Liberal," in Baxandall and Gordon, *Dear Sisters*, 187.

81. Falconer, "Are Blue Jeans Mandatory?," 18.

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83. Florynce Kennedy quoted in Kushner, "Finding a Personal Style," 83–84.

84. Mrs. D. E. Wilson, "Back to the Hot Comb," *Ebony*, letter, November 1969, 19.

85. "Letters," *Cowrie* 1, no. 5 (February 1974): 11, emphasis in original.

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88. Maureen Turner quoted in Mopsy Strange Kennedy, "What Does a Feminist Wear?," *Boston Globe Magazine*, December 30, 1979, 25.

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139. Patricia Kent, "Some Hemlines to Fall, But Mini Will Stay On," *Women's Wear Daily*, January 30, 1970, 17; "Store-by-Store Lowdown on the Great Hemdown," *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1970, 11; Marylou Luther, "Pantsuits Voted Tops for Fall," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1970, H1, 14.
140. Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars*, 140.
141. Paoletti, *Sex and Unisex*, 41.
142. Luther, "Pantsuits Voted Tops for Fall," 14.
143. Barmash, "Pants Emphasized as Women's Sportswear," 43.
144. Margie Albert, "Something New in the Women's Movement," *New York Times*, December 12, 1973, 47.
145. Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1984), 80.
146. Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars*, 19.
147. "The New Femininity," *Vogue*, January 15, 1967, 88; Barmash, "Pants Emphasized as Women's Sportswear," 43.
148. Grace Glueck, "Now His Is Hers," *New York Times*, September 20, 1964, SM48.
149. As Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards argue, this approach fell short of instilling radical structural social change, partly because Girlie feminists refrained from traditional avenues of politics and preferred to limit themselves to cultural expressions. Nevertheless, while these young feminists distanced themselves from the older generation of the movement, their emphasis on beauty and fashion, Baumgardner and Richards claimed, was an important addition to it, mostly because it made feminism relevant and appealing to larger audiences. Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 136–38, 161–66.

Epilogue

1. Debbie Stoller, "Editor's Letter: The Devil Wears Nada," *BUST*, August/September 2006, 6.
2. Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 80, 136–38, 161.
3. Scholars identify the 1990s and early 2000s as the third wave of feminism, arguing that what distinguishes it from previous waves is its inclusivity, emphasis on intersectionality, and greater focus on the cultural realm. See, for example, Baumgardner and Richards, *Manifesta*; Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, eds., *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Jo Reger, ed., *Different Wavelengths: Studies of the Contemporary Women's Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2005). Yet, as I discuss in the introduction, and as some of these studies argue, the clear division into waves is problematic and refers not only to generational differences. For more on that, see Leandra Zarnow, "Bringing the Third Wave into History," *Feminist Formations* 22, no. 1 (2010): 110–20.

4. Kristen Stocks, "Skirting the Issue," *BUST*, August/September 2006, 62–66.
5. "Our Outfits, Ourselves," *BUST*, August/September 2006, 55–61.
6. *BUST*, August/September 2006, front cover.
7. According to media scholar Elizabeth Groeneveld, while *BUST* positioned itself as pro-fashion, its approach actually validated rather than challenged the perceived myth of feminism's hostility to fashion. *Making Feminist Media: Third-Wave Magazines on the Cusp of the Digital Age* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 93–94. While I don't disagree with Groeneveld, I see the root of this problem in the failure to recognize the continuity of feminism's pro-fashionable approaches from the early twentieth century, not in portraying all second-wavers as antifashionable, a position many antifeminists embraced.
8. Joyann King, "Chanel Taps Gisele and Kendall for Feminist Protest on the Runway," *Harper's Bazaar*, September 30, 2014, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/fashion/fashion-week/a3773/chanel-spring-2015/>; Steff Yotka, "Maria Grazia Chiuri Makes a Feminist Statement at Her Dior Debut," *Vogue*, September 30, 2016, <https://www.vogue.com/article/dior-we-should-all-be-feminists-t-shirt-maria-grazia-chiuri>.
9. Maura Brannigan, "Proceeds from Dior's 'We Should All Be Feminists' T-Shirt Will Benefit Rihanna's Charity," *Fashionista*, February 28, 2017, <https://fashionista.com/2017/02/dior-feminists-shirts-to-rihanna-charity>; Emma McClendon, *Power Mode: The Power of Fashion* (Milano: Skira, 2019), 78.
10. *Time*, February 6, 2017, front cover; Robin Givhan, "For Nancy Pelosi and the New Women in Congress, Fashion Was a Defiant Statement of Purpose—and Resistance," *Washington Post*, January 3, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/for-nancy-pelosi-and-the-new-women-in-congress-fashion-was-a-defiant-statement-of-purpose—and-resistance/2019/01/03/0f8c2836-0f7a-11e9-831f-3aa2c2be4cbd_story.html.
11. "FAQ," Pussyhat Project, <https://www.pussyhatproject.com/faq/>, accessed January 17, 2020.
12. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (@AOC), "I wore all-white today to honor the women . . .," Twitter, January 3, 2019, 7:39pm, <https://twitter.com/AOC/status/1081032307262345216>.
13. For examples of women politicians embracing suffrage imagery to promote their agendas, see Cara Kelly, "Hillary Clinton Was a Modern Suffragette in Ralph Lauren White for Historic DNC Speech," *USA Today*, July 29, 2016, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/entertainthis/2016/07/29/hillary-clinton-modern-suffragette-white-historic-dnc-speech/87694618/>; Emily Crockett, "House Democratic Women Are Wearing White—A Symbol of Women's Suffrage—To Trump's Speech" *Vox*, February 28, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/2/28/14748562/trump-congress-women-house-wear-white-suffragists>; Marisa Iati, "Why Did Women in Congress Wear White for Trump's State of the Union Address?," *Washington Post*, February 6, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/02/05/why-are-women-lawmakers-wearing-white-state-union/?utm_term=.b2fd51d2fcc4; Emilia