**University of Southampton**

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

History

# Fashioning the Life Cycle: Women's Dress and Identity in England, 1660 - 1780

By

**Charlotte Emma Fletcher**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

ORCID: 0009-0008-7508-5068

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**University of Southampton**

**Abstract**

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This thesis is an examination of women's dress, the life cycle, and identity in England between 1660 and 1780. Through a combination of material objects and written sources – with a particular focus on diaries and letters – this thesis explores the clothes that women wore at different stages of their life cycles, and how these garments aided in the development of identity throughout the entirety of a woman's life.

Clothes were integral to the lives of upper and middling class women between 1660 and 1780, and were used, amongst other things, as indicators of age, marital status, wealth, social position, political allegiance, familial networks, personal taste and consumer knowledge. Whilst historical studies of dress successfully explore these themes, this thesis looks to explicitly link dress to the stages of the life cycle and considers how women utilised their garments to visually represent their changing identities as they progressed through their lives.

This thesis focusses on a small group of middling and upper class women who each left substantial records of their lives, either in the form of autobiographical writing, correspondences, extant garments, or a combination of these, from multiple stages of their life cycles. These women - including Mary and Moll Verney, Elizabeth Shackleton, Mary Wortley Montagu, Barbara Johnson, Mary Delany and Sarah Hurst - form case studies that inform the bulk of the thesis, and allow us to investigate how their identities, and their dress, changed across different stages of their life cycles.

The key research questions of this thesis focus on the examination of the ways in which women used dress to represent their sense of identity, how their identities changed across the life cycle and how their clothes were indicative of their position within that life cycle; and how 1660 – 1780 in England is relevant to these themes. This thesis demonstrates that middling and upper class women were acutely aware of both their position in the life cycle, and the importance of their outward appearance, and utilised dress as a tool for visualising their identity during this period.

Studies of both women's dress and stages of women's life cycles in early modern and eighteenth-century England are plentiful; this thesis draw these themes together, considering the work of historians such as Amanda Vickery, Serena Dyer, Patricia Crawford and Helen Yallop, and investigates how women's life cycles informed the clothes they chose to wear, and how these clothes, in turn, reflected their identities.

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# Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Charlotte Emma Fletcher

Title of thesis: Fashioning the Life Cycle: Women's Dress and Identity in England, 1660 - 1780

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: .....Date: .....

## Acknowledgements

This thesis has been a labour of love (and occasionally frustration) for the last six years. Without the guidance, support, and encouragement of a number of people, and the assistance of a variety of organisations, it would not exist; I am hugely thankful that it now does.

Firstly, and most importantly, I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Maria Hayward and Dr Julie Gammon, for their endless support, expert advice and for always enthusiastically discussing the thesis with me, even in those moments when I lacked enthusiasm myself. If it were not for their generous and kind supervision, I would not have done any of this.

I also owe my thanks to the Wolfson Foundation for fully funding the three years that I worked full-time on my thesis; their scholarship was both generous and flexible, and allowed me to focus entirely on my thesis in its early stages, along with pursuing research avenues that required travel and accommodation. Thanks must also be given to the members of the History Department at Southampton that considered my application for this scholarship and saw the potential in it.

I am incredibly grateful for the University of Southampton's Library team, who have accommodated my various inter-library loan requests, and posted out so many books to me, both during COVID and after my move to Scotland. Without them, I would have been very stuck! I would also like to thank the staff at the Lancashire Records Office, the Bodleian Library, the V&A Collections Archive and the Bath Fashion Museum for providing me with access to their collections, and the School of Historical Dress for the opportunity to attend a course on garment construction.

Finally, I want to give my most heartfelt thanks to my friends, family, and especially to my husband. Their love, encouragement, and willingness to lend a sympathetic ear when things felt difficult allowed me to reach this point. Thank you, so very much.

## List of Graphs and Images

## Introduction

*'oh dress, thou enchanting thing, how much doth thou engross of most females' time & thoughts'*[1]

Dress is ubiquitous throughout history. Across all periods of time, in all cultures, people have adorned their bodies with garments, and had complex relationships with those items of clothing. Clothing protects and covers the body, but is also representative of social status, emotional relationships and social networks, political allegiance, economic position, and personal identity. In early modern England, dress was an essential tool of visual communication that conveyed identity, as well as an individual pleasure that could be indulged with sufficient money and status. Dress could be enchanting, as Sarah Hurst described in her diary, or it could be mundane and practical, but it was always a fixture in the lives of English women between 1660 and 1780.

It is unsurprising that Hurst devoted entries in her diary to dress; as the daughter of a tailor, who worked in her father's shop in Horsham, West Sussex during the years of 1759 to 1762, she had daily contact with people buying, altering, mending, and sharing clothing. Whilst not all the customers at the tailor's shop were women, Hurst's network of female friends and acquaintances was certainly bolstered by her position as someone knowledgeable about fashions for the middling class and skilled at constructing garments. The social web of Hurst's life was constructed with skeins of thread; friends visiting to see her latest seamstress project, customers asking for her fashion advice, or her sweetheart sending her muslins from India.

One example of dress engrossing much of Sarah Hurst's time and attention is during the construction of her new catgut apron, which was started on the 20th September 1759, and not completed until the 12th March 1761. During this time, visitors came to view her progress: 'Several people come & desire to see it, all agree it extravagantly commending, how fond we all are of being prais'd for our performances'.[2] For Hurst, making a piece of clothing was more than just a practical

[1] B. Hurst & S. C. Djabri, ed. *The Diaries of Sarah Hurst 1759-1762: Life and Love in 18th Century Horsham* (Stroud: Gloucestershire, 2009) p. 257.
[2] B. Hurst & S. C. Djabri, ed. *The Diaries of Sarah Hurst 1759-1762,* p. 125.

pursuit; it was a public performance of skill and knowledge, a statement of taste and a test of endurance: 'work on my Apron, a little. I wish this everlasting piece of work was finish'd'.[3] The construction of garments was an integral part of Hurst's life: a year after the apron was completed, she began work on another large project, "Work all day, make me a Cloak trim'd with fur, I suppose it will be thought too fine for me'. The fur lined cloak treads the line between complimenting Hurst's appearance, illustrating her sense of taste and her ability to make garments, and appearing to mimic elite women, reaching beyond her middling class status, and wasting her time on shallow pursuits.

When describing dress as enchanting, Hurst evokes the transformative power of garments: a woman might feel confident and accomplished after making a beautiful piece to wear, could communicate her identity, demonstrate her position in the life cycle, and could potentially elevate her social status by dressing well. However, a preoccupation with dress could also carry the risk of being considered superficial and self absorbed, as well as the potential to make a fashion faux-pas and be met with ridicule and scorn from peers. On the 25th September 1761, Hurst records in her diary that she '[has] a new gown which every body says is the ugliest thing in the World'. Hurst's social network clearly contained a number of critics, and it is unlikely that she wore this dress again after their opinions were voiced.

Dress did require both time and thought from women in this period; the rules of fashion were complex and shifting, the construction of garments could be costly and slow, and the messages imbued in clothing were numerous. Women used dress as a tool with which to navigate their life cycles, but were also shaped throughout their lives by the garments they wore.

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The introduction to this thesis is intentionally both long and divided into distinct sections. There is an overview of political and cultural change that is necessary in order to contextualise the long chronological period of the thesis, as well as an overview of changing fashions and styles during this time. The literature review is extensive, and also divided thematically: this thesis takes an interdisciplinary

[3] B. Hurst & S. C. Djabri, ed. *The Diaries of Sarah Hurst 1759-1762*, p. 191.

approach that has required an extensive examination of secondary literature to construct its methods and arguments. The section on sources and methodology also highlights the interdisciplinary approach, and provides a biography for the key women featured throughout the thesis.

## Research Objectives

This thesis explores how English women, specifically those who were in an economic position to devote time and money to their clothing, used dress to outwardly express their experiences of different stages of the life cycle. This work will consider the variety of ways that fashion was used to shape and construct identity throughout the female life cycle across this period, as well as identifying what some of these key stages might be. The female body in early modern England was at once monstrous, desirable, vulnerable, secret, exposed, powerful and grotesque, creating a complex social discourse around which women had to dress themselves, construct their identities and navigate their sense of self. The socio-economic groups that this thesis focusses on are those of the middling and upper classes, with occasional reference to royalty. These women had both the financial means to devote money to their dress, and experienced the societal pressures that ensured they considered their appearance frequently. Joanne Entwistle acknowledged a key theme of this thesis when she observed that the 'personal act of getting dressed [is] an act of preparing the body for the social world', emphasising dress as a central element of social and cultural interaction, crucial in our analysis of the past, and central to the work of this thesis.[4] The research objectives and aims of this thesis can be broken down into a series of questions:

*How were women using dress to represent their sense of self?*

This question sits at the centre of the thesis, and prompts an exploration of the ways in which women used dress as a material form of expression and identity; interrogating the ways in which access to dress, which was influenced by finances, class, social status and geographical location, impacted the ways that women could outwardly express their sense of individual personality and taste. The thesis uses a small number of case studies to explore how individual women reacted to their changing bodies and identities through their garments; epistolary and

[4] J. Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 7.

autobiographical sources allow us to explore how these women thought and felt about their appearance during different stages of their life cycles, whilst material sources provide us with examples of their changing tastes, bodies, and financial circumstances through the items they chose to purchase or adapt.

