

WHY WOMEN'S CLOTHING?  
A CRITICAL HISTORY OF CLOTHING COLLECTIONS:  
A REGIONAL CASE STUDY

By

STACEY ELIZABETH JONES

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by

Stacey Elizabeth Jones

This document is dedicated to my sister, Cheryl Corinne Jones.

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School  
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By

Stacey Elizabeth Jones

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While the histories of the collecting of many of the objects traditionally collected by museums are reasonably well documented, clothing is one area of collecting about which comparatively little has been written. In fact, there exists a relative paucity of scholarly literature on the subject, which seems striking if only for the fact that over the course of the twentieth century, some of the largest museums in the United States, as well as a number of universities and smaller museums, began to amass sizable collections of historic clothing.

Almost regardless of the institution in question, one trend that is immediately discernable within the historic clothing collection at present is the ubiquitous presence of women's apparel. This pattern is significant because it would seem to suggest that traditional notions of "woman" are both reflected and reinforced in an institution that purports to represent history accurately to the audiences for whom it holds objects in trust.

Using a feminist approach, the study presents an analysis of the historic clothing collections at three different institutions: the Indiana State Museum, the Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection at Indiana University, and the Indianapolis Museum of Art. While this is a regional case study, the conclusions drawn regarding those historical forces that have contributed to the composition of the historic clothing collections at each institution and the effects that these compositions have on public perceptions of women are applicable on a more general, i.e., national and international, level as well.

In each case, the reasons for the dominant or majority presence of women's apparel and the ideological ramifications this has, both for the institution in question and generally, are explored. In the case of the Indiana State Museum, a social history museum, the dominance of women's clothing and accessories within the historic clothing collection is linked to the relationships that women develop as a result of their roles as the primary producers/consumers of clothing within the household unit. The analysis of the Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection demonstrates that the founding contributions of Elizabeth Sage, the woman for whom the collection was named, constituted a significant ideological impact that is manifested in the collection's shape and even in its very existence, one that embodies the notion of consumption as something that is distinctly feminine. Finally, an investigation of the historical reasons for which clothing has been collected at the Indianapolis Museum of Art and the use of historic clothing and fashion for exhibition within the museum provides insight into the limitations of historical portrayals of women in the space of the art museum and the ways in which these limitations can influence visitor perceptions of femininity, masculinity, and women's (and men's) roles.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In James Clifford's The Predicament of Culture, the author states, "The categories of the beautiful, the cultural, and the authentic have changed and are changing. Thus it is important to resist the tendency of collections to be self-sufficient, to suppress their own historical, economic, and political processes of production."<sup>1</sup> While it is true that contemporary institutions in the business of collecting—namely museums—may recognize the first of these statements as self-evident in theory, as concerns the latter statement, in practice this brand of awareness has certainly proved the exception rather than the rule. However, it is for this reason that the passage is so provocative, for it brings to light important questions in regard to the history of collections.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, what are the details of the history of collecting, and for what reasons were objects collected (and collections amassed) in the past? On another level, Clifford's statements also generate questions about those subjectivities inherent in the process of selection of objects for collection.<sup>3</sup> What assumptions underlie the choices that are made in regard to the collecting of a certain type of object? What forces contribute to the shaping of the modern museum collection? By viewing the collection as something that is necessarily socially and culturally produced, as an organism that is imbued with a history that,

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<sup>1</sup> James Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture," The Predicament of Culture (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988) 229.

<sup>2</sup> I am especially interested here in the collection on an institutional level.

<sup>3</sup> It follows, of course, that the selection of objects for display also involves such subjectivities.

however masked or veiled, is nevertheless fundamental to its very existence, Clifford's thesis promises to offer insight into the origins—indeed, the very nature—of the museum collection.

While the histories of the collecting of fine and decorative art objects, natural history specimens, books, antiquities, curiosities, and even trinkets are reasonably well documented, clothing is one area of collecting about which little has been said and even less has been written.<sup>4</sup> In fact, there exists a relative paucity of scholarly literature on the subject, which seems striking if only for the reason that some of the largest museums in the United States have amassed sizable collections of historic clothing.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, many universities and smaller museums have compiled important historic clothing collections as well.<sup>6</sup>

Almost regardless of the institution in question, and whether in Europe or the United States, one trend that is immediately discernable within the historic clothing collection at present is the ubiquitous presence of women's apparel.<sup>7</sup> This pattern is of

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<sup>4</sup> The definition of "clothing" that I employ here is necessarily limited. Because there is evidence that "exotic" clothing (i.e., that originating from non-Western locales) was collected with other such curiosities relatively early within the general history of collecting, in this study use of the term will refer strictly to Western clothing.

<sup>5</sup> The term "historic clothing" in this study refers specifically to fashionable clothing—i.e., an article of clothing that represents a particular fashion or style dating from the period in which it was made and worn. I should also note here that the terms "clothing," "costume," "apparel," and "fashions" are used interchangeably throughout.

<sup>6</sup> The focus of this study will center on American museums. However, the inclusion of data from similar institutions in other Western countries, especially England and France, is illuminating, for many similarities exist. Such information will be used when it is relevant to the topic at hand.

<sup>7</sup> In his discussion of children's clothing collections, Thomas Schlereth states, ". . . many . . . share the same evidential biases that costume historians and curators bemoan for adult clothing: far fewer male costumes than female ones." However, are these biases indeed "evidential," as Schlereth assumes? They may be. However, within the small body of scholarship that currently exists in the area of historic clothing collections, I would argue that these biases have not been thoroughly addressed. Thomas J. Schlereth, Cultural History and Material Culture: Everyday Life, Landscapes, Museums (Ann Arbor: UMI Research P, 1990) 93

particular interest if only for the fact that it would seem to both reflect and reinforce traditional notions of “woman”—woman as possessing an innate propensity for “sartorial decoration” (and clothing more generally), woman as consumer, and woman as spectacle—in an institution that purports to represent history accurately for public benefit, be it social history or art history.<sup>8</sup> Hence, perhaps unwittingly, the museum may be propagating some of the very notions it wishes to challenge.<sup>9</sup>

### Methodology

Within the context of the museum, the historical and art historical paradigms traditionally employed in the study of objects are not conducive to the viewing of the historic clothing collection as anything other than “self-sufficient.”<sup>10</sup> However, feminist interventions in these disciplines have been particularly instructive in unmasking some of the biases that are more often than not taken for granted or ignored entirely in the course of museum practice. For example, Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock’s pioneering tome Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology, particularly Chapter 2, “Crafty Women and the Hierarchy of the Arts,” is one attempt to expose and deconstruct the

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Vogel briefly discusses the ability of the museum collection to transmit values to the museum audience: “The museum communicates values in the types of programs it chooses to present, in the audiences it addresses . . . in the selection of objects for acquisition. . . . All tell the audience what to think beyond what the museum ostensibly is teaching.” Hence, exhibits are obviously not the only groups of objects in the museum that communicate ideas and beliefs. Susan Vogel, “Always True to the Object, in Our Fashion,” Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991) 195. Quoted in Stephen Inglis, “Museums and the Future of Craft, Decorative Art, and Design,” Common Ground: Contemporary Craft, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts, Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies Mercury Ser. 72 (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization; The Institute for Contemporary Canadian Craft, 1999) 140-43; 141.

<sup>9</sup> I would argue that the museum indeed does perceive itself (and is perceived by others) as a space in which commonly held ideas can (and should) be challenged. As Stephen Inglis points out in his essay “Museums and the Future of Craft, Decorative Art, and Design,” “. . . museums have become ‘zones of contestation,’ sites of negotiation among administrators, scholars, politicians . . . and communities. Museums are often at the heart of post-modern and post-colonial cultural issues.” Inglis 141.

<sup>10</sup> Clifford 229.

differentiation in contemporary (non-feminist) art historical discourse between “high” art and “craft,” the latter of which is distinctively “feminine” (and consequently substandard) expressly because its creators are usually women.<sup>11</sup> According to Parker and Pollock, “The sex of the artist matters. It conditions the way art is seen and discussed.”<sup>12</sup>

What is so valuable about a study such as Parker and Pollock’s is not so much its content as its approach. Parker and Pollock employ a Marxist feminist approach in order to critique the current composition of the art historical canon. A similar methodology can be applied to the study of the museum collection, whose formation is susceptible to those same forces that shape the art historical canon. However, the application of a strictly Marxist feminist methodology requires that issues relating to class be addressed. Such issues are certainly pertinent to the development of the collections discussed here, and the need for further research in regard to class and its relation to and effect upon the composition of historic clothing collections is acknowledged. However, such an investigation falls outside the scope of this study, which is limited to questions regarding gender specifically. Thus, a feminist, rather than a Marxist feminist, approach will be used here to analyze the development of the composition of the historic costume collection.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, “Crafty Women and the Hierarchy of the Arts,” Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981) 50-51.

<sup>12</sup> Parker and Pollock 50.

<sup>13</sup> The type of museum or collecting body in which an historic clothing collection is housed does not restrict the application of this theoretical framework. Regardless of whether the collection in question is contained in an art museum or a history museum, the approach maintains its efficacy in that it enables the analysis of social and cultural forces at work in history within each of them.

### **Women and Clothing: Associations and Relationships**

What are the “historical, economic, and political processes of production” at work in the formation of the historic clothing collection, and from whence can their origins be traced? Historically, clothing, and “sartorial decoration” especially, has long been associated (and, in fact, is often even equated) with the entity of “woman.”<sup>14</sup> This identification was first marked by what J.C. Flügel has coined The Great Masculine Renunciation. Male renunciation of “all the brighter, gayer, more elaborate, and more varied forms of ornamentation” near the end of the eighteenth century signaled a fundamental change in the ways that clothing and its adornments were viewed in relation to gender.<sup>15</sup> Flügel states, “Man abandoned his claim to be considered beautiful. He henceforth aimed at being only useful.”<sup>16</sup> The author attributes this overhaul to the democratic ideals of the French Revolution and the growing acceptance of work as a man’s most important activity.<sup>17</sup> Enlightenment philosophy also plays a significant role in his discussion of this Great Masculine Renunciation:

It is . . . safe to say that, in sartorial matters, modern man has a far sterner and rigid conscience than has modern woman, and that man’s morality tends to find expression in his clothes in a greater degree than is the case with woman. Hence, it is not surprising that . . . modern man’s clothing abounds in features which symbolise his devotion to the principles of duty, of renunciation, and of self-control.<sup>18</sup>

And,

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<sup>14</sup> According to Flügel, sartorial decoration “consists in the embellishment of already existing garments.” J.C. Flügel, The Psychology of Clothes, (London: The Hogarth P Ltd., 1966) 52.