*How was women's identity influenced by their life cycles?*

Alongside dress, this thesis also examines how women's identity was linked to their experiences of the life cycle, and the ways in which their life cycle might shape or change their sense of self; then, in turn, how dress was employed during these different stages of the life cycle to visually represent their identity. By dividing the thesis into clear sections based on the stages of the life cycle, we are able to chronologically follow this progression and explore how the women in the thesis reacted to their changing bodies and the new phases of their life cycles using dress, and how the socially constructed rules of fashion changed with each new stage of the life cycle.

*What were some of the most important stages of the life cycle?*

When considering women's life cycles, the question of which stages are the most important, most transformative and of the greatest significance must be addressed. This thesis argues in favour of including stages that encompass biological change, social movement, and ceremonial importance. Each chapter of the thesis deals with a different part of the life cycle, and argues for its significance in the lives of middling and upper class women throughout the period by considering how they themselves marked the change in their biology and their identity, and the importance they placed on this.

*To what extent does women's writing about dress, and their surviving objects, reveal their identities?*

This thesis uses a combination of women's correspondences, private diaries, and public writing about dress, as well as surviving material objects, to explore how clothing can be used as a lens through which to access these women's feelings and attitudes towards their own bodies, and their sense of individual identity. The thesis argues for an interdisciplinary approach, examining both text and material objects, to create a clearer picture of women's self identity. The sources used in the thesis are explored in greater detail later in this introduction; it is through examining both physical objects, in order to understand construction, style, materials and fit, as well as written sources, which help us to develop a sense of what women thought about their garments and how they believed this reflected their status and identity, that this thesis explores the relationship between women's identity and dress.

*In what ways is the period of 1660 – 1780 in England important to these themes?*

The period and geographical boundaries of this study are important, and the thesis highlights the unique contribution of English society and culture between 1660 and 1780 to the history of dress and fashion, the development of global consumerism and the social expectations of women's identity. The transition from Stuart to Georgian politics, culture and fashion had a distinct impact on women's dress and the availability of new fabrics and styles through increased international trade. During this period we also see mass urbanisation, particularly in the expansion of London and other cities, which led to the development of shops and shopping as an activity for middling and upper class women. Alongside these changes, the growth of women's literacy and education during the long eighteenth century, as well as the increased accessibility of printed material, meant that women were able to broaden their knowledge of fashionable trends, the production of fabrics and garments, and the styles which were deemed appropriate through polite conduct. These ideas will be explored throughout the thesis and provide important context for women's consumption of fashion in this period.

## 1660 – 1780: Continuity and Change

*Cultural, social and economic developments between 1660 – 1780*

The period of time covered in this thesis is one of turbulent change and development in English society, but also one of returning to previously held social and political systems and establishing a level of continuity that would endure for over one hundred years.[5] The cultural, social and economic changes that occurred during this period provide the context in which the women at the centre of this thesis were making their clothing choices; it is important to establish what the key events of this period were, in order to provide some background to their lives and experiences.

Charles II was raised to the throne in 1660 and monarchical control was restored to the country. Puritanical influences were rejected amongst the wealthy and elite, and fashion turned to excess, glamour and ornate decoration, taking inspiration from the court of Louis XIV in France. The arts, including fashion, were encouraged to flourish again, with the reopening of theatres, commissions of portraiture and writing of literature. 1660 also saw the first female actress on stage: Margaret Hughes, who heralded a new public arena in which the transformative nature of women's dress could be viewed and discussed. The return to monarchy and a renewed sense of constancy for those elite who had supported the King during his exile meant that public activities, such as spending time at court or attending balls and parties could be pursued again with renewed vigour, and that displays of fashion would be more important than ever. Charles II also introduced legislation to protect the English wool trade: his 1666 'Act for Burying in Woollen Onely' stated that all

[5] For comprehensive histories of the seventeenth and eighteenth century in England, see J. Gregory & J. Stevenson, *The Routledge Companion to Britain in the Eighteenth Century, 1688-1820* (London: Routledge, 2007); P. Corfield, *The Georgians: The Deeds and Misdeeds of 18th Century Britain* (London: Yale University Press, 2022); R. Porter, *The Penguin Social History of Britain: English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Penguin, 2001); J. A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History, 1550-1760* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1997); C. Hill, *Change and Continuity in Seventeenth Century England* (London: Yale University Press, 1991); E. Camerson, ed., *Early Modern Europe: An Oxford History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

death shrouds, aside from those of plague victims, had to be made of pure English wool, with a fine of five pounds for those who did not comply.[6]

Religious tensions continued throughout this period: in the 1670s, Charles' rule was allegedly threatened by the 'Popish Plot', leading to the persecution of Catholics and a heightening of religious suspicion in the country, as well as criticism of the King being too easily swayed by Catholic influence. In France, by the 1780s, the reverse was true: Protestant Huguenots fled to London where they established their silk weaving community in Spitalfields and utilised their skilled techniques for making lace, influencing popular English styles. During this time, there was a strong influence on English dress, decoration, and culture by French fashions, which could also have heightened suspicions of the monarchy's leniency towards French Catholicism and the opulence and excess it was accused of encouraging.

During the latter half of the seventeenth century, London continued to grow as a centre of global trade, and English political and cultural presence was felt across the world. This continued expansion of trade and empire allowed the wealthy and elite, as well as the newly emerging middling classes of England, to purchase new, imported goods and materials, and this phenomenon only expanded further during the eighteenth century, prompting protective legislation to be passed to bolster English production. Throughout the reign of Queen Anne, from 1702, regulations were put on French imports, such as the banning of French ribbons, laces and lustrings in 1706; a ban on Asian silks had already been passed at the beginning of the century, to encourage patriotism through dress. In 1720, whilst the plague threatened, strict quarantines were placed on import ships to prevent the disease spreading, impacting the availability of fabrics. Imports of gold and silver lace were banned in 1749 to assist British manufacturers, and by 1765, during the reign of George III, all foreign ready-made silk garments, as well as silks and velvets, particularly from France and Italy, had been banned after protest from British silk manufacturers. Despite this, smuggling was rife, and many of the English elite continued to buy and wear imported fabrics.

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[6] 'Charles II, 1666: An Act for Burying in Woollen onely.', in *Statutes of the Realm: Volume 5, 1628-80*, ed. John Raithby (s.l, 1819), p. 598. *British History Online* http://www.british-history.ac.uk/statutes-realm/vol5/p598a [accessed 29 March 2023].

In 1714, after the death of Queen Anne, who had no surviving children, the British throne was passed to George I, the elector of Hanover, marking the start of the Georgian period. During this time, England saw extensive urban expansion, with mass population movement from rural area to cities and towns; working class groups moved for increased job prospects, but resort towns such as Bath and Harrogate also grew in popularity as holiday destinations for the elite and wealthy. Assembly spaces, leisure gardens, coffee houses and the development of shopping districts helped to establish busy urban social spaces that would be frequented by both men and women of the growing middling classes as well as the elite. The establishment of shopping as a recognised activity for middling and upper class women was central to the growth of the fashion industry; women could visit fabric shops, browse and touch the wares on offer, and discuss the latest trends with shopkeepers and dressmakers. Household goods and furniture dramatically increased in variety and availability throughout this period; the rise of consumer culture and interest in material objects created demand for production and industry that further increased the growth of urban centres. Middling class women particularly had a key role as consumers, purchasing goods for their households and families, developing their knowledge of production and material literacy.

During the reign of George III, British global control continued with the extensive use of the slave trade, as well as the success of the East India Company; imported Indian cotton drastically altered the landscape of fashion towards the end of the eighteenth century, with printed cottons becoming favoured over heavier woven or embroidered silks. Cotton became a hugely popular fabric in the later eighteenth century because of its versatility and ability to be dyed and printed on, allowing trends to cycle much faster than through patterned silks.

By 1780, England had seen eight monarchs succeed to the throne, established new parliamentary powers, cemented Anglicanism as the national religion, grown its global presence and economic empire, introduced a new consumer culture to its middling and upper classes, developed new styles of fashion, experienced huge urban growth and increasing population size, been in numerous military conflicts and contributed to important developments in science, engineering, literature, and the arts. The women that feature in this thesis had to navigate a changing social and

political world; one which held significant potential for the construction of individual identity and self-fashioning through material objects.

*English Fashion from 1660 – 1780*

Dress of this period was largely made up of separate garments that would be pieced together to make a complete outfit; undergarments, such as stays, hoops, shifts and petticoats that would form the foundation of the outfit and could shape the body; outerwear, which might take the form of a dress or gown, under which the petticoat could be visible, or a separate jacket and skirt; and accessories, including sleeve ruffles, jewellery and other decorative pieces that would tie the outfit together, both figuratively and sometimes literally, in the case of ribbons.[7] Janet Arnold has created a helpful visual guide to the changes in fashionable dress between 1660 and 1860 in her seminal work *Patterns of Fashion,* which illustrates the evolution of necklines, stays and bodices and skirt draping in women's dress across the long eighteenth century (see Figure 1).[8]

In 1660, there was a return to fashionable textures and decorations in dress following the restoration of Charles II to the throne. The basic elements of women's dress remained the same: layering a linen shift underneath stays, and then wearing a bodice over the stays, and wearing petticoats beneath full skirts. For the elite, satin silks, velvets and lace accents were popular, as well as using textiles woven with precious metals and ribbon bows to decorate outfits. This decade saw a distinctive low, scooped, off-shoulder neckline, long waists, and short, full sleeves on bodices (see Figure 2). Skirts might be lifted with a padded roll to create additional volume. This style was largely followed throughout the 1670s, with the notable exception of skirts being pinned up into a bustle shape to reveal the petticoats.