<sup>15</sup> Flügel 110-111.

<sup>16</sup> Flügel 111.

<sup>17</sup> Flügel 111-112.

<sup>18</sup> Flügel 113.

the sex distinction has been greatly emphasized . . . by the fact that men, not content with a different type, have adopted a completely different style of dress to that of women—a style which renounces all gaiety, exuberance, and beauty, which aims only at correctness, and which permits of only the slowest and most gradual modifications. . . . There is, in fact . . . a standard which demands of men a far more austere morality than it demands of women.<sup>19</sup>

Passages such as these lay the foundations for Flügel’s explanation of this Renunciation as a cultural phenomenon in which women became the exclusive proprietors of “sartorial decoration” (and, it would seem, a questionable morality).<sup>20</sup> Additionally, Flügel notes, the Great Masculine Renunciation is “one of the most remarkable events in the whole history of dress, one under the influence of which we are still living.”<sup>21</sup>

While Flügel locates the Great Masculine Renunciation in France in the latter half of the eighteenth century, scholar David Kuchta argues that it “had its origins in an aristocratic response to the increasing diffusion of fashion in the eighteenth century and to the political culture that emerged after 1688. . . .”<sup>22</sup> According to Kuchta, this first occurred in England, not in France, and took place immediately following the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Additionally, Kuchta states that the renunciation “began . . . with a different class . . . ‘plain and uniform costume’ was not inherently, timelessly, or exclusively a middle-class ideal, but functioned as an aristocratic ideal as well.”<sup>23</sup>

Kuchta’s contribution puts the Great Masculine Renunciation in historical perspective,

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<sup>19</sup> Flügel 203.

<sup>20</sup> Flügel states, “Hitherto man had vied with woman in the splendour of his garments . . . henceforward, to the present day, woman was to enjoy the privilege of being the only possessor of beauty and magnificence, even in the purely sartorial sense” (Flügel 111).

<sup>21</sup> Flügel 111.

<sup>22</sup> David Kuchta, “The Making of the Self-Made Man: Class, Clothing, and English Masculinity, 1688-1832,” *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996) 56.

<sup>23</sup> Kuchta 56.

and sheds light on the fact that class, and not gender alone, factors significantly into considerations of people's associations to and with clothing.

The association of women with clothing did not stop with the decoration of their garments. In fact, it seems likely that the sheer number of articles of clothing in a woman's wardrobe also would have contributed to the idea that women had some inherent connection to all things sartorial. Jennifer Jones notes, "On the eve of the [French] Revolution, a typical male artisan might have possessed fifteen items of clothing . . . whereas his wife might have possessed as many as fifty items."<sup>24</sup> Thus, it is perhaps not so surprising that a woman's identity was closely linked to the clothing in her wardrobe. Additionally, Flügel's statement in the second passage cited above that men's dress "permits of only the slowest and most gradual modifications" serves as evidence that although changes in men's fashions certainly occurred, they did so at a much slower rate than in women's fashions, making men's purchase of clothing far less frequent.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, the modern notion of woman as consumer is intimately connected to the equation of women with clothing. Its origins can be traced to the second half of the

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<sup>24</sup> Daniel Roche, "L'économie des garde-robes à Paris, de Louis XIV à Louis XVI," *Communications* 46 (1987) 93-188; idem, *The People of Paris* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987) 160-94. Cited in Jennifer Jones, "Coquettes and Grisettes: Women Buying and Selling in Ancien Régime Paris," *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996) 31. It is important to mention here that the growth in the "value, size, and variety" of the wardrobe was not limited to the members of the elite classes. In fact, the opposite was true; the wardrobes of almost all Parisians, with the exception of the very poor, grew considerably. Jones 30.

<sup>25</sup> Flügel also states, "As long as individuality is permitted, women struggle with one another for wearing the 'latest' or most costly frocks," thus acknowledging the frequent changes in women's fashions. Flügel 114. Critics might argue that if women's fashions did, in fact, change more rapidly than did men's, and that if this necessitated the more frequent purchase of clothing, thus resulting in larger wardrobes for women across the board in comparison to their male counterparts, then the prevalence of women's garments in historic clothing collections is not an issue of great importance. However, the crux of the argument presented here is rooted in the idea that the very notion that woman can be represented within the museum collection in an accurate manner by clothing alone is inherently flawed. In other words, clothes did—and do not—make the [whole] woman.

eighteenth century. In the 1770s and 1780s, women in Paris were venturing into public for the first time to purchase, among other goods, clothing.<sup>26</sup> This mode of the consumption of clothing deviated substantially from that which prevailed during the seventeenth century. At that time, the rich received tailors and dressmakers in their homes, were fitted for garments accordingly, and then had the goods delivered directly to them at their residences, while the poor acquired clothing by buying from traveling merchants and vendors who dealt in second-hand apparel.<sup>27</sup> However, in the late eighteenth century, a “culture of shopping” was emerging “in the luxury districts of Paris, a culture in which women played prominent roles as . . . shoppers.”<sup>28</sup> Although this trend was initially disquieting for many Parisians, several of the foremost critiques that were used to discourage it during the late eighteenth century later facilitated its naturalization. While Jones acknowledges “the construction in the later eighteenth century of a conceptual framework that regarded the excessive desire to consume as a peculiarly feminine quality, a weakness shared by all women,” it is also true that shopping later came to be regarded as a component role of femininity itself.<sup>29</sup> “For countess or shop girl, the pursuit of fashion was acceptable if it took place within the proper confines of

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<sup>26</sup> Jones 33. In her essay “The Gendering of Consumer Practices in Nineteenth-Century France,” Leora Auslander states, “Many of these dynamics of the gendering of consumption . . . were similar across Europe and in the United States. But the gendering of consumption is, in many ways, a very French story.” (In *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough, eds. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996) 80.) For this reason, and because so much of the literature on the subject of consumer culture begins with France (and Paris more specifically), I feel it is appropriate to situate my discussion of the beginnings of the gendering of consumption in France.

<sup>27</sup> Jones 31.

<sup>28</sup> Jones 26.

<sup>29</sup> Jones 27.

pleasing a husband or attracting legitimate suitors.”<sup>30</sup> Hence, it is evident that well before the emergence of the department store, women were being branded as innate consumers, and innate consumers of clothing at that.

As consumption became naturalized and woman’s predilection for all things sartorial came to be viewed as socially acceptable, the branding of woman as a consumer of clothing became further embedded in the Western consciousness. Following the Revolution, Jones posits, a new outlook on fashion prevailed. She cites a passage from the Encyclopédie de la beauté as an example:

Clothes double the value of a woman. They augment men’s pleasures and joys by revealing women’s charms. They are the natural complement of beauty; without fashions a pretty woman is a diamond, but a diamond which is not mounted, and who awaits an artist to give her a brilliant setting.<sup>31</sup>

Hence, clothing came to define the very essence of woman. A woman’s clothing served to complement the best of her individual qualities much in the way that a fine wallpaper could accentuate the decorative nuances of a bourgeois salon.

Representations of this brand of “woman” also surfaced in nineteenth-century literature, further reinforcing those stereotypes already in place. Earlier examples reflect the anxieties that accompanied the advent of women as consumers. Gustave Flaubert’s portrayal of housewife Emma Bovary in his novel Madame Bovary (1857) is a classic example. Emma, the angst-ridden wife of a country physician, is portrayed as the prototypical female consumer: idle, frivolous, and easily seduced by the charms of Paris and its inhabitants:

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<sup>30</sup> Jones 38.

<sup>31</sup> A.C.D.S.A. [August Caron], Toilette des dames, ou Encyclopédie de la beauté (Paris: A.-G. Debray, 1806) 108. Quoted in Jones 38.

Paris, vaster than the ocean, glittered before Emma's eyes in a rosy light. The teeming life of the tumultuous city was divided into parts, however, separated into distinct scenes. She distinguished only two or three which overshadowed the others and represented all mankind for her. The world of the ambassadors moved across gleaming parquets, in drawing rooms paneled with mirrors, around oval tables covered with gold-fringed velvet. It was a world of trailing gowns, profound mysteries, and anguish concealed beneath smiles. . . . As for the rest of the world, it was lost to her; it had no specific location and scarcely seemed to exist at all. . . . In her longing she confused the pleasures of luxury with the joys of the heart, elegant customs with refined feelings.<sup>32</sup>

Emma's fascination (or what might more appropriately be deemed obsession) with this world leads her to reckless consumption. "A woman . . . certainly had a right to indulge in a few whims . . . she sent for a blue cashmere dress from Rouen; she bought the finest scarf in Lheureux's shop."<sup>33</sup> Of course, Emma's buying frenzies are not limited to the realm of clothing, and her character indulges in reckless behavior outside of her consumption patterns. However, it is significant that because of her consumption, the novel ends with the financial ruin of her husband, Charles, and her own dramatic, self-induced death. The conclusion to the story reflects the unease people were experiencing at the time in regard to women's increasing presence in the public sphere as consumers.

The nineteenth century witnessed the dawn of the department store, an institution that was immediately taken up in the literature of the latter half of that century as a context in which to position the woman as consumer. Appropriately entitled Au bonheur des dames (The Ladies' Paradise), Émile Zola's 1883 novel explores, among other

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<sup>32</sup> Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary, trans. Lowell Bair, ed. and with an introduction by Leo Bersani (1857; New York: Bantam Books, 1989) 50-51. In her ground-breaking text Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France, author Rosalind Williams notes, "The advent of the consumer revolution in the French provinces was more gradual than in the cities but was still decisive." Hence, despite the Bovaries' provincial residence, consumption was obviously not confined to the city limits of Paris. Rosalind Williams, Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982) 10-11.