From the 1680s, we begin to see the adoption of the mantua as the most popular style of women's dress. The low, off-shoulder neckline lost its fashionable status and the mantua, which was a single garment that opened at the front with a

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[7] For further information about styles of dress in the 17th and 18th century, see J. Ashelford, & A. Einsiedel. *The Art of Dress: Clothes and Society, 1500-1914* (London: National Trust, 1996); A. Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1979); V. Cumming, *A Visual History of Costume: The Seventeenth Century* (London: Batsford, 1984); C. Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Faber, 1972); A. Hart, S. North, R. Davis & L. Davis. *Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Fashion in Detail* (London: V&A Publications, 2009); A. Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth Century Europe* (London: Yale University Press, 2002); N. Waugh, *The Cut of Women's Clothes, 1600-1930* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1968).

[8] J. Arnold, *Patterns of Fashion 1: Englishwomen's Dresses and their Construction, c. 1660 – 1860* (London: Macmillan, 1984) p. 20. An extensive update, with colour images, has been added to *Patterns of Fashion 6* (London: The School of Historical Dress, 2021).

stomacher to hide the stays from view and was kept open from the waist down to display the skirts, rose to fashion (see Figure 3). The influence of French fashions and fabrics on English styles of dress is clear throughout this period, including in the introduction of the mantua. The art of garment construction was also altered at the beginning of the eighteenth century, with the rise in popularity of professional seamstresses, or mantua-makers. These women would take on the making of mantuas and other draped styles of garments, whilst the male profession of the tailor remained to cater to fitted items, such as stays and riding jackets.

A distinctive item of clothing that grew in popularity from the 1710s was the hoop petticoat, which could be constructed from metal or wood, and served to greatly exaggerate the width of women's skirts and would be worn underneath petticoats as a structural undergarment (see Figure 4). The start of the eighteenth century saw the shape of stays changing to a somewhat shorter and more conical shape than was popular at the end of the seventeenth century, allowing for greater width in the skirts from the waist. New fabrics were also gaining in popularity at the beginning of the eighteenth century; the extensive importing of cotton from India was regarded as a threat to the English silk trade.

From the 1720s, the mantua began to fall out of favour, particularly in France, where it was replaced by the sack gown, or *robe volante*, characterised by its loose fit and billowing drapery, with pleats of fabric hanging from the back of the shoulders (see Figure 5). During the mid-eighteenth century, the sack was altered for English tastes and eventually morphed into a more fitted garment that still had the flowing box pleats of fabric hanging from the back of the body. This *robe à la Française* had a tightly fitted bodice that would be worn with a stomacher and, much like the mantua, had open skirts that would display the petticoats. This style of dress required a considerable yardage of fabric to create the back pleats, as well as to accommodate the ever-larger hoop petticoats, and was therefore a staple in elite wardrobes. The open skirts could be decorated with ribbons, and lace cuffs would often decorate the elbow length sleeves. Elaborate stomachers could be heavily embroidered or embellished with jewels to create a statement of wealth. At the English court, a fitted version of the earlier mantua was preserved as court dress, though it was a dated style by the 1740s and 50s (see Figure 6).

An alternative to the drapery of the altered sack in the mid-eighteenth century was the English nightgown which consisted of a closed, fitted bodice, cut separately from the skirts. The skirts could be worn open, displaying the petticoats, but nightgowns would typically not have been worn over wide hoops. This garment was undoubtedly more informal and relaxed than the sack or mantua, and might be worn indoors with a muslin or lace apron by middling and upper class women. Both styles of garments, however, could be worn casually, depending upon the fabrics and colours chosen.

By the 1770s, the sack had been largely eclipsed by more informal, front fastened dresses, and the broad, imposing hoop petticoats had been replaced with more manageable hip panniers or pocket hoops, which combined the functionality of the pocket bag with the structure of a small hoop. This style, which closely resembled the nightgown, became known as the *robe à l'anglaise* (see Figure 7). The female silhouette slowly adjusted from the extreme width of the mid-century to something more akin to a bustle; skirts were lifted and tied into a polonaise style that added volume to the back of the dress. During this decade, the popularity of cotton was increasing as it became more readily available for both upper and middling class women; and because of the ease with which it could be printed and dyed with fashionable colours and motifs.

Between 1660 and 1780, women's fashionable dress in England was regularly updated, altered, and adjusted to suit prevailing tastes and styles. Despite the largely unchanged basic structure of a long shift, stays and petticoats being worn underneath the outer garments, the female silhouette took on several distinct shapes across the period, reaching the heights, or widths, of the 1750s court mantua skirts, before shrinking again to more manageable proportions by 1780. Styles of dress were influenced by the cultural trends of the period, such as the infatuation with the Rococo movement from the late seventeenth century onwards, and the development of botanical science in the mid-eighteenth century. Dress was also heavily influenced by trade and politics: the migration of Huguenot silk-weavers to England between 1670 and 1710 helped to establish Spitalfields as a central position of silk production in Europe; English legislation restricted the importing of cotton at the beginning of the eighteenth century after protest from English silk-weavers, as well as completely banning the import of French manufactured silk in 1765, restricting the fabrics that

were legally available to consumers. The growth of urban centres in eighteenth century England, which helped to foster the development of a consumer shopping culture was also of central importance to the way fashion developed and changed over this period; and was something that directly impacted the women discussed in this thesis.

*Figure 1: Janet Arnold's 'A Pictoral Outline of Englishwomen's Costume c. 1660 – 1860'. From Patterns of Fashion 1: Englishwomen's Dress and Their Construction c. 1660 - 1860*

*Figure 2: Pink silk stays, stomacher and sleeves, 1660 -1680. V&A Collections, T.14&A-1951.*

*Figure 3: Silk mantua, ca. 1708. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Collections, 1991.6.1a,b.*

*Figure 4: Stays and hoop petticoat, 1750 - 1780. LACMA Collections, M.2007.211.353.*

*Figure 5: Red silk sack-back gown, 1740. National Museums Scotland Collections, K.2002.510.*

*Figure 6: Brocaded silk court mantua, 1750. National Museums Scotland Collections, K.2013.67.1.*

*Figure 7: Yellow silk Robe à l'Anglaise, 1776. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Collections, 2009.300.952.*

## Literature Review

This literature review has been divided into distinct sections: the life cycle, women's bodies, women's identity, women as consumers, and a section that focusses specifically on dress history. This thesis draws on all of these complex themes, and by approaching the literature review thematically, allows us to distinguish the areas in which particular scholars have influenced this work.

### *The Life Cycle in Early Modern England*

A large part of the cultural significance of clothing is based around the life cycle: a variety of social positions rooted in the process of ageing and bodily change. There have been a number of studies of the life cycle across the early modern period, but without a focus on material culture and bodily expression. As well as this, there is also a lack of consistency in interpretations of how the female life cycle was defined in this period. This thesis draws upon a number of historical interpretations of the early modern life cycle in order to select a limited number of key moments that were experienced, directly or indirectly, by a majority of middle and upper class women, and made visible and often public through their dress.

The concept of the life cycle is well known to social and cultural historians, although there is arguably a lack of broad consensus with regards to what exactly constitutes the early modern female life cycle. The reproductive and sexual life cycle is one of the best established approaches: considering the life of a woman as being defined by her reproductive and sexual physicality or potential; paying close attention to puberty, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause. One of the successes of this approach is the way in which it allows us to consider how women in early modern England identified with their bodies and constructed their sense of self during those periods of uniquely female physical change. Despite this, there are inevitable limitations: Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford acknowledge that the rhetoric of the maid, wife and widow 'imposes a restricted narrative of normative heterosexual life', obscuring the experiences of those women who did not marry or

have children.[9] We might argue, however, that those women who were unable to participate in these stages, or actively chose to not marry or have children, were still implicated in these phases of the life cycle as a result of their distance from it. Unmarried and childless women were often proscribed this identity by a society that was critical of their conspicuous absence from these stages of the life cycle.

David Cressy's ceremonial life cycle is a useful alternative to this biological approach, placing emphasis on socially and culturally constructed events such as christenings, weddings and funerals, arguing that the life cycle was not necessarily dictated by the body, but by an individual's position in society.[10] Here we see differences in the female life cycle across class boundaries, or between rural and urban spaces where societal and cultural tradition could often differ considerably. The main focus of this research will strive to be those stages that women themselves considered noteworthy and important, as evidenced in their expenditure on clothing and their personal documents. A comprehensive study of all conceivable stages in the early modern female life cycle is an undertaking too large for one thesis; rather, several broad, key elements of female identity will be addressed. These will consider age, social position and biological process in an attempt to draw upon the variety of historiographical approaches applied to the life cycle.