<sup>33</sup> Flaubert 108.

things, the marvels of the Parisian department store. Throughout the text, the masses of women that flock to the store to partake of its fineries are portrayed within the frame of the consuming woman:

There was a crowd . . . groups of women pushing and squeezing, devouring the finery with longing, covetous eyes. . . . And all that went on in an orderly manner, with mechanical regularity, quite a nation of women passing through the force and logic of this wonderful commercial machine.<sup>34</sup>

In her discussion of the stereotyping of women as consumers in the nineteenth century, Rosalind Williams notes, “Women are the ones who crowd into department stores like Au Bonheur des Dames, who urge their henpecked husbands to buy round furniture for chic apartments, who gape at fashion displays in the expositions. . . .”<sup>35</sup> Hence, however fictionalized, Zola’s physical descriptions of the The Ladies’ Paradise department store clearly echo the realities of the time, making its subtitle of “A Realistic Novel” all too appropriate.

Finally, the concept of woman as spectacle is significant for the purposes of this study. As women physically ventured into the consumer realm, both they and the [fashionable] clothing that they wore became the object of looking, of the gaze of others. In fact, the very notion of woman as spectacle is integrally linked to fashionable clothing. This constitutes an important association in the analysis presented here.

### **The History of the Collecting of Clothing**

As this study hopes to demonstrate, these notions of “woman” are both reflected in and have contributed significantly to the composition of the historic clothing collection today. However, the reasons for this occurrence are located in the historical moment at

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<sup>34</sup> Émile Zola, The Ladies’ Paradise (1883; Berkeley: U of California P, 1992) 16-17.

<sup>35</sup> Williams 308-9.

which the collecting of clothing began. As was previously mentioned, the history of the collecting of other kinds of objects that are traditionally collected by museums are addressed throughout the literature on the subject, but information about clothing is conspicuously absent. According to Leora Auslander, although the French state had begun to collect many different types of objects for institutions such as museums in the later decades of the nineteenth century, clothing did not number among them.<sup>36</sup> In fact, Auslander describes clothing as being too ephemeral to be included in the category of “domestic goods”:

Domestic goods . . . occupied a particular location in this nineteenth-century bourgeois world of goods. Furniture, paintings, silverware, and rugs, unlike food and clothing, were often intended to last at least one lifetime. The acquisition of an objet d’art, even for the very rich, represented something different than the purchase of a new spring suit. Clothing could be changed according to the social occasion. One had, in contrast, only one living room in which to receive. . . . And, no matter what one’s income, furniture was almost always a major purchase and was intended as an investment for use in the future as well as in the present. Furthermore . . . family histories were inscribed in the domestic objects.<sup>37</sup>

However, in her discussion of the frenzy for collecting that swept Paris in the nineteenth century, Emily Apter cites a passage by Paul Bourget from 1895 that would seem to suggest otherwise: “In the windows of the department stores which boast the latest novelties and which form a colossal résumé of the habits of a people in anticipating their desires, what do you encounter? The bibelot again, and again the bibelot. . . .”<sup>38</sup> While

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<sup>36</sup> The French monarch had set taste standards in courtly circles throughout the country in the two centuries preceding the Revolution. See Chapter 2, “The Closed World of Courtly Consumption,” in Williams, 19-57, esp. 20-21. In her discussion of nineteenth-century consumption patterns in France, Auslander states, “By mid-century . . . the state had resumed an intense interest in what its citizens bought and used and had started to create institutions intended to improve consumers’ taste. The first among these were the world’s fairs and exhibitions, which began in the 1850s and were followed by the new museums, libraries, and schools of the 1880s and 1890s.” Auslander 82.

<sup>37</sup> Auslander 81-82.

<sup>38</sup> Emily Apter, Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 60.

it is true that bibelots must certainly have populated the windows of the great department stores of the time, we also know that they were inhabited by grand displays of clothing, of fashion. The following passage from Emile Zola's The Ladies' Paradise is telling in this regard:

But just as she was entering the street, Denise was attracted by a window in which ladies' dresses were displayed . . . the dresses were in this sort of chapel raised to the worship of women's beauty and grace. Occupying the centre was a magnificent article, a velvet mantle, trimmed with silver fox; on one side a silk cape lined with miniver, on the other a cloth cloak edged with cocks' plumes; and last of all, opera cloaks in white cashmere and white silk trimmed with swansdown or chenille. There was something for all tastes, from the opera cloaks at twenty-nine francs to the velvet mantle marked up at eighteen hundred.<sup>39</sup>

Based on this excerpt, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that individuals were collecting clothing in addition to other kinds of objects, even if the state or its museums were not. Nonetheless, evidence such as this comprises the exception rather than the rule.

The origins of the history of the clothing collection can actually be traced to a particular juncture in the history of the museum. Carol Duncan defines this period in American history as "an interesting moment, culminating in the 1920s, but continuing into later decades, when art museums, far from maintaining an aloofness from industry, sought relations with it."<sup>40</sup> In his landmark essay "Museums, Merchandising, and Popular Taste: The Struggle for Influence," historian Neil Harris notes that during the late nineteenth century, "Besides the museum, there were two other settings . . . where objects were exhibited in great number and variety, and which had strong connections with

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<sup>39</sup> Zola 7-8.

<sup>40</sup> Carol Duncan, "Museums and Department Stores: Close Encounters," High-Pop: Making Culture into Popular Entertainment, ed. Jim Collins (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2002) 130.

public knowledgeability.”<sup>41</sup> Harris cites these as the World’s Fair, or Great Exposition, and the department store.<sup>42</sup> In agreement with Harris’s claim, Duncan goes on to claim that these three institutions were

components of a single development that was as much economic as it was cultural. . . . Through their display of objects, all three promoted the culture of consumerism and stimulated and/or facilitated markets for manufactured goods. Above all, they introduced notions of good taste to a broad, middle-class public, and taught the pleasures of spending rather than saving unused purchasing power.<sup>43</sup>

The clothing industry played a significant role in the market of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America.<sup>44</sup> Along with other mass-produced goods, clothing would have been accumulated and displayed not only in department stores and at the World’s Fairs but in museums (and especially museums of decorative arts) as well. Clothing was certainly part of the Great Expositions; its presence at those events has been well-documented. Thomas Schlereth notes that machine-made shoes, bone corsets, and ready-made clothes were among the items exhibited at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, “Electricity illuminated miles of consumer-goods displays in the forty-four acre Manufacturers and

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<sup>41</sup> Neil Harris, “Museums, Merchandising, and Popular Taste,” Material Culture and the Study of American Life (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978) 140-74. Repr. in Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1990) 58.

<sup>42</sup> Harris 58, 63.

<sup>43</sup> Duncan 130-31.

<sup>44</sup> In her discussion of the historic clothing collection in British and Scottish museums, Naomi Tarrant states, “Modern dress is part of a major industry. . . . Cloth production, or the raw materials for its manufacture, have been the staple of most of the European economies at some time. It was also the main motivator behind the technical innovations which led to the industrial revolutions of the medieval period and of the eighteenth century. . . . The health of the industry in any modern society should be of interest to politicians and economists because of the widespread effect that it has on a country’s economy.” Naomi Tarrant, The Development of Costume (London: Routledge; Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 1994) 1-2.

<sup>45</sup> Schlereth 274.

Liberal Arts Building, the largest department store the world had ever seen.”<sup>46</sup> Clothing, of course, numbered among the wares shown that year as well.<sup>47</sup>

An “energetic new breed” of museum professionals in the early twentieth century grasped onto the idea that “The museum and its collections . . . may be made ‘superlatively useful,’ especially by proving ‘of value to American industry.’”<sup>48</sup> Figures such as the influential museum promoter George Brown Goode (1851-1896) adapted new techniques of accumulation and display from expositions and department stores alike.<sup>49</sup> Stewart Culin (1858-1929), the first curator of the ethnological collection at the Brooklyn Museum, believed that industry could be applied to the context of the museum in order to put American museums ahead of their European counterparts.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, John Cotton Dana (1856-1929), director of the Newark Museum from its founding in 1909 until his death, was especially interested in the possibilities that the melding of the museum and modern industry offered. Dana took an experimental approach to the museum and asked, “‘What kind of museum best serves the needs of a modern, industrial city?’”<sup>51</sup> To attract investors, Dana emphasized the potential of the museum to stimulate commerce in the

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<sup>46</sup> Schlereth 283.

<sup>47</sup> In her discussion of the significance of the universal exposition of 1900 in Paris, Rosalind Williams notes, “. . . wax figurines modeling the latest fashions were displayed in glass cages under brilliant lights, a sight which attracted hordes of female spectators.” Williams 87.

<sup>48</sup> Stewart Culin quoted in Simon J. Bronner, “Object Lessons: The Work of Ethnological Museums and Collections,” *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America 1880-1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989) 217-254; 219.

<sup>49</sup> Bronner 222-23. The concept of accumulation would seem to be especially important in regard to the development of collections at a time when museums were still relatively young. “The rising importance of museums . . . was a reflection of the growing importance of things and their accumulation” (Bronner 250).

<sup>50</sup> Bronner 236.

<sup>51</sup> Duncan 133, 135.

city and “psychologically prepare the population for its role as workers and consumers in the industrial society of the future.”<sup>52</sup>

The advent of the First and Second World Wars also facilitated the development of a partnership between museums and industry. This was especially important in regard to the clothing and fashion industry, because in both instances, the war thwarted “the steady flow of style ideas from France to this country.”<sup>53</sup> In response to the advent of the American fashion design industry in the late 1940s, the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Francis Taylor, asked, ““What can we do for the great industries of apparel and fabrics in this city?” Soon after, the Met made moves to make available particular clothing-related resources and develop events exclusively for industry employees.<sup>54</sup> It also put on “Exhibition after exhibition . . . to show not only what the museum’s resources are, but what leading designers can do with such material and such facilities as the museum has to offer.”<sup>55</sup> M. D. C. Crawford notes that museum collections with holdings in the areas of clothing and fashion contained documents such as books and magazines as well as “complete costumes and accessories.”<sup>56</sup> The collections were opened to designers from any number of clothing-related industries—representatives from the industries of dresses, embroidery and laces, children’s clothes,

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<sup>52</sup> Duncan 141.

<sup>53</sup> M.D.C. Crawford, The Ways of Fashion (New York: Fairchild Publishing Co., 1948) 273. Bronner notes, “Interest in American designs and American things contributed to reliance on museum collections . . . as did restrictions on European goods because of World War I” (Bronner 224).

<sup>54</sup> Crawford 275.

<sup>55</sup> Crawford 276.

<sup>56</sup> Crawford 277, 283.

and accessories such as belts and buttons—were all noted by Crawford as having used museum collections “constantly and freely.”<sup>57</sup>

Two events that took place in New York City between 1935 and 1945 mark the first real indications that clothing was being collected at an institutional level. In the middle of the decade, the Fairchild Fashion Library, a library oriented towards research in the industry, was opened. It contained thousands of books, magazines, and sketches that illustrated historic clothing and contemporary fashions as well as beadwork and embroidery samples. It was open only to members of the clothing and fabric industries, and was “in the nature of a trade laboratory and . . . has been widely used.”<sup>58</sup> Likewise, the Museum of Costume Art, opened in 1937, contained a collection of costume-related documents as well as several thousand complete costumes and accessories. As a laboratory museum, it too was visited for study by both students and professional designers.<sup>59</sup>

However, other data seems to indicate that historic clothing collections had been in existence for some time prior to these events. For example, Crawford’s statement that the Museum of Costume Art was “already old as an idea” at the time of its opening suggests that the idea of the institutional clothing collection was not revolutionary in 1937. It is notable that a good portion of this institution’s costume collection was given by an individual by the name of Lee Simonson.<sup>60</sup> Hence, perhaps the early twentieth century marked the first movements of historic clothing collections from individuals to

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<sup>57</sup> Crawford 278.

<sup>58</sup> Crawford 281-82.

<sup>59</sup> Crawford 282-83.

<sup>60</sup> Crawford 282.

institutions such as museums. Additionally, Crawford mentions the “specialized collections” of the Museum of the City of New York and the New-York Historical Society.<sup>61</sup> He does not say whether these collections actually contained historic clothing or not, but the Museum of the City of New York today holds one of the most important historic clothing collections in the United States, which would suggest that these institutions were collecting clothing prior to the middle of the twentieth century. Finally, in his discussion of clothing and textile collections in American museums, Crawford states, “. . . the Smithsonian Museum . . . has among many other treasures a collection of the costumes of the presidents’ wives . . . and also a vast amount of material on every period of our national life and culture.”<sup>62</sup> Again, exactly what kinds of objects are included in that “vast amount of material” remains a bit elusive, but it seems logical to hypothesize that the Smithsonian was indeed in the business of collecting historic clothing in those decades preceding the middle of the twentieth century.

Thus, it seems that clothing collections in American museums were originally founded with the intentions of blending the interests of the museum and industry, sometimes for the purposes of propagating a nationalistic agenda; however, as is evident here, sufficient research has not yet been conducted in regard to the origins of the historic clothing collection. While a comprehensive investigation of these origins falls outside the scope of this study, the case studies presented here provide a starting point for such an inquiry.

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<sup>61</sup> Crawford 279.

<sup>62</sup> Crawford 280.

### **Why Women's Clothing?: A Regional Case Study**

The prominence—indeed, the very existence—of historic clothing collections gives new urgency to the development of a critical history of the collecting of clothing. However, the focus of this essay is not the lack of information available in the literature but rather what I hope will constitute the beginnings of such a history. Locating the origins of the history of the clothing collection in American museums in the twentieth century expedites the unearthing of some of the preconceptions that have contributed to its composition today and contributes to an understanding of the ideological work that is performed by collections as a result.

This study involves the analysis of the historic clothing collections at three different collecting institutions in the United States, and in Indiana specifically: the Indiana State Museum, the Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection at Indiana University, and the Indianapolis Museum of Art. While these institutions are all located in Indiana, the conclusions drawn regarding the historical forces that have contributed to the compositions of each and the effects that these compositions have on public perceptions of women are applicable on a more general, i.e., national and international, level as well. In other words, although this is a regional case study, it is meant to serve as an example from which conclusions can be drawn and concepts applied.

In each case, I attempt to explore the reasons for the dominant or majority presence of women's apparel and the ideological ramifications this has, both for the institution in question and on a more general level. In the case of the Indiana State Museum, a social history museum, the dominance of women's clothing and accessories within the historic clothing collection is linked to the relationships that women develop as a result of their roles as the primary producers/consumers of clothing within the household unit. My

analysis of the Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection demonstrates that the founding contributions of Elizabeth Sage, the woman for whom the collection was named, constituted a significant ideological impact that is manifested in the collection's shape and even in its very existence. Finally, an investigation of the historical reasons for which clothing has been collected at the Indianapolis Museum of Art and the use of historic clothing and fashion for exhibition within the museum provides insight into the limitations of historical portrayals of women in the space of the art museum and the ways in which these limitations influence viewer perceptions of women's (and men's) roles.

CHAPTER 2  
THE HISTORIC CLOTHING COLLECTION AT  
THE INDIANA STATE MUSEUM, INDIANAPOLIS

The historic clothing collection at the Indiana State Museum (ISM) is generally regarded as a social history collection. As such, emphasis is placed on “provenance and context rather than on designers.”<sup>1</sup> It seems logical to assume that a clothing collection dedicated exclusively to designer fashions would necessarily be comprised at least primarily of women’s clothing, and at face value, the focus of the clothing collection at the ISM seems much less limiting—i.e., it does not preclude the inclusion of men’s and children’s clothing in addition to women’s. Nonetheless, women’s clothing and accessories together make up the majority of this collection.<sup>2</sup> I will argue here that this occurrence stems from the roles that women have historically played in the production and consumption of clothing and the relationships that they develop with clothing as a result.

**Background and History of the Collection**

The Indiana State Museum is a large public museum that “preserves, interprets and presents material evidence of Indiana’s cultural and natural history in a context that encourages people to actively participate in discovering their world—as it was, as it is and as it can be.”<sup>3</sup> The museum’s collections are comprised of approximately 300,000

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Jane Teeters-Eichacker, Curator of Social History, personal interview, 18 October 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Teeters-Eichacker estimates that women’s clothing and accessories together constitute 75-80% of the historic clothing collection. Personal interview, 18 October 2004.

<sup>3</sup> “Mission statement,” Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites, 2003.

objects in two different departments, natural and cultural history. Natural history collections consist of rocks, minerals, fossils, molluscs, Ice Age mammals, prehistoric and historic Native American collections, mammals, birds, fishes, and other smaller collections, while cultural history collections include furniture, popular culture, textiles, costumes, metals, fine arts, politics, documents and other groupings.

The historic clothing collection at the Indiana State Museum includes items that are: “1. handmade (couture or homemade); 2. commercially [sic] mass produced; 3. worn by a significant person or group; 4. associated with a significant place or event; 5. associated with occupation and everyday life.”<sup>4</sup> The collection aims to “represent the customs, mores, and social practices of Hoosiers of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds,” and primary emphasis is placed on “objects . . . that document expectations and opportunities in the areas of home life; work experiences; gender and group identity; social change; consumption patterns; and leisure activities that reflect the changing makeup of Indiana.”<sup>5</sup> The collection presently consists of approximately 10,000 items. These are broken down as follows: clothing accessories, 2,198; footwear, 848; headwear, 1538; outerwear, 4,548; and underwear, 779.<sup>6</sup> The collection contains women’s, men’s,

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<sup>4</sup> Section II.B.4, “Costumes,” Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites Collection Management Policy, 1991: 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> “Social History,” Collections Management Policy, Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites, 2003: 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> Figures from the computer collections database employed by the museum, MultiMIMSY 2000, provided by Traci Cromwell, Cultural History Collections Manager, Indiana State Museum. Items are grouped in the database according to The Revised Nomenclature for Museum Cataloguing: A Revised and Expanded Version of Robert G. Chenhall’s System for Classifying Manmade Objects, by James R. Blackaby and Patricia Greeno (Walnut Creek, CA; London: AltaMira Press and the American Association for State and Local History, 1995). The figures given here total 9,911; however, both Ms. Cromwell and Teeters-Eichacker, Curator of Social History and the primary curator of the costume collection, believe that the actual total is probably closer to between 11,000 and 12,000 objects. They attribute inaccuracies in figures obtained via database searches primarily to nomenclature errors during the data entry (cataloguing) process and also note that at the time the research for this study was being conducted, between 800 and 1000 objects (not including accessories of any kind) had yet to be unpacked and entered into the database.

and children's costumes and accessories, sports and military uniforms, and Amish clothing and accessories. However, as has been previously noted, women's clothing and accessories, including blouses, skirts, suits, wedding dresses, formal gowns (couture), prom dresses, cocktail dresses, house dresses, shoes, hats, bags, jewelry, and paisley shawls, constitute the majority of the collection.

According to David McLary, who worked at the museum from 1967 to 1986, there were very few clothing pieces in the collection when the museum was moved from the basement of the Statehouse to its new location in the former Indianapolis City Hall building in 1966.<sup>7</sup> While early records suggest that the museum was accepting clothing for its collections as early as 1919, clothes accounted for a minute percentage of the total collection, and donations containing clothing items occurred at such infrequent intervals as to have been almost inconsequential.

It seems the museum first began to actively solicit clothing donations in January of 1971. In a letter to the museum dated January 30, 1971, one Mary Louise Bone of Lafayette, Indiana writes, "Dear Sir,—I heard on a TV program yesterday that you would like old clothes for your museum. . . ."<sup>8</sup> This document constitutes the earliest available evidence that the museum wished to begin collecting historic garments in some quantity and had commenced efforts to do so.

The museum's holdings in historic clothing items grew steadily throughout the 1970s, but the appointment in 1983 of Lee Scott Theisen as Director of the museum marked the beginning of a period of unprecedented and uncapped growth for what was

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<sup>7</sup> Kathleen McLary, Vice President of Programs, personal interviews, 18 August 2003 and 15 March 2004.