The life cycle is a central theme throughout the entirety of this thesis, defining the structure of this work and encouraging a broad, comparative exploration of the relationship between dress and women's identity through the lens of ageing and the experience of different life stages. Cressy provides an anthropological approach to the life cycle, suggesting that we look for 'not ages but stages, separated by ritual markers of transition from one stage to the next', emphasising the importance of the life cycle in helping to understand the changing human body, a body regularly in a state of transitional flux, and its impact on female identity and notions of social status, and the way in which social traditions navigate this movement.[11] Historians have approached the life cycle in a variety of ways: Cressy focuses on the 'ritual activity', often religious, that accompanied stages of the life cycle, such as

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[9] S. Mendelson & P. Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550 – 1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 76.
[10] D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)
[11] D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death,* p. 6.

christenings, weddings and funerals.[12] Patricia Crawford, Mary Fissell and Sara Read have taken a more biological approach, considering the importance of the changing female reproductive system and the ritual shedding of blood as a marker of the 'change in the way in which a woman was perceived by those around her'.[13] The historians considered here cover a broad time frame, much wider than that directly referenced by this thesis: K. M Phillips concentrates on medieval life cycles; Cressy, Read, Fissell, Crawford, Sara Mendelson and Anne Laurence focus on the period between the early sixteenth century and approximately the mid-eighteenth century. Amanda Vickery's focus on women's social and cultural experiences in the eighteenth century is beneficial to the later stages of this thesis' timeframe. The thematic distinctions in the study of the life cycle will be explored here; this thesis draws upon all of these approaches to establish a structure that broadly fits the lives of the women discussed within.

The first approach we will consider is that of the biological life cycle, and the concept of ageing. Phillips has noted that the ' 'ages of man' model… [encompassing] stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age and old age' was one way in which the life cycle was considered in the medieval and early modern periods, envisaging 'stages of progression, transition and decline'.[14] This focus on stages that progressed throughout the life cycle was taken from classical philosophical, scientific and astrological theories. J. A. Burrow's work on the ages of man describes the difference between the ancient 'biologists' theory of three ages, the physiologists' theory of four, and the astrologists' theory of seven'; although each divides human life into a different number of phases, it is notable that every model acknowledges the existence of distinct stages of human life.[15] There is an emphasis on seven-year cycles amongst contemporary writers, illustrating a belief that every seven years, a human would undergo a transitional phase, with '14 years old…[being] a significant moment in a young woman's life', and 49 being suggested as the

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[12] D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death,* p. 1.
[13] S. Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) p. 1.
[14] K. M. Phillips, 'Women's Life Cycles', *Oxford Bibliographies* <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195396584/obo-9780195396584-0124.xml>
[15] J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: a Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 5.

appropriate age for menopause.[16] One particular issue that arises from the 'ages of man' approach, which has been rightly noted by K. M. Phillips, is the difficulty in mapping women's life experiences onto a model that is primarily concerned with phases that correspond to specific numerical ages: the onset of menopause, or the climacteric, could occur across a number of years, and for most women was a gradual process.[17] As well as this, many women across the early modern period did not reach seventy years of age, with the understanding that death might occur at any point of the life cycle, particularly if one was repeatedly experiencing pregnancy and labour. Cressy has argued that 'Stuart authors imagined the life cycle in terms of a succession of ages…Infancy gave way to childhood, childhood to youth, youth to maturity, and maturity to old age', emphasising the usefulness of considering the life cycle in terms of age and ageing, despite his broader advocacy of a more anthropological and ceremonial approach.[18] This thesis will draw upon this, acknowledging the existence of distinct phases of life and examining women's progression through these, but not necessarily adhering to the proscribed ages at which women were supposed to have reached specific life stages; instead focussing on the social, cultural and physical indicators by which a woman might independently determine that she has moved from one stage to another.

Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford have convincingly argued that the female life cycle is inherently bound to women's bodies through issues of reproduction and sexuality. They state that 'the patterns of women's lives were shaped by their physiology through a succession of bodily changes, by their sexual and reproductive experiences, and by their relationship to men, as daughters, wives or widows.'[19] Whilst this approach is clearly biological in nature, it places greater value on women's experience of reproduction and its associated bodily changes as opposed to a model based on specific ages. This version of the life cycle might include puberty, or first menstruation as a 'signifier of physical maturity', followed by sexual activity, with hymenal bleeding being focussed on by Sara Read as a 'culturally significant life event in a girl-to-woman life cycle'.[20] Following this, the life cycle

[16] S. Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body* p. 58.
[17] K. M. Phillips, 'Women's Life Cycles'.
[18] D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death* p. 5.
[19] S. Mendelson & P. Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England,* p. 12.
[20] S. Mendelson & P. Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England,* p. 79; S. Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body,* p. 144.

might include pregnancy, childbirth and lactation; Crawford has described this phase of an early modern woman's life as the 'female rite of passage *par exellence*', and an important social and cultural influence over female identity and notions of self-value.[21]

Childbirth and motherhood were eventually superseded by the menopause, a stage of life that would largely go publicly unnoticed by everyone but the individual woman and her close confidants, including her husband if she was married. Read states that menopause did 'not mark a key cultural status change', in that it was not formally recognised or immediately visually apparent, but that it was regarded as 'part of the aging process and as the end of fertility', and was frequently met with 'some trepidation' by women who felt the uncertainty of a new bodily identity.[22] In this sense, it is entirely probable that women were experiencing a very physical sense of their ageing and of the passing of their life cycles, despite this not necessarily being publicly acknowledged.

Mendelson and Crawford write that 'a woman's reproductive capacity and her society's construction of her…biology and gender appear to have been more important than class differences', placing huge importance on the reproductive system as a lens through which to view the female life cycle. One of the successes of this approach to the life cycle is that way in which it allows us to consider how women identified with their bodies and constructed their sense of self during those periods of physical change. Despite this, there are inevitable limitations: by focusing entirely on biological function and how this was experienced, the lives of those women who did not experience normative menstruation, pregnancy, birth, or menopause are often obscured or neglected. We must also note the significance of class to this thesis: the women examined here have been selected as a result of their class and economic status, as their access to disposable income, knowledge of fashionable dress and ability to record their thoughts about these in writing are a result of their social class.

One alternative is the cycle used thoroughly by Cressy: the religious or ceremonial life cycle. This places emphasis on socially and culturally constructed

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[21] P. Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2004) p. 95.
[22] S. Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body*, pp. 171, 180.

events that are not necessarily tied to biological changes in the body, although he suggests that it could provide 'cultural meaning to natural processes' of the body.[23] The ritual life cycle includes stages such as the christening, or baptism, which Cressy argues is worth studying 'not only for its exhibition of ritual activity but also for what it shows about social and cultural tensions, frictions and proceedings'. We can also consider how this type of ceremony could help to reconcile religious and bodily identity, and imbue the process of ageing with spiritual significance.[24] Marriage is arguably the most significant event of a woman's ceremonial life cycle; Abbott's claims that 'marriage was, conventionally, the final stage in the metamorphosis from irresponsible youth to adult maturity', is important here, suggesting that whilst physiological changes might not occur as a result of the marriage ceremony, there was a distinct shift in attitudes and identity that accompanied an increase in social responsibility, and that these changes could be expressed bodily, through dress.[25] It is necessary to consider marriage, along with other ceremonies, as 'a social process with both public and private dimensions', allowing us access to both collective and individual identity and perceptions of the female life cycle.[26] Funerals are another example given by Cressy, particularly with the potential for subsequent widowhood at the death of a spouse as either a prolonged or transitional phase for a woman, depending on when, or if, she remarried. Funerals and mourning are described as 'a matter of outward display', indicating an important and public change to a woman's identity, the 'most obvious sign of…[which] was costume'.[27] The strengths of this ceremonial life cycle, therefore, are the ways in which it allows us to consider women's identity and their experiences through public events, regularly using dress as a crucial indicator of the different stages in their life cycles.

However, where the biological cycle might overlook those women who did not experience childbirth, the ceremonial life cycle obscures important female developments that were not publicly commemorated. As Crawford argues, neither menarche nor menopause 'appear to be rites of passage…the physiological changes were recognised by the individual and by the society as stages of life', but not

[23] D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 2.
[24] D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 98.
[25] M. Abbott, *Life Cycles in England*, p. 87.
[26] D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 286.
[27] D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, pp. 438, 439.

expressed through ritual or ceremony.[28] What must be considered for this thesis, then, is a combination of these approaches to the female life cycle: a selection of age, bodily developments and ceremonial phases, in order to identify the moments of greatest importance to women's identity.