<sup>8</sup> From the donor file labeled "Bone, Mary Louise," accession 71.971.30.

quickly becoming a bona fide historic clothing collection. Dr. Susan Dickey, Curator of Collections at the museum from 1981 to 1984 and Curator of Costumes and Textiles from 1984 to 1988, notes that Theisen “encouraged more aggressive collecting through donation and purchase. His approach to accepting donations was ‘Take everything. The donor might give you better stuff later.’ (. . .) His successor, Dick Gantz, was of the same opinion, i.e., accept just about everything.”<sup>9</sup>

Such an approach to collecting can account for the large number of clothing items amassed by the museum in the 1980s, but it does not explain why the overwhelming majority of them were women’s. The prevalence of women’s clothing items in the collection can hardly be passed off as coincidence, since, as has already been noted, most historic clothing collections exhibit a similar imbalance. While it is true that historically, women have owned more articles of clothing than their male counterparts, most clothing collections do not even begin to reflect an accurate gender-to-clothes-owned ratio, and the collection at the Indiana State Museum is no exception.<sup>10</sup>

### **Why Women’s Clothing?**

As noted in Chapter 1, Schlereth claims that “evidential biases” have contributed to this disparity historically.<sup>11</sup> Relying solely on this claim, it seems logical that unevenness

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<sup>9</sup> Susan J. Dickey, personal interview, 22 Nov 2003. In my interview with her, Dr. Dickey mentioned that Director Theisen was able “to obtain larger appropriations” for the museum. While she did not say to what extent these increased appropriations affected purchasing funds for the historic clothing collection (if they did at all), because the museum has traditionally relied on the physical donation of items rather than on purchasing funds for building its collections (and especially the historic costume collection), this chapter focuses on donations alone.

<sup>10</sup> “Gender-to-clothes-owned ratio” refers to the correlation between gender (male/female) and the number of clothing items typically owned by a person of one or the other gender. Of course, as has already been noted, women traditionally own more articles of clothing than do men.

<sup>11</sup> In his discussion of children’s clothing collections, Thomas Schlereth states, “. . . many . . . share the same evidential biases that costume historians and curators bemoan for adult clothing: far fewer male costumes than female ones” (Schlereth 93).

in the composition of historic clothing collections could be attributed to a brand of male bias operating in their formation and development. Certainly, this is not an unreasonable conclusion, given that the bulk of museum employees, even up until very recently, were men, and that commonly held notions of women—that they are consumers (and especially of clothing and fashion), are thought of as possessing an innate propensity for sartorial decoration (and a love of clothing generally), and are defined by what they wear—would all seem to favor an imbalance in terms of gender representation within historic clothing collections. However, while the importance of these factors cannot be underestimated, to credit them as being solely responsible for the shaping of historic clothing collections with respect to gender representation would be to ignore other, equally important social and historical processes of production at work in their development.<sup>12</sup> In fact, I will argue here that there are other forces that contribute significantly to, and can account in large part for, the fact that the historic clothing collection at the Indiana State Museum is composed mostly of women’s attire—specifically, the relationships that women develop with their clothing as a result of traditional female roles and functions within the household unit.

### **Old Clothes and Their Stories**

The museum did not adopt a collections management policy until 1991, at which time individual departments and collections and their respective collecting strategies were defined.<sup>13</sup> As a result, between 1967 and 1991, the museum’s collections grew rapidly and without any real direction. As has been previously noted, the prevailing collecting

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<sup>12</sup> Clifford 229.

<sup>13</sup> The official title of the policy is Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites Collection Management Policy. This policy was revised and updated in the 2003 version, Collections Management Policy, Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites.

strategy consisted of the museum essentially accepting any and all donations that it was offered. However, Dr. Dickey notes that although she does not recall there having been a written collections policy, several criteria were loosely employed in the selection process: items made or manufactured in Indiana; items made elsewhere, but representative of those used in Indiana and having an Indiana provenance; and items associated with famous Hoosiers.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to the requirement of an association with Indiana, all of these criteria have another common feature: each of them requires that the object in question be accompanied by a story, a history. Of course, the story of any article of clothing, be it a dress or a pair of trousers, does not (and cannot) in and of itself explain why an historic clothing collection is composed primarily of women's attire. But an examination of the mechanisms by which clothing items have been donated to the Indiana State Museum in the past gives indications as to how the histories of individual objects can contribute to this trend.

The museum first announced that it was interested in acquiring "old clothes" for its collection via a public television program in 1971. In investigating the intricacies of the processes that precede a donation to a museum, specifically a donation of "old clothes," two primary avenues of inquiry arise. First of all, who had these old clothes? And second, why did they have them?

The answer to the first question is obvious. Who had old clothes? Women did. But why they had them is perhaps not so apparent. Why did women keep old clothes, and what clothes did they keep? The answers to these questions find their roots in the

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<sup>14</sup> Susan J. Dickey, personal interview, 22 Nov 2003.

roles that women—specifically, women in the roles of wife/mother in a nuclear family setting—have historically played in the production and consumption of clothing within the household unit.

### **Women: Producers and Consumers of Clothing**

Before the advent of mass clothing production, women were the primary producers of clothing for the members of the household unit. Later, in the decades spanning the middle of the twentieth century, and especially in the 1950s, buying mass-produced clothing at large department and discount stores became the principal method of acquiring new apparel in middle- and upper-class households. Women once again played a pivotal role, this time as the chief consumers of clothing for the domestic unit. They thus possessed an intimate knowledge not only of what clothing was made or bought but also for what purposes and occasions it would be worn, or why it needed to be made or bought. Furthermore, in both scenarios, women would have been making and shopping for clothes not only for other family members but for themselves as well, thus establishing a relationship to their clothing that was unique to them and that was intimately tied to their functions as producers/consumers of clothing.

Additionally, coupled with the fact that the sheer volume of garments and accoutrements that most women owned far outnumbered those of any of their immediate family members, for many women—especially those who did not work outside of the home—clothing also served as an outlet for the display of personal tastes, acted as the most immediately recognizable symbol of membership in a socioeconomic class, and allowed one woman to distinguish herself from the next. Hence, not only did women invest a significant amount of time making or selecting for purchase their own clothing, they also had a deep social investment in the clothing that they wore. In other words, for

women, clothing's social function was closely interwoven with its practical functions: clothes, perhaps more than any other personal belonging, had the ability to define the woman that wore them. One need only recall images of iconic 1950s housewives such as Donna Stone of The Donna Reed Show (1958-1966) or June Cleaver of Leave it to Beaver (1957-1963) to comprehend the fundamental roles that clothing and appearance played in shaping a woman's identity.

These investments affected the attitudes and feelings that women had toward their clothing and consequently how they might have treated it. The amount of time, energy, and thought a woman spent in making a garment or in selecting an article of clothing for purchase, or how much she paid for it, likely had an effect on how expendable she viewed any given item as being. Likewise, clothing's social function made it that much more valuable (and less dispensable as a result). Therefore, women were much more reluctant to part with clothing items than other members of their households would have been, even if an item was no longer being used.

Additionally, many women kept clothing that was worn at an important event in their lives or in the lives of their older female relatives (mothers, grandmothers, or aunts, for example). Because of the social function that clothing served in women's everyday lives, it makes sense that clothing worn during significant occasions in the life of the wearer—a prom or a wedding, for example—would have been set apart from the rest of the wardrobe as unique or distinctive, hence causing the wearer to feel that it was important to care for and keep the item (and pass it on to a younger female relative, in some cases) long after its use function had expired.

### **Women Donors and Historic Clothing at the Indiana State Museum**

It is not surprising, then, that women have not only been the primary donors of historic clothing to the collection at the ISM, but the bulk of the clothing that they offer is women's, even if it may not have belonged to them. For example, in the 1971 letter cited above, the author continues, "I have a muff and coat which my mother wore in the 1880's . . . some formals of the 1930 vintage. . . ."<sup>15</sup> Citing an example from the following decade, Dr. Susan Dickey recalls "two or three" sizable donations made in the mid-1980s by Shirley Kulwin, the wife of a large electrical supplier in Indianapolis. Although some of the clothing was less than ten years old, Dickey said that she accepted it because "most of it had come from local department stores . . . and was in excellent condition." Furthermore, Dickey states, "The donor was able to provide information regarding some of the occasions for which the clothing was worn."<sup>16</sup> In both of these examples, the history of the garment—where it came from, who wore it, and when it was worn—is dependent on the donor's knowledge and memories of it.

When clothing is saved, in many cases the history of the object—its story, so to speak—is preserved as well, thus making the clothes that women are able to offer to the museum for donation particularly valuable. This is especially important for an institution like the ISM in which the story of the object is nearly as important as the object itself. For example, one Wanda Stapp donated the dress and stole that she wore to her junior prom at Bedford High School in 1957 to the museum in 2000. The donor notes that she purchased the dress at a shop on the Courthouse Square in Bloomington, a nearby town,

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<sup>15</sup> From the donor file labeled "Bone, Mary Louise," accession 71.971.30.

<sup>16</sup> Susan J. Dickey, personal interview, 22 Nov 2003.

and recalls her surprise at the fact that her parents actually allowed her to travel out of Bedford to buy it.<sup>17</sup> Thus, what at first glance seems an old (albeit unique and well-constructed) teen formal dress in good condition becomes an object imbued with a piece of the history of both one woman's life and the state. This example demonstrates that via the mechanisms of saving, remembering, and donating, women have come to constitute a primary force in shaping the composition of the historic clothing collection at the ISM. In the next chapter, I will examine the ways in which the contributions of one woman in particular had a fundamental impact on both the physical and ideological makeup of another historic clothing collection, the Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection.

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<sup>17</sup> From the donor file labeled "Stapp, Wanda," accession 71.2000.004.001.

CHAPTER 3  
THE ELIZABETH SAGE HISTORIC COSTUME COLLECTION AT  
INDIANA UNIVERSITY, BLOOMINGTON

The Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection (ESHCC) is a museum-quality collection composed primarily of women's clothing and accessories. The dominance of women's apparel has been apparent since the collection's inception in 1937, when Elizabeth Sage, the first professor of textiles and clothing at Indiana University, donated her personal collection of historic clothing items to the university. While the same mechanisms discussed in Chapter 2—namely the relationships that women develop with clothing as a result of their roles as the primary producers/consumers of clothing within the household unit—have contributed in large part to the sustained prevalence of women's clothing in the Sage Collection, I would like to argue here that the reasons for both the shape of the collection in its earliest stages and, indeed, its very existence can be traced to the ideological premises on which Elizabeth Sage's motivations for collecting clothing were founded.

**Background and History of the Collection**

The Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection is an “assemblage of eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century clothing and related accessories” whose mission it is to “record and preserve cultural heritage by collecting, maintaining, exhibiting and sharing as a resource these articles of dress and accessories.”<sup>1</sup> Maintained by the Department of Apparel Merchandising and Interior Design at Indiana University,

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<sup>1</sup> “Statement of Purpose,” The Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection Collection Policy, 2003.

Bloomington, the Sage Collection distinguishes itself from other historic clothing collections by the fact that it “is not limited to high fashion. It focuses on clothing of the United States and includes . . . dress of the common person as well as the elite.”<sup>2</sup>

The collection contains “body coverings, articles used to adorn the body, and articles carried or in some manner used to enhance a fashion;” “items pertaining to Indiana history and Indiana University history,” particularly “articles reflecting the era 1800 to the present;” “articles of dress which reflect American fashion design and illustrate the efforts of American designers” and “European design as related to American fashion . . . especially as it serves to illustrate and illuminate American design statements.”<sup>3</sup> It is made up of some 20,000 objects, which are broken down as follows: children’s accessories, 222; children’s clothing, 516; clothing care and storage, 870; documentary and non-textile objects, 241; flat textiles, 757; men’s accessories, 585; men’s clothing, 679; non-Western objects, 72; personal care objects, 79; published materials, 3,094; sewing tools and equipment, 4; stage costume: 4 ensembles; uniforms: 6; unisex clothing and accessories, 263; women’s accessories, carried: 964; women’s

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<sup>2</sup> Excerpt from a membership brochure, The Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection, n.d.

<sup>3</sup> “Collection Objectives,” The Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection Collection Policy, 2003.

accessories, worn: 3,200; and women's clothing: 4,794.<sup>4</sup> As has already been noted, women's clothing and accessories comprise the majority of the collection.<sup>5</sup>

Elizabeth Sage was appointed the first professor of textiles and clothing at Indiana University in 1913. Over the course of her 24 years of service there, Sage "assembled for the university a wide variety of clothing and textile instructional materials and accumulated her own impressive collection of exquisite fashions and accessories."<sup>6</sup> When she retired in 1937, Sage donated her personal collection of historic items to the university, and the Historic Costume Collection was founded in her name.<sup>7</sup>

The number of objects in the collection grew steadily following its formal inception. Early donations were made by Sage's friends and family, and as word of the collection spread, items from alumni, faculty and friends "throughout the state and country" were offered for donation.<sup>8</sup> The nation's bicentennial celebration (1975-77)

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<sup>4</sup> Figures from the computer collections database employed by the ESHCC, io, provided by Kelly Gallett-Richardson, Assistant Curator, Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection, on November 13, 2003. Items are grouped in the database according to the classification system employed by the computer collections database formerly used for the collection, SNAP!. The figures given here total 16,350; however, the number of items in the collection according to an overall database query totals 20,454. Hence, there is a difference of 4,104 objects. Mrs. Gallett-Richardson attributes this discrepancy to both nomenclature problems (at least 220 objects do not have categories) and to the margin of error inherent in database queries.

<sup>5</sup> Based on the figures given here, women's clothing and accessories account for approximately 55% of the collection overall, and 80% of the collection when non-costume and non-Western objects are excluded from the total count.

<sup>6</sup> Kathleen L. Rowold, "Preface," *Flights of Fancy: The Art of Fashion's Surface Design* (Bloomington: Metropolitan Printing Service, Inc., 1991) 6.

<sup>7</sup> "Early History," *The State of the Collection*, November 1991: 1. The exact number of items that Miss Sage donated to the university is not known. Figures range from "several hundred" to 500 to 700. However, it has been noted that Sage's "private collection of antique apparel and fashion artifacts . . . initially probably numbered fewer than 200 items." Because this is the most recent (and only published) figure available, I have chosen to use it here. Tim Lucas, "Sage of Fashion," *Indianapolis Star* 5 Apr. 1992: H1.

<sup>8</sup> "Collection growth and storage facilities," *The State of the Collection*, November 1991: 1.

marked an important turning point in the collection's growth; beginning in 1976, the first major exhibit of artifacts from the collection, the "Traveling Exhibition of Historic Indiana Costumes," was displayed in twenty communities in Indiana in a variety of public venues.<sup>9</sup> The exhibit garnered much attention and interest in the ESHCC, and donations increased dramatically as a result.<sup>10</sup> Prior to the bicentennial exhibition, the collection was used "primarily for classroom examples and graduate student research. . . . Very few people knew it existed."<sup>11</sup> Thus, this event signified the beginning of the collection's evolution from a hands-on, educational collection to one of museum quality in which objects were collected explicitly to be preserved and exhibited.<sup>12</sup>

By 1976, the collection had grown to include a little over 2,000 objects; by 1991, its holdings totaled over 11,500 objects;<sup>13</sup> and by 1997, the collection numbered more than 15,000 items.<sup>14</sup> However, despite the growth of the collection over time, the ubiquitous presence of women's apparel and accessories has remained a constant. A document marked "c. 1968" states, "The collection . . . contains almost two thousand examples of wearing apparel of men and women, children and infants during the

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<sup>9</sup> Kathleen L. Rowold, "Nelda M. Christ," To Honor Retiring Faculty (program), Indiana University Bloomington, 9 April 1985.

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Kathleen L. Rowold, Curator, Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection, and Professor, Department of Apparel Merchandising and Interior Design, personal interview, 12 November 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Pamela J. Schlick, letter to Lynn Pittman, 18 Mar. 1985.

<sup>12</sup> Rowold, personal interview, 12 November 2003, and a membership brochure, The Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection, n.d.

<sup>13</sup> "Collection growth and storage facilities" and "Scope of the Collection," The State of the Collection, November 1991: 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> Rowold, "Preface," 6.

nineteenth and twentieth centuries,” but goes on to say that “the bulk of [it] is ladies’ apparel.”<sup>15</sup> This is still the case today, almost 40 years later.

### **Why Women’s Clothing?**

Of course, standard explanations for the overwhelming presence of women’s apparel in the Sage Collection in its earliest years abound. Perhaps it occurred by default: women’s clothing was certainly more ubiquitous in consumer venues than men’s or children’s and was thus more readily available for purchase. Additionally, Elizabeth Sage never married, and she did not have any children. Hence, it seems likely that to some degree, at least, Sage would have been able to escape the domestic roles required of women in “traditional” family settings and could thus expend more time, energy, and money purchasing and collecting clothing for herself. Furthermore, consumer venues such as department stores and boutiques that carried the exemplary apparel that Sage sought after catered to, and even targeted, female customers. On another note, perhaps a woman who amassed an exemplary clothing collection, especially one dominated by women’s apparel, could use the collection as an avenue by which to define herself, to distinguish her from other women.

While none of these explanations should be disregarded, and while the dominance of women’s clothing in the Sage Collection probably resulted at least in part from some or perhaps even all of them, the purpose for which the collection was originally established can account for the ubiquity of women’s clothing early in the collection’s history more than any other single factor. Sage intended for the collection to be used as

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<sup>15</sup> Lavinia Franck, “The Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection,” Procedures and Classification System, c. 1968: 1.

an aid in the training of young women enrolled in Home Economics courses so that they might learn to be wise consumers of clothing.<sup>16</sup>

### **Elizabeth Sage: Teacher, Scholar, Collector**

Elizabeth Sage was a professor in what was then called the Home Economics department at I.U. and “a forerunner of the notion that Home Economics was more than just sewing.”<sup>17</sup> For her, “the study of clothing, textiles, and, particularly, their history, was an academic subject no less serious than the history of science or art.”<sup>18</sup> During her tenure at the university, Sage authored two textbooks, A Study of Costume (1926) and Textiles and Clothing (1930), the former of which was one of the first books on costume history to be published in the United States.<sup>19</sup>

The following statements, excerpted from her 1930 text, reveal Sage’s ideas about what an education in Home Economics should include: “As women more and more become spenders or consumers, instead of producers as they formerly were, the more essential it is that girls of to-day be taught how to buy their clothes ready-made. . . . The active life of the women and girls of to-day gives little time for the making of garments in the home.” Later in the text, she asserts, “It is especially necessary, then, that this rapidly

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<sup>16</sup> I should note here that the ESHCC does still contain a study collection component; however, classroom education is no longer the sole objective of the collection. The primary collection, which “includes all artifacts identified for historic preservation and exhibition,” comprises the bulk of the collection as a whole and will thus constitute my focus here. “Statement of Purpose,” The Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection Collection Policy, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Patricia C. Kampe, untitled document, July 29, 1975.

<sup>18</sup> Lucas H1.

<sup>19</sup> “Early History,” The State of the Collection, November 1991: 1.

increasing number of buyers should have standards for choice when they purchase their clothes.”<sup>20</sup>

Sage’s philosophy was reflected in both her teaching and her collecting. To supplement her teaching, she collected clothing from family and friends and purchased exemplary historic costume items and related artifacts while traveling abroad, first in 1925 and again in 1934.<sup>21</sup> It seems that Sage began collecting items in the early 1920s.<sup>22</sup> Although early records of the collection are incomplete at best, it is known that her earliest acquisition was an infant’s dress—specifically, the Sage family christening robe.<sup>23</sup> The next items to be added to the collection were a blue satin dress and a pink dress with matching shoes, all of which also belonged to Sage’s family.<sup>24</sup>

Sage also collected examples of men’s and children’s clothing, but not to the same degree that she did women’s.<sup>25</sup> An undated inventory of the ESHCC lists the total number of items in the collection as 663. Of these 663 items, 410—or 62%—of them are

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<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Sage, Textiles and Clothing (New York: Scribner, 1930). Quoted in Gail Benjamin Anderson, “Elizabeth Sage,” unpublished essay, 1967: 3. Page numbers for the statements from the textbook are not noted in the research paper, and because a copy of the book was not available to me, I have cited the statements here as they appear in Anderson’s paper.

<sup>21</sup> “Retirement of Miss Sage,” Indiana University Alumni Quarterly Winter 1937: 32.

<sup>22</sup> Pamela J. Schlick, “Request for Funding for Additional Storage Space in the Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection – Department of Home Economics,” 1981: 1. Each statement in this document references a document authored by Coffee in 1978. This refers to a report prepared by consultant Barbara Coffee of the Smithsonian Institution – Museum of American History, who was hired in 1976 “to assess the state of the Collection and to make recommendations on storage, conservation, and exhibition issues” (“Collection Growth and Storage Facilities,” 1). Unfortunately, a copy of her report was not available at the time that the research for this study was conducted.