Mendelson and Crawford wrote that 'Through the lenses of medical, scientific, legal and political frameworks, women were categorized and known', stressing that in the study of the female life cycle, it is important to consider stages from a variety of perspectives.[29] This thesis looks to examine women's experiences and identities, attitudes towards the life cycle, and how these could be visibly expressed through dress; a combination of biological and ritual stages therefore seems the most appropriate approach. Puberty, or the onset of young adulthood, is one of the stages that will be addressed, as it covers the important physical state of first menarche, the 'first step of a girl's transition to womanhood', but also encompasses the social gravity of reaching adolescence and being permitted greater access to adult society.[30] Marriage is another moment of great importance during the female life cycle that will have to be considered in the thesis; Cressy argues that marriage was 'the most momentous event in anyone's life', particularly for women, for whom it 'assigned new privileges, advantages and obligations. It redefined social and sexual roles, rearranged patriarchal obligations, and conferred new duties of status, authority and dependency.' [31] It should, therefore, not be overlooked. Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths have considered the life cycle from an economic perspective, examining the consumption patterns of a seventeenth century family: the eldest daughter's wedding required a new wardrobe of clothes bought a year and a half in advance to mark her transition into married life.[32] Similarly, Vickery argues that for the eighteenth-century genteel woman 'the assumption of their most active material role coincided with marriage, when they became mistress of a household'.[33] Marriage was clearly a central phase in a woman's life cycle, even for those women who chose to remain

[28] P. Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families*, p. 33.
[29] S. Mendelson & P. Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, p. 15.
[30] S. Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body*, p. 58.
[31] D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 6, 287.
[32] J. Whittle & E. Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender in the Early Seventeenth-Century Household: The World of Alice Le Strange* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) p. 168.
[33] A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's,* p. 8.

unmarried, as their identities were still based upon and shaped by their marital status.

Pregnancy and childbirth incorporate both important physiological changes for women, as well as a change in social status and the important ritual ceremonies of churching and the christening of the child. Vickery convincingly argues that 'The production and rearing of children had a transforming effect on genteel women's lives, all but obliterating their past selves', claiming that this phase of the life cycle had an undeniable, potentially destructive, effect on women's identity. Cressy similarly identifies the numerous ways in which motherhood could affect women: 'physical, hormonal, emotional, social, domestic and cultural' shifts might all be expected from bearing children.[34]

Widowhood is also a useful phase to examine, given its potential to be either a temporary stage or a more permanent identity. Whittle and Griffiths study grief and mourning as social displays of emotion, questioning how far 'the cost of a funeral [could be seen as] a measure of grief'.[35] It will also be useful to reflect on the effects of widowhood on women's identity and how far this changed a woman's perception of herself, and her place in society. Death itself is also an interesting stage in the female life cycle, particularly because, as Mendelson and Crawford have asserted, it was a 'semi-public occasion…dominated by women', and regarded as an opportunity for women to assert themselves during their final days.[36] Here we might find examples of women preserving their identities to be remembered by their family and exercising control over the ceremonies associated with death.

This section of the literature review has sought to analyse some of the existing historiographical arguments surrounding the female life cycle, and to outline which phases of the life cycle will be important to consider in this thesis. The study of life cycles is largely thematic, examining either the biological process of the female body, or the purely cultural or religious rituals associated with ageing. The most useful approach for this thesis will be to take a combination of these, to focus on what are arguably some of the most crucial moments in the female life cycle: youth and the

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[34] D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 15.
[35] J. Whittle & E. Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender in the Early Seventeenth-Century Household*, p. 167.
[36] S. Mendelson & P. Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, pp. 194, 195.

onset of puberty during adolescence; marriage, pregnancy and childbirth, and those women who, through choice or chance, avoided these; ageing and death. Each of these stages could rightly fill an entire thesis alone, examining women's experiences and personal interpretations of one key moment in their lives. This thesis seeks to cover, broadly, several important phases of the life cycle, and to examine how some individual examples of women experienced change and growth in their sense of self, and how this was communicated visually through their choice of dress.

*The Female Body in Early Modern England*

Perceptions of, and attitudes towards, the female body are of central importance to this thesis, which will consider the ways in which the female body was used as a signifier of different stages of the life cycle through its adornment and outward presentation. The early modern female body has been examined in a variety of ways, particularly through its representation in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature and the development of bodily discourse in medical texts. This scholarship is primarily concerned with the reproductive and sexual female body, examining women's physicality at the stage in which it is at its most distinct from the male body. A large part of this scholarship has been the discussion of Thomas Laqueur's theory of the 'one-sex' and 'two-sex' models, and the importance of the eighteenth century as a moment of change in the understanding of the female body and its reproductive function.[37] This is an area that has been contested in scholarly debates: Helen King's work in particular has drawn attention to the oversimplifications and selective evidence used in Laqueur's study. Rather than a singular one-sex model being applied to medical thought before the eighteenth century, King convincingly argues that the one-sex model was not the only prominent line of thought in pre-eighteenth century medicine, that debate between one-sex and two-sex models was happening in the sixteenth century, and that Laqueur's work ignores the complexity and diversity of medical thinking on the difference between the sexes.[38] Jennifer Evans has drawn on King's work, clarifying that 'both the one-sex and the two-sex models

[37] T. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender From the Greeks to Freud* (London: Harvard University Press, 1990)
[38] H. King, *The One Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) p. 124.

were discussed and accepted during the period', and that 'ideas about reproduction were not fixed, but changed and shifted across the period' of early modern England.[39] Within this context, this thesis will consider the extent to which attitudes towards women's bodies body actively changed between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or if, as is more likely, social and personal perceptions of the body saw gradual and shifting change.

Another way of examining the female body in this period is through erotic and pornographic material, emphasising the cultural importance of the sexualised female body and considering the ways in which this might have influenced women's identities and perception of the self, and their attitudes towards dress.[40] Laura Gowing remarks that 'the body seems to have been oddly absent from the history of early modern women', perhaps as a result of the challenging lack of material containing women's own words about their bodily experience.[41] Despite this, it remains necessary to explore what sources are accessible as evidence of women's own understanding of their bodies. The body plays an essential role in women's identity that is deeply linked to the life cycle and social presentation through dress; themes that are central to this thesis.

The bulk of debate concerning the female body in the early modern period considers how the 'long eighteenth century [was] the century of change in the ways in which bodies were understood, sexually constructed and sexual activity carried out', moving from an understanding that 'the female body was essentially the reverse of the male', to an understanding of 'the two sexes to have fundamentally different and incommensurable anatomical constitutions.'[42] As Karen Harvey has acknowledged, Laqueur's model emphasises 'understandings of bodies that increasingly stressed opposites rather than hierarchy', marking the female body as something inherently

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[39] J. Evans, *Aphrodisiacs, Fertility and Medicine in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014) pp. 52, 63.
[40] These source materials are not focus of this thesis, which is primarily concerned with women's letters and diaries, but a separate project that considers the impact that erotic material could have had on women's identity and the way they chose to dress themselves would be very interesting.
[41] L. Gowing, 'Women's Bodies and the Making of Sex', p. 813.
[42] K. Harvey, 'The Century of Sex? Gender, Bodies, and Sexuality in the Long Eighteenth Century', *The Historical Journal*, 45, 4 (2002) pp. 899-916, p. 899; L. Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth Century England* (London: Yale University Press, 2003) p. 2; A. Chamberlain, 'The Immaculate Ovum: Jonathan Edwards and the Construction of the Female Body', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 57, 2 (2000) pp. 289-322, p. 292.

different to the male body, rather than an inverted or imperfect replica.[43] Whilst this might, on the surface, suggest a sense of female individuality or independence from the pervasive social presence of the male body, it impacted medical debates on reproduction during the eighteenth century that rendered women's sexual pleasure redundant. Harvey describes how this medical discourse, in which female orgasm was not necessary for conception to occur, contributed to the 'redefinition of women as 'domesticated' and 'sexually passive'', identifying the female body as a submissive and receptive construct, and perhaps requiring it to be visually presented in such a way.[44]

Gowing has suggested that these new medical theories, emerging in the eighteenth century, 'defined women as governed by their ovaries, asexual, and intellectually and physically weak', but that, although the biological developments and use of medical language may have been newly implemented in the eighteenth century, the social beliefs which identified women as inferior to men were rooted in much older traditions and discourses.[45] This is unsurprising, taking into consideration the extent of the readership of medical texts and the long-standing position of the female body as a place of debate and control. Mary Fissell has argued that 'women's bodies were sites of contest' throughout the early modern period, and that they were continually used to 'represent some of the confusions and uncertainties of the moment', implying that the female body has always been a source of contention in societies, making the ways that women dressed themselves of crucial importance.[46] It is likely, then, that the eighteenth century did not radically change the social, and largely male, perception of women's bodies as a mysterious, potentially dangerous and ultimately inferior beings, but rather contributed to the restructuring of the scientific foundations for these beliefs.

The historiography of the female body in the early modern period largely focuses on the reproductive system as being central to concepts of gender and identity. Gowing comments on the importance of reproduction to notions of sexual

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[43] K. Harvey, 'The Century of Sex?', p. 904.
[44] K. Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 10.
[45] L. Gowing, *Common Bodies*, p. 205.
[46] M. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) pp. 12, 247.

difference, and highlights maternity as the point 'when women feel themselves to be, unequivocally and recognisably, women', emphasising that the ability of women to give birth was a socially and culturally recognised symbol of femininity and womanhood that placed them apart from men, but also from those women who could not, or would not, have children.[47] Crawford explores the ways in which 'theological and medical discourse established a sexual knowledge which was part of the means by which women were defined, and relations between the sexes regulated', implying that whilst the female reproductive body could be used by women as a foundation of identity, it was also a tool for structuring the gender hierarchy.[48] Fissell writes that part of this process was 'making women's reproductive bodies equivalent to property owned by men', partly through the control of medical knowledge by male doctors, and later in the eighteenth century, male midwives.[49] Gowing describes 'a misogyny in which, once maidenhood is lost, women's boundaries are unsustainable, and men's knowledge and self-control constitute both a telling contrast to the female body and a way of managing it'.[50] There is a suggestion that this desire to map and understand the 'frustratingly inchoate and unmasterable' female body stemmed from a desire to perpetuate patriarchal social control; Anthony Fletcher argues that medical 'changes were a product of men redefining patriarchy in order to ensure its continuance and bolster its foundations'.[51] If this is the case, we could argue that female identity, and the notion of a female life cycle rooted in reproductive processes, was based on patriarchal notions of the female body as 'other', entirely removed from male experience: Harvey has suggested that 'much of the historiography on the body and sexuality is really about masculinity', constructing female identity around a male model, and presenting an interesting perspective for further research to consider.[52]

Despite its roots in masculine and patriarchal discourse, the reproductive life cycle still established pivotal and transitional moments for early modern women. Sara Read explores 'the ways in which women related [to] their reproductive functions' as a series of stages that represented a growth to maturity, with hymenal

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[47] L. Gowing, 'Women's Bodies and the Making of Sex', p. 818.
[48] P. Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families,* p. 62.
[49] M. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, p. 203.
[50] L. Gowing, *Common Bodies*, p. 25.
[51] L. Gowing, 'Women's Bodies and the Making of Sex', p. 817; A. Fletcher in K. Harvey, 'The Century of Sex?', p. 905.
[52] K. Harvey, 'The Century of Sex?', p. 916.

bleeding, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause as progressive phases of ageing in the early modern woman.[53] The centrality of reproduction to social and cultural understandings of the female body is evident in the scholarship of women's physicality during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and is closely linked to the issues of female identity and expression explored in this thesis.

A common theme in the study of the early modern female body is the perception of women as grotesque, or the notion of the female body as being less perfect than its male counterpart. Crawford argues that until the mid-eighteenth century, 'medical writers regarded the male body as the norm, superior to the female', implying that the female body was a flawed or incomplete version of man's, providing a physiological reasoning for patriarchal order.[54] According to A. Chamberlain, medical developments in the eighteenth century saw a shift to a 'biology of incommensurability…the two sexes as having fundamentally different and opposing reproductive anatomies', but rather than removing the stigma surrounding the female body as being that of a failed man, social discourse adapted to present 'the female genitalia as a synecdoche for the otherness and strangeness of women's nature'.[55] King's discussion of Laqueur's one-sex/two-sex model, which has been discussed earlier, lends more nuance to this argument: it is likely that popular thought accepted both models of medical thought to a certain extent, and that the medical developments were not as rigidly defined as asserted in Chamberlain's work.

Despite this, women could be criticised for their alien bodies, different and grotesque when compared to men, transforming 'the strangeness of the female body into disgust…both strange in its design and base in its function'.[56] L. S. Haslem has noted that the womb was associated with 'the irrational, the mysterious, the obscene, and the monstrous' in popular culture and literature, with Gowing arguing that 'the leaky female body provided a stereotype for the grotesque female characters of the stage', implying the cultural power of the assumption that the female body was unclean or uncontrollable.[57] One solution to the unpleasantness of the female body

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[53] S. Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body,* p. 187.
[54] P. Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families*, p. 57.
[55] A. Chamberlain, 'The Immaculate Ovum', pp. 314, 318.
[56] A. Chamberlain, 'The Immaculate Ovum', p. 319.
[57] L. S. Haslam in A. Mangham, *The Female Body in Medicine and Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011) p. 47; L. Gowing, *Common Bodies*, p. 23.

was to keep it largely hidden and restricted: the 'ideologies of shame and social ritual seemed to insist that the female body was private and secret', as a way of countering 'the natural disorderliness of the female body, its openness, and its vulnerability to exposure'.[58] One crucial way of hiding or restricting the female body was through dress, but this method also provided women with the potential to shape their bodies and identities with some degree of independence or freedom.

Women's bodies were a constant feature of erotic and pornographic material during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, further complicating depictions of the female body by presenting it as sexually available and appealing, in contrast with, or even alongside, the emphasis on its grotesque nature. Harvey describes how the 'saturation of this material with depictions of the female form is testament to the fascination men had with women's bodies', implying the ways in which 'female bodies inspired both fear and desire'.[59] Here we can see the female body as sexually appealing as a result of its contrast to the male body, and its potential for reproduction. Reproductive medicine during this period encouraged depictions of the female body as a landscape, as 'the fertile land which would nourish male plants', or as a 'fertile, fruit-bearing plant' itself, using culturally popular botanical motifs to emphasise reproductive sex as an erotic activity.[60] Sarah Toulalan examines the ways in which 'sexuality at this time was inseparably intertwined with reproduction', meaning that the female body, even in pornographic representations, had links to fertility and childbearing.[61] There was clear tension in the 'desire for sexual pleasure and procreation that female bodies promised, [and the] apprehension of the loss of control and the destruction that female bodies threatened', making them contradictory and complicated constructs, even in erotic depictions.[62]

Julie Peakman has claimed that women were able to exercise some form of agency over their bodies through erotic prints and literature, even suggesting that as 'women were described as both laviscious and inquisitive…investigating another

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[58] L. Gowing, *Common Bodies*, pp. 10, 40.
[59] K. Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 2, 105.
[60] K. Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 112, 114.
[61] S. Toulalan, *Imagining Sex: Pornographies and Bodies in Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 265.
[62] K. Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 122.

woman's body was a good introduction to sex.'[63] However, even in overtly sexual material, the female body could still remain secretive; Toulalan convincingly writes that 'the smock was so identified with the body and a state of undress that to be clothed only in this garment was to be considered as if naked', making total nakedness and visibility of the female body less readily accessible.[64] Gowing also rightly argues that 'early modern bodies were mostly kept well clothed, covered in layers of inner and outer garments that were worn so long they were likely to become part of both the visible self, and inner subjectivity', illustrating the ways in which clothes had a crucial role in female identity and perceptions of the body, but also helped to obscure it in its most natural and exposed form.[65]

The historiography of the early modern female body seems to be broadly shaped by the issues of the reproductive and sexual body and the ways in which these are linked to socially constructed gender norms. Women experienced their lives through their bodies, which were determined as female through their reproductive and sexual organs. There appears to be much less emphasis on the body at other stages of the life cycle, perhaps because the relevance of gender distinctions was predominantly at sexual maturity, or as a form of preparation for sexual maturity. It is challenging to assess women's attitudes towards their own bodies; part of the work of this thesis will be uncovering the thoughts of women concerning their bodies, and how their bodies were presented at various stages of their lives. The 'rhetoric of shame' perhaps promoted a sense of secrecy around the female body that extended even into women's own private thoughts and writings.[66] Despite the well-discussed developments in medical discourse between the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the stigmatisation of the female body persevered. It created a dichotomy in early modern society and culture: simultaneously sexually desirable, miraculous in its ability to reproduce, and grotesque, frustrating and frightening in its unknowability; a 'complex and volatile entity' that required constant surveillance and regulation, and careful consideration of how best to dress it when it was presented to the world.[67]

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[63] J. Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies: A Sexual History of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Atlantic, 2004) p. 195.
[64] S. Toulalan *Imagining Sex: Pornography and Bodies in Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 264.
[65] L. Gowing, *Common Bodies*, p. 34.
[66] L. Gowing, 'Women's Bodies and the Making of Sex', p. 817.
[67] A. Mangham, *The Female Body in Medicine and Literature*, p. 8.

*Women's Identity in Early Modern England*

The topic of women's identity is central to this thesis, and will be explored by examining the conceptualisation and presentation of the female self through the clothing and personal writings of individual women in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This thesis looks to examine the progression of identity throughout the life cycles of individual women, and to consider the notion of how the experience of ageing might change perceptions of the self. This ageing process was often reflected in dress and considered in personal writings, sources which greatly contribute to our understanding of women's identity in this period. Diaries and letters, particularly those kept by individual women over an extended period of their lives, will prove invaluable here, in conjunction with evidence of the clothing worn as part of the construction of outward identity.

For many historians, the eighteenth century was a period of change that heralded the beginnings of modernity. The concept of the self, and of identity, was one that underwent significant reshaping, as argued by Dror Wahrman, in his influential work, *The Making of the Modern Self*. Wahrman regards the last two decades of the eighteenth century as a watershed moment that reconfigured what was understood by identity: the late seventeenth and early to mid-eighteenth centuries saw identity as mutable and constructed, but from the 1780s it became an 'innate, fixed, determined core' of person, the unchangeable essence of the self.[68] What this means for our examination of 1660 – 1780 is that identity was still largely regarded as something that could be constructed, shaped and altered as befitted each individual.

Wahrman covers five key facets of identity: gender, class, race, nationality and religion. Gender and class are of most interest to this thesis, although all of these forms of self-identity can be conveyed through dress. Before the 'gender panic' of the late eighteenth century, Wahrman argues that 'masculinity and femininity [were regarded] as social and cultural attributes, distinct from male and female bodies'.[69] Whilst this draws upon Thomas Laqueur's notion of the new two-sex model, suggesting that gendered identity was entirely separated from biological sex in the

[68] D. Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth Century England* (London: Yale University Press, 2004) p. 43.
[69] *Ibid.*

eighteenth century is an oversimplification, as has been discussed previously: clearly some women still drew from their biological experiences of menstruation, pregnancy and motherhood as a way of shaping their gendered identity. What we can take from this, however, is that gendered identity in the later seventeenth and early to mid-eighteenth centuries was mutable and personal, and that any sense of divorce between gender and sex created room for a cultural understanding of the feminine that could be adopted or rejected by individual women.