<sup>23</sup> “Collection growth and storage facilities” 1 and Anderson 4.

<sup>24</sup> Anderson 4. See also “Appendix I: Transcription of Sage 1925/1928 Inventory,” The State of the Collection, November 1991: 9.

<sup>25</sup> Anderson notes that Miss Sage’s collection consisted of “outstanding examples of clothing for men, women, and children from 1830 to her time.” Anderson 4.

women's clothing and accessories, while only 17 (2.5%) are men's, 52 (8%) are children's, and 93 (14%) are infants'.<sup>26</sup> Given that the collection that Sage gave to the university contained approximately 200 items, it is not unreasonable to conclude that it would have reflected similar percentages.

Based on the opinions Sage expressed in her scholarly writing, it seems clear that her decision to collect more women's clothing than men's or children's was an informed decision on her part. Her primary objectives included teaching young women how to "buy their clothes ready-made" and provide them with education regarding "standards for choice when they purchase their clothes;" hence, that her collection exhibits a majority percentage of women's clothing is not surprising.<sup>27</sup> However, it is significant that her ideas about Home Economics education constituted not only the basis for her collecting practices but the very premise on which the collection was founded.

Sage's idea that young women needed to be educated to be wise consumers of clothing provides several indications as to the ways in which women's roles and femininity were perceived in American culture at that time. First of all, women were becoming "more and more . . . spenders or consumers, instead of producers as they formerly were."<sup>28</sup> Thus, consumption, especially of clothing, was becoming a requisite component of femininity itself: being a woman meant being a consumer. Additionally, Sage's idea seems to reflect at least some degree of cultural anxiety (or her own) in regard to the consumer roles that women were quickly assuming in the first half of the

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<sup>26</sup> "Collection growth and storage facilities" and "Appendix 2: Undated Inventory," The State of the Collection, 1 and 10-13.

<sup>27</sup> Sage as quoted in Anderson.

<sup>28</sup> Sage as quoted in Anderson.

twentieth century. Implicit in the notion that women needed to be educated about clothing consumption is the assumption that there existed the potential for women to consume irresponsibly or recklessly. As consumption eclipsed production as the primary method of clothing acquisition and women ventured with increasing frequency into the consumer realm to purchase their clothing, a sudden need to educate them about it arose. If we recall the discussion in Chapter 1 of the disquietude many Parisians felt in the late eighteenth century, when women were for the first time in history venturing into public to consume, such a response to women's newfound roles as the primary consumers of their own clothing, even in the twentieth century, is perhaps not so surprising. Furthermore, it is important to note that the notion of responsible consumption reflected in the reasons for Sage's collecting coincided directly with the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed. This is significant if only for the fact that it demonstrates the promulgation of a conception of consumption that differs fundamentally from those that preceded it. During this time, emphasis was placed on frugality and fiscal responsibility, not the excess and luxury that had characterized consumption historically.<sup>29</sup>

Regardless of the primary purposes for which the objects in the Sage Collection have been used over time, the perception of women as consumers—especially of clothing—and the idea that consumption embodies at least in part the very essence of what it means to be “feminine” are reflected and perpetuated not only via the composition of the collection itself but in its very reason for being. Hence, the contributions of one

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<sup>29</sup> This, too, raises the question of class and the ways in which it is related to perceptions of “good” or “proper” consumption. Rosalind Williams' discussion of courtly consumption is instructive in unearthing those early models of consumption to which large groups of people aspired and their defining characteristics, namely frivolity and excess. See Chapter 2, “The Closed World of Courtly Consumption,” in *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France*, 19-57.

individual—Elizabeth Sage—made a fundamental and lasting impact on the collection as it exists today, physically and ideologically.

The purposes for which clothing is collected within a particular collecting body, then, dictate the ways in which women are represented and consequently how they are perceived in the space of that collecting body (in this case, the ESHCC). In an institution such as the Indianapolis Museum of Art in which clothing is collected as art, we see that other reasons for collecting clothing come to bear directly on ideas about women and their roles.

CHAPTER 4  
COSTUME IN THE TEXTILE AND FASHION ARTS COLLECTION AT  
THE INDIANAPOLIS MUSEUM OF ART

The historic costume component of the Textile and Fashion Arts Collection at the Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA) is comprised of costumes, costume accessories, and costume components<sup>1</sup> of “aesthetic or art historical significance.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, clothing is collected explicitly for its aesthetic properties. Primary emphasis is placed on the visual qualities of the item, on the ability of the item to stimulate visual engagement.<sup>3</sup> What is of interest in the case of the historic costume collection at the IMA is the fact that the collecting of clothing as art has led to the formation of a costume collection that is almost entirely women’s clothing. Based on this composition, it seems logical to conclude that thus far, only women’s clothing and accessories have been able to meet the criteria for collecting—i.e., that they fall into the category of “art.” I will argue here that those qualities that enable women’s apparel to be considered as “art” bear directly on the ways in which gender is both represented and perceived within the context of the art museum.

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<sup>1</sup> “Costume components” include fabrics that were part of a costume at one time as well as items such as collars.

<sup>2</sup> “Permanent Collection,” Collection Definitions, Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Greenblatt’s concept of “wonder” is especially instructive here. Greenblatt defines “wonder” as “the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention.” Stephen Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution P, 1991) 42.

### **Background and Institutional History**

The Indianapolis Museum of Art is a large art museum whose mission it is to “enable a large and diverse audience to see, understand and enjoy the best of the world’s visual arts,” and “to this end [it] collects, preserves, exhibits and interprets original works of art.”<sup>4</sup> One of the largest general art museums in the nation,<sup>5</sup> its permanent collection consists of approximately 42,000 objects in nine curatorial departments: African, Oceanic, and Precolumbian Art; Asian Art; Classical Art; Contemporary Art (post-1945); Decorative Arts; European and American Paintings and Sculpture (1800-1945); European Paintings and Sculpture (before 1800); Prints, Drawings, and Photographs; and Textile and Fashion Arts.<sup>6</sup>

The Textile and Fashion Arts Collection is comprised of nearly 6,000 items and “represents virtually all of the world’s traditions in fabric,” including Asian, West Asian, African, American, and European textiles and costumes. Chinese textiles and costumes, Japanese kimonos and Buddhist robes, Kashmir shawls and Indian ceremonial furnishings, Indonesian textiles, rugs and furnishing textiles from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, Iranian rugs and kilims, Ottoman embroideries from Turkey, Baluchi rugs and weavings, sub-Saharan African textiles and costumes, Moroccan costumes and embroideries, American and European silks dating from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, a lace collection spanning 500 years, nineteenth-century paisley

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<sup>4</sup> “IMA’s Mission Statement,” Museum News, A monthly newsletter for IMA Staff November 2003: 1.

<sup>5</sup> The Story of the Indianapolis Museum of Art (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1998) 8.

<sup>6</sup> This information was obtained via a marketing document prepared by Rebekah Marshall of the IMA in May of 2002. At the time of the creation of this document, the department now known as “Textile and Fashion Arts” was referred to as “Textiles and Costumes.” To avoid confusion, I have chosen to use the department’s most recent name here.

shawls from England, Indiana quilts and coverlets, European costumes dating from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, and twentieth-century fashion, especially works by Indiana natives Norman Norell, Bill Blass, and Halston, all number among the collection's strengths.<sup>7</sup>

Curator Niloo Imami-Paydar notes that while an attempt has never been made to separate the collection into "textile" and "costume" components for inventory purposes, she estimates that 70-80% of the collection is costume. Within this part of the collection, the overwhelming majority—Imami-Paydar says as much as 99%—is women's. Men's clothing is not actively collected (nor has it ever been), with the exception of some canes, a few top hats, and "3 or 4" eighteenth-century men's ensembles.<sup>8</sup>

The Indianapolis Museum of Art was founded in 1883 as the Art Association of Indianapolis.<sup>9</sup> The Association's "Aims and Needs" statement indicates its mission:

The Art Association proposes to increase its permanent art collection, to hold frequent exhibitions of the productions of contemporary American and foreign artists, to develop an art library to add to the facilities for teaching in the art school in order to keep abreast of the most advanced methods of instruction, to give lectures, receptions, and entertainments of an artistic character, and in every way possible to encourage the study and love of art among the people.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Collections: Textile and Fashion Arts," Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2004, Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1 Nov 2004 <<http://www.ima-art.org/cTextiles2.asp?SID=6F87DA6CD5BE483ABF7A5C328B77B072>>.

<sup>8</sup> Niloo Imami-Paydar, Curator, Textile and Fashion Arts, personal interview, 1 Nov 2004.

<sup>9</sup> The Story of the Indianapolis Museum of Art 8.

<sup>10</sup> Art Association of Indianapolis, Indiana: A Record, 1883-1906. Published on the occasion of the dedication of the John Herron Art Institute, November 20, 1906. (This report is located in the book labeled "Art Association Reports 1883-1911" in the library at the museum.)

Thus, it is clear that from the beginning, the Association meant to collect art exclusively. Yet today, the museum's permanent collection is "composed of objects of aesthetic or art historical significance."<sup>11</sup>

### **Why Women's Clothing?**

In contrast to the historic clothing collection at the Indiana State Museum and the Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection, in the case of the IMA, the causes for the dominance of women's attire in the costume portion of the collection are located not in the history of the collecting of clothing over time but in the museum's rationale for collecting clothing in the first place. What Schlereth refers to as "evidential biases" are, then, of primary concern in regard to this particular collection.<sup>12</sup> As has already been noted, the museum has focused on collecting "art," or "objects of aesthetic or art historical significance," throughout its history. But again, it is remarkable that the collecting of clothing for this purpose has led to the development of what is essentially a women's clothing collection. Does the collecting of clothing as art preclude the inclusion of men's clothing? I would argue that it does not. Thus, an examination of some of the reasons why this may have occurred is in order.