Some of the most accessible pieces of evidence regarding female identity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as conduct books, literature and women's diaries, are based around culturally constructed forms of gender identity, such as marriage or motherhood. We have seen these roles before, in the stages of the life cycle; the various stages of women's lives, including daughter, wife, mother and widow, can be regarded as forms of identity that develop and progress throughout a woman's life and help to establish and shape a sense of the self. Keeble's argument that in the seventeenth century, 'woman was increasingly identified with her wifely and motherly roles', is highly relevant to this thesis; these socially constructed roles were expected of people with a feminine identity to the detriment of other facets of women's identities, obscuring the lives of women who did not marry or have children. There was an 'overriding assumption of the conduct book and guides…that it is woman's lot to become a wife, that self-fulfilment lies in her performance of that role', emphasising that female identity was often shaped around these positions.[70]

Marriage, particularly, was central to the ways in which women considered themselves across this period, it being 'conceived as women's proper and 'natural' destiny'; the social construct of the wife provided a model of identity for women to either strive for or compare themselves against.[71] Keeble suggests that these proscriptive examples of female identity were intended as a way of controlling women, claiming that 'the domestication of women in the seventeenth century through insistence upon her wifely role, while it dignified marriage…actually confined and reduced women', constructing women's identity around the notion of inferiority and subservience to men, with 'wifely submission…a matter of common

[70] N. H. Keeble, *The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth Century Women,* pp. 209, 143.
[71] N. H. Keeble, *The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth Century Women*, p. 116.

sense and convention'.[72] Whilst it is clear that these social roles perpetuated patriarchal hierarchies, this thesis will look to examine the ways that women in this period developed their own sense of self and of bodily identity within these roles; not always being confined by their marriages, and often demonstrating agency within their positions.

Motherhood was similarly encouraged, with the implication that 'there is something monstrous in a woman who does not wish to be a mother, still more in one who rejects her own child'.[73] Here, identity was linked to broad notions of correct feminine behaviour: a woman that outwardly rejected the role of mother or wife might find herself shunned by her community. Additionally, woman who were infertile might struggle to reconcile their own identity with popular notions of motherhood, perhaps blaming their own bodies for being unable to fulfil this particular social role. As Jennifer Evans has noted, 'the connection between barrenness and the womb became more pronounced' as medical understanding of the differences between male and female bodies became better understood, often placing the blame for the inability to have children on the hostile body of the woman.[74] It is clear that these gendered social roles had a considerable influence on the construction of women's identity in this period, but we might argue that these expectations of women primarily shaped an outward identity, and that a personal, internal conceptualisation of the self allowed for a space to explore doubts, fears and rejection of these roles. These roles, and the identities that they help to construct, were clearly linked to the progression of the female life cycle and the process of ageing, combining the social and cultural self with the physical body.

Age is an important factor in considering aspects of identity and the self, whether age was used as a way of determining appropriate social roles, or to mark the passage of time and the physical transformation of the body, shaping an individual's bodily identity. Helen Yallop argues that historiographical

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[72] N. H. Keeble, *The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth Century Women*, pp. 144, 146.
[73] N. H. Keeble, *The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth Century Women*, p. 169.
[74] J. Evans, *Aphrodisiacs, Fertility and Medicine in Early Modern England*, p. 63. For further discussion on infertility and conception, see Evans' work, as well as Daphna Oren-Magidor, 'Literate Laywomen, Male Medical Practitioners and the Treatment of Fertility Problems in Early Modern England', *Social History of Medicine*, 29 (2016) pp. 290 – 310 and 'From Anne to Hannah: religious views of infertility in post-Reformation England', *Journal of Women's History*, 27 (2015) pp. 86 – 108.

considerations of age have largely focussed on the 'old' in past societies as a social group, rather than examining the continuous process of ageing and how this influenced identity. [75] Yallop suggests that 'eighteenth century notions of personhood…continued to be very dependent on the physical self', placing emphasis on the body and biological processes as key to establishing a sense of personal identity.[76] The frequent themes in the writing of elderly women throughout this period of their changed appearances, aches and discomforts, and altered bodily functions would suggest that, in this sense, identity was still very much bound up in physicality, particularly when linked to age and ageing.

There are fewer attempts by historians to consider childhood identities and how these could shape adult perceptions and constructions of the self than studies of old age. Anja Müller has explored a 'conceptualization of childhood that considers this stage of life as a period in which a human being's identity is not yet fully developed', but argues that the 'cultural construct' of childhood itself enables the 'shaping [of] social roles and individual personalities', making childhood an important part of the life cycle when considering the formation of identity and expression of the self.[77] Here we might begin to explore how women's identity could be constructed from a very young age: B. Glaser claims that young girls 'are frequently not taken notice of in their present state as children but are rather perceived of as future women', suggesting that social and cultural influences, including dress, might be used as a way of preparing a child for the inevitable changes to their bodily identity.[78] Müller also argues that youth was held in direct contrast with old age, implying a sense of biological deterioration across the life cycle, in which 'youth is thus described as more beautiful, vigorous and attractive than old age', and the ageing self is regarded with feelings of regret and loss.[79] It is interesting to consider the possibility of multiple identities developing at different points throughout the life cycle; separate senses of the self, determined by age and biological process, that make up the entirety of a person across their existence, and whether women felt a sense of disconnect with their younger bodies. This thesis will

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[75] H. Yallop, *Age and Identity in Eighteenth Century England*, p. 7.
[76] H. Yallop, *Age and Identity in Eighteenth Century England*, p. 121.
[77] A. Müller, *Fashioning Childhood in the Eighteenth Century,* pp. 4-5.
[78] B. Glaser, 'Gendered Childhoods: On the Discursive Formation of Young Females in the Eighteenth Century', in A. Müller, ed., *Fashioning Childhood in the Eighteenth Century,* pp. 189-199, p. 190.
[79] A. Müller, 'Fashioning Age and Identity', p. 93.

demonstrate how this is reflected in the choice of clothing associated with women of different life stages, as an outward and visual way of representing identity based on age.

A further way in which facets of identity might manifest is through social class and economic background. It is important to consider the extent to which women in the seventeenth and eighteenth century were shaped by their class and economic position, as opposed to a gendered identity, whether biological or social, though all of these are deeply interlinked in the formation of the self. Keeble's examination of class identity through conduct books and guides emphasises that these materials were intended for educated women who could afford printed literature, and who would shape their identities around what was contained within.[80] Similarly, Peter Borsay argues that fashionable, wealthy urban society worked to construct the identity of its children and adolescents through institutions such as 'genteel girls' schools…[teaching] the arts of polite living…female accomplishments such as sewing, drawing, music, deportment and dancing', solidifying the idea that gendered and social identities were greatly influenced by class and wealth.[81] Borsay also addresses the changing notions of gentility during this period, in which 'appearance and behaviour were esteemed more and more', suggesting that the identity of the 'genteel' was partly constructed around the wealth required to dress appropriately and the education needed to be knowledgeable about polite behaviour.[82] We can see, then, the ways in which identity and class or wealth were linked, particularly with regards to dress and outward appearance. Roach-Higgins and Eicher have claimed that dress 'influences peoples' establishing identities of themselves and others', and 'helps announce…identities for persons who are socially situated', making dress a crucial part of outward identity, and allowing those who were able to consistently attain new clothing the ability to better cultivate their visual identity and sense of self.[83]

C. W. Sizemore observes the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries' 'tendency to judge women on the basis of their appearance', making clothing and bodily adornment, and the financial means to acquire these, a basis upon which identity

[80] N. H. Keeble, *The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth Century Women*, p. 143.
[81] P. Borsay, 'Children, Adolescents and Fashionable Urban Society', p. 57.
[82] P. Borsay, 'Children, Adolescents and Fashionable Urban Society', p. 60.
[83] M. E. Roach-Higgins and J, B. Eicher 'Dress and Identity', pp. 1, 5.

could be constructed.[84] There has been a suggestion of the presence of an 'authority that elite women derived from their social rank and material wealth', further emphasising the importance of class and wealth as influences over identity and the ways in which individuals manoeuvred themselves in society.[85] Women's identity was determined not only by gendered roles and biological processes, but also class and wealth. This thesis, in focussing on middle and upper class women, will look to examine the ways in which women spent money to purchase items of clothing that reflected their own identities, and indeed how this financial stability shaped these identities and the women's sense of position in the world.