A brief discussion of what Flügel referred to as The Great Masculine Renunciation can elucidate some of the issues surrounding the present composition of the costume collection at the IMA.<sup>13</sup> As has been previously noted, following the French Revolution, men's apparel became markedly subdued, and it has remained so to up to the present day,

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<sup>11</sup> "Permanent Collection," Collection Definitions, Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> In his discussion of children's clothing collections, Thomas Schlereth states, "...many...share the same evidential biases that costume historians and curators bemoan for adult clothing: far fewer male costumes than female ones" (Schlereth 93).

<sup>13</sup> Flügel 52.

both in France and in the United States. Male renunciation of “all the brighter, gayer, more elaborate, and more varied forms of ornamentation” was reflected in clothing that was dark in color, free of embellishment and adornment, and simply constructed.<sup>14</sup> As man “abandoned his claim to be considered beautiful” and “henceforth aimed at being only useful,”<sup>15</sup> brightly colored, ornately embellished, and elaborately fashioned garments and accessories were relegated to the realm of women. This, too, is generally still the case in the twenty-first century.

This phenomenon has a number of implications for the IMA’s collecting habits in regard to clothing. The museum aims to collect art specifically, and the qualities that enable women’s clothing and accessories to be considered as “art” include striking colors, detailed ornamentation, and/or intricate or unique construction. What is important to note is that all of these qualities share a common trait: they stimulate visual engagement on the part of the viewer—i.e., they invite looking.

Given these collecting criteria, it is safe to say that most, if not all, of the clothing and accessories in the Textile and Fashion Arts Collection at the IMA were originally intended not only to be worn but also to be seen. Consequently, the woman who donned such an article or ensemble would have invited looking, observation. This brings to light a fundamental assumption about the role of women in a historical context: that they existed to be seen, to be noticed, to be studied. This is not to say that women did not have or play other roles; certainly, they did, and the importance of those roles cannot be underestimated. However, it is significant that this particular role—the role of the

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<sup>14</sup> Flügel 52, 110-111.

<sup>15</sup> Flügel 111.

viewed, of the object of viewing—is promulgated more than any other, however subtly, via the composition of the clothing collection at the IMA.

This conveys to the viewer, too, a message about the role of women within the space of the art museum. The application of Laura Mulvey’s notion of the spectacularization of women in cinema can be useful here: if women’s clothing is exhibited as art, it follows that woman becomes a (the) spectacle as a result: “. . . women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, both the composition of the clothing collection and the exhibition of the women’s items within it reinforce the idea that in a historical context, women existed solely to be seen. However, the exhibition of women’s clothing within the art museum space begs the question of whether it is indeed woman or the clothing itself that becomes spectacularized. I would argue that the physical form of “woman” (i.e., the woman’s body) cannot be separated from women’s clothing, regardless of the method of exhibition, and that woman remains the spectacle as a result, but this question is significant enough to warrant further exploration.

An equally important avenue of inquiry regarding the reasons for the prevalence of women’s clothing in the collection can be found in those areas of historic costume that are emphasized within it. While the scope of the collection as a whole is broad, American and European costumes dating from the eighteenth through the twentieth

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<sup>16</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990) 33.

centuries and twentieth-century fashion together constitute the bulk of the costume component of the collection, and each is “constantly expanding.”<sup>17</sup>

The Indiana Fashion Design Collection—a collection composed chiefly of designer gowns—was established in 1973 at the IMA with a gift of five pieces from the estate of Norman Norell. By 1992, the collection had grown to include more than 700 pieces, including both haute couture (made-to-order) and prêt-à-porter (ready-to-wear) fashions by American and European designers, as well as many accessories, and it continues to grow today.<sup>18</sup> Especially as regards this collection, women’s clothing and accessories play an integral role, since they comprise the very essence of what “fashion” is. Before the 1960s, fashion designers created women’s clothing exclusively; men who wanted custom-made garments patronized tailors. It was only in the 1960s that major designers began to take up the introduction of men’s lines in addition to their creations for women.<sup>19</sup> Hence, it seems appropriate that a “Fashion Design Collection” would consist almost entirely of women’s apparel.

This, too, has connotations for the ways in which gender is perceived and represented within the context of the art museum. The collecting of fashion items for an art museum collection confers legitimacy upon fashion as an art form, and upon fashion designers as artists, but in doing so it also conveys a representation of women that is necessarily limited. By choosing to collect only women’s clothing and accoutrements—and visually engaging clothing and accoutrements at that—the museum intimates not

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<sup>17</sup> The Story of the Indianapolis Museum of Art 51.

<sup>18</sup> The Fine Art of Fashion: Recent Acquisitions (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Phyllis G. Tortora and Keith Eubank, Survey of Historic Costume, A History of Western Dress. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1994) 450, 477.

only what is important in terms of the history of clothing as an art form, but also what is important in terms of the history of women as the wearers of these items. The fact that the costume collection is composed mostly of women's clothing may enable it to recognize the role of women in history in a more significant way than any other area of the art museum's collection, but the fact that it does so on a purely aesthetic (or even art historical) basis limits the degree to which women can be accurately represented in a historical context. It happens, then, that in the art museum, women come to be identified solely by the clothing that they wore: women are represented by clothing, and clothes represent women. This extends also to those areas of the costume collection that do not fall into the category of "fashion," namely eighteenth- through twentieth-century American and European costumes but also other areas of Western costume.

The fact that men's clothing is so conspicuously absent from the costume collection at the IMA gives the impression that men's clothing is not worthy of aesthetic contemplation or that it is not art historically significant because it is not brightly colored, ornately embellished, or elaborately fashioned—in other words, because it is not visually engaging. But is this conclusion valid? True, men's clothes may not possess the same visual qualities that women's do, but this does not mean that men's clothing is not important in an aesthetic or art historical sense. Hence, what does this utter lack (or at least gross underrepresentation) of male—and, conversely, what can only be called near-total dominance of women's—dress within the costume collection at the IMA imply about gender in the context of the art museum? It suggests that men's clothes are not intended to be studied or looked at, nor are the men who wear them. Flügel reminds us that following The Great Masculine Renunciation, man "abandoned his claim to be

considered beautiful” and “henceforth aimed at being only useful.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, while the contemplation of men’s clothing is not ruled out entirely, there seems to be no place for it in the art museum space.

The analysis presented here means to serve not so much as a judgment of the Indianapolis Museum of Art’s decision to collect only women’s apparel for inclusion in its Textile and Fashion Arts Collection but rather attempts to illuminate the historical inaccuracies that can result from such a decision. In an institution that purports to represent history—in this case, art history—accurately, the reasons for the dominant presence of women’s apparel and accessories within the collection become paramount, as they reveal that however inadvertently or unintentionally, traditionally-held (and even outdated) notions of acceptable roles for, and perceptions of, men and women are both reflected and perpetuated in its composition and display.

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<sup>20</sup> Flügel 111.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

Based on the analyses presented here, it seems that regardless of the reasons for which clothing is collected—the story to which an item is attached, its usefulness as a teaching aid, or special aesthetic properties that it possesses—women’s apparel is, time and again, the single most prevalent component within historic clothing collections today. What does this say about the collecting of clothing and, more broadly, institutional collecting practices at large?

First of all, it is important to point out that a very particular version of history is being represented within all of these collections: the history of the predominantly white middle- and upper-middle classes, and specifically that of [white] middle- and upper-class women. This has both positive and negative connotations. On one hand, it might be argued that because of their predominantly female compositions—in other words, by sheer volume—historic clothing collections can actually serve to represent women better than any other single area of the museum’s collection. However, on the other side of this is the argument that by representing women more with clothing than with any other type of artifact in the museum, historical fact and context is lost, or is, at the very least, biased to a considerable degree. Additionally, as has already been noted, it is important to acknowledge that class biases, too, are at work in the development of historic clothing collections. This issue warrants further consideration and investigation.

Second, these issues beg the question of museum responsibility. What is the museum’s primary responsibility? Is it, in fact, to accurately represent history to the

people for whom it holds historic objects in trust? To inspire “wonder”<sup>1</sup> or to stir a desire for learning in the viewer? Is it all of these things, or perhaps none of them? The case studies presented here are illuminating in this regard. The historic clothing collection at the Indiana State Museum does, in fact, strive to “. . . represent the customs, mores, and social practices of Hoosiers of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds”<sup>2</sup>, while the mission of the ESHCC is to “record and preserve cultural heritage by collecting, maintaining, exhibiting and sharing as a resource . . . articles of dress and accessories”<sup>3</sup> and the aim of the IMA generally is to “enable a large and diverse audience to see, understand and enjoy the best of the world’s visual arts.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, it can be said that both the ISM and the Sage Collection seem to endeavor to present a balanced view of history. However, in the case of the IMA, no such claim is made; the presentation of “the best of the world’s visual arts” is hardly a guarantee that history will be accorded fair and balanced representation within its walls. Can we conclude, then, that history is presented least accurately in the art museum? Perhaps. But why?

Although it is touched on to some degree within this study, further investigation regarding the particular methods used to exhibit clothing within the space of the museum (or other collecting institution) would serve as an important complement to the analysis presented here. The historical reasons for the collecting of clothing and the fact that historic clothing collections are comprised primarily of women’s clothing are of fundamental importance in unearthing some of the ideological forces at play in museum

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<sup>1</sup> Greenblatt 42.

<sup>2</sup> “Social History,” Collections Management Policy, Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites, 2003: 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> “Statement of Purpose,” The Elizabeth Sage Historic Costume Collection Collection Policy, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> “IMA’s Mission Statement,” Museum News, A monthly newsletter for IMA Staff November 2003: 1.

collecting practices, but the ways in which these collections have the opportunity to affect their audiences are illuminating in regard to the other end of the spectrum of museum practice: exhibition.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Stacey E. Jones was born on May 2, 1979, in Indianapolis, Indiana, where she lived in the same house until she was 17 years old. Always eager to break with convention, in 1996, Stacey moved to Arizona to attend college at Northern Arizona University and Arizona State University, respectively. In 2000, she graduated *summa cum laude* from Arizona State University with a bachelor's degree in anthropology and a minor in French. The following year, she made (and survived) a perilous journey east to Gainesville, Florida, where she began—and eventually completed—her graduate studies in museology at the University of Florida. After graduation, Jones hopes to shed the drudgeries of small-town life and begin her museum career in a major city. She also plans to travel extensively, teach in Japan, learn how to sew, read books for fun, continue singing, and enjoy doing nothing sometimes without feeling guilty about it.