A final way of considering identity is through the social construction of the 'other'; the stigmatization of transgressive individuals in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century society that helped to establish the trope of the 'good woman' through comparison. Kittredge explores the ways in which 'patriarchal society is profoundly invested in the necessity of imposing the good woman/bad woman dichotomy', creating one identity that is desirable and another that should be avoided through appropriate female behaviour, that encompassed, amongst other things, dress and appearance.[86] Some common identities based on acts of transgression included 'the whining spinster, the evil murderess [and] the decaying prostitute', each criticised and condemned by polite society as a way of constructing a contrasting image of acceptable female conduct.[87] This is also linked to socially approved gender roles: Kittredge suggests that 'women adhered to the codes of behaviour that communicated 'feminine' gender for fear that any deviation would be read as a signal that they were not sexually restrained'; the fear of being identified as a transgressive individual encouraged women to perpetuate popular and recognisable acts of femininity in public.[88]

There are connections that can be made between identity founded in ideas of transgression, and identity constructed through the body and ageing: 'the aging

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[84] C. W. Sizemore, 'Early Seventeenth-Century Advice Books: The Female Viewpoint', *South Atlantic Bulletin*, 41, 1 (1976) pp. 41-48, p. 48.
[85] Walker, M., review of A. E. Herbert, *Female Alliances: Gender, Identity and Friendship in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 73, 2 (2016) pp. 366-371, p. 370.
[86] K. Kittredge, ed. *Lewd & Notorious: Female Transgression in the 18th Century* (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 2003) p. 8.
[87] Kittredge, ed. *Lewd & Notorious*, p. 1.
[88] Kittredge, ed. *Lewd & Notorious*, p. 6.

female body [was seen] as repellent…[and] condemn[ed] all socially visible older women as sexually voracious and subject to ridicule and disgust'.[89] Whilst we might argue that older women in socially prominent or wealthy positions were less subject to these beliefs, there is still a sense that as the female body aged, it was more open to scrutiny and risked greater social transgressions, shaping the identity and presentation of older woman who wished to avoid such criticism. One form of transgression to consider is the contrast of nationalities; the 'wild man' and the learned, polite individual. R. Nash argues that 'the figure of the wild man constitutes a complex alter ego to the idealised abstraction of 'the Citizen of Enlightenment', allowing an identity based around education, race and morality to flourish.[90] It would be interesting to consider how far this 'Enlightenment' identity impacted the construction of women's self-consciousness; the presence of conduct books and coded behaviour in the form of politeness in the eighteenth century perhaps suggests that British women saw themselves in direct contrast to 'wild' societies and the women that lived in them. Whilst this thesis does not compare women from different countries, this would certainly be an interesting avenue for further research. Transgressions, therefore, are another way of shaping a sense of the self through comparison and fear of social misdemeanours. Women could identify as good, feminine individuals by placing themselves in direct contrast with those who fell outside of social norms.

Women's identity and construction of the self is a complex topic of investigation, particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Evidence of women's self-perception is challenging to identify through the material culture and personal writings of this period; an issue which is considered further in the methodology section. The most pervasive forms of identity, and arguably the easiest to access through primary sources, are those based on widely accepted social roles that occur as part of the female life cycle: the roles of daughter, wife, mother and widow. These also have clear links to the ageing process, the passage of time and bodily development and change. Klein argues that the eighteenth-century self was 'a form of personhood that was psychologically deep, uniquely expressive, and yet essentially rooted in biology', highlighting the importance of the body when

[89] Kittredge, ed. *Lewd & Notorious*, p. 11.
[90] R. Nash, *Wild Enlightenment: The Borders of Human Identity in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2003) p. 3.

considering the construction of women's identity across this period.[91] Another type of identity that will be important to consider throughout this thesis is that based on class and economic position, particularly with regards to the act of purchasing clothing as an integral part of fashioning an outward identity. M. E. Roach-Higgins and J. B. Eicher have argued that 'dress has a certain priority over verbal discourse in communicating identity', highlighting the centrality of clothing to notions of the self, and reinforcing its importance as a tool of social communication and as a key theme in this thesis.[92] Perceptions of the self, and notions of both public and personal identity are crucial to this thesis, which explores women's expressions of identity throughout their lives, focussing on how these women used dress to visually communicate which stages of the life cycle they were experiencing, and how this choice of dress influenced their sense of self.

*Women as Consumers During the Long Eighteenth Century*

A central theme throughout this thesis is that of women as consumers, actively participating in the acquisition of clothing for both themselves and their households. The rise of shopping as both a socially acceptable and necessary activity in eighteenth-century England has been explored by a number of historians since the 1960s: the edited collection, *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, by Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb firmly places the development of the first mass consumer society, in which shops and the act of shopping were integral, as occurring in England during the eighteenth century.[93] Further investigation into the identity of the consumer, shopping as a social activity, the economic implications of increased consumer activity and the impact of women as consumers has occurred since, establishing a solid scholarship of shopping and consumption to draw from.

Quantitive research on the number of shops, and their geographical distribution provides a framework within which to research consumer behaviour. The work of Hoh-Cheung Mui and Lorna H. Mui, using the London Bills of Mortality

[91] L. Klein, review of D. Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, p. 610.
[92] M. E. Roach-Higgins and J, B. Eicher 'Dress and Identity', p. 7.
[93] N. McKendrick, J. Brewer & J. H. Plumb eds. *The Birth of A Consumer Society: the Commercialisation of 18th-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982)

and excise documents, suggests that London contained just over 21, 600 shops in 1759, out of around 137, 600 across the whole of England; potentially one-sixth of all shops in England in 1759 were found in London, emphasising the capital's importance as a hub of consumption and fashionable goods.[94] The figures used here include small, provincial traders of miscellaneous items as well as the established city shops with luxurious interiors and a bustling clientele; Mui and Mui emphasise that contemporary depictions of shopping often overlook the lower middling class shopkeepers that supplied rural villages, and were 'dependent on the London wholesale-retail dealers for their stock', keeping provincial populations connected and able to partake in the act of shopping.[95] The sheer increase of luxury goods that became available for the middling classes in the eighteenth century is what, according to McKendrick, sets this century apart from its predecessors: the desire to consume was not new, but the ability to do so with relative ease was novel and exciting.[96] This thesis, with its focus on women with disposable income of the middling and gentry classes, is mostly concerned with city shops, and the network of goods between London and other large urban centres such as Bath and Preston.

As well as the distinction between different types, and class, of shop and shopper, there is also a 'distinction between shopping for luxury and essential items; in-person and proxy shopping; [and] shopping for pleasure or necessity', as suggested by Helen Berry.[97] The shopping explored most frequently within this thesis is that which Berry argues is 'a constituent element of, and of itself produced, a polite lifestyle', which women of the middling and upper classes would strive to achieve.[98] This type of shopping was 'associated with sociability, display, and the exercise of discerning taste' for these women, and provided a regular, often daily, activity which combined the act of being visible in public with the ability to demonstrate knowledge of fashionable trends and understanding of quality craftsmanship.[99] Jon Stobart has explored how the streets themselves became central to this activity, and how urban

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[94] H-C Mui & L. H Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth Century England* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989) pp. 296 – 297.
[95] H-C Mui & L. H Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth Century England*, p.6.
[96] N. McKendrick, 'Introduction', N. McKendrick, J. Stobart & J. H. Plumb, eds., *The Birth of A Consumer Society: the Commercialisation of 18th-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) p. 2.
[97] H. Berry, 'Polite Consumption: Shopping in Eighteenth Century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 12 (2002) pp. 375 – 394, p. 379.
[98] H. Berry, 'Polite Consumption, p. 377.
[99] *Ibid.*

planning and improvements in pavements, lighting and cleanliness meant that in these areas of cities and large towns, 'sociability, display and consumption could be brought together in a fashionable and tasteful physical setting' where women could gather.[100]

One element of consumer behaviour that has been the focus of scholarly interest is the motivation behind women's fashionable consumption and the argument, central to McKendrick's work, that it was in 'imitation of the rich [that] the middle ranks spent more frenziedly than ever before'; that 'competition, envy, emulation, vanity' were the primary forces encouraging middling class women to spend money on fashionable dress.[101] This theory has been rightly challenged for its over-emphasis on the desire of middling women in the eighteenth century to imitate the women of the gentry and aristocracy, and the somewhat simplistic view that the only motivation for women to purchase and wear fashionable dress was the desire for upward social mobility. Lorna Weatherill emphasises this in her contribution to John Brewer and Roy Porter's edited collection, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, firmly stating that there 'is no evidence that most people of middle rank wanted to be like the gentry, although they may have wanted some of the new goods for their own purpose…Emulation undoubtedly happened but it is not the sole meaning of increasing consumption'.[102] Similarly, Amanda Vickery emphasises that it is wrong to assume that 'consumables, once possessed, carry the same social and personal meanings for all consumers'.[103] This thesis takes cues from Weatherill and Vickery's argument, and looks at how the consumption of fashionable dress was employed as a way of constructing individual identity, rather than mass emulation of the upper classes; by looking closely at select women, we can see that the motivation behind fashionable purchases is often multifaceted and complex, with emotional and symbolic meanings that go beyond a desire to look like other women.

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[100] J. Stobart, 'Shopping Streets as Social Space: Leisure, Consumerism and Improvement in an Eighteenth Century County Town', *Urban History,* 25 (1998) pp. 3 – 21, p. 17.
[101] N. McKendrick, 'Introduction', p. 11, p. 15.
[102] L. Weatherill, 'The Meaning of Consumer Behaviour in Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century England', in J. Brewer & R. Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 208.
[103] A. Vickery, 'Women and the World of Goods: a Lancashire Consumer and her Possessions, 1751 – 81' in J. Brewer & R. Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 277.

The prospect of women shopping for leisure as well as necessity prompted a level of social concern: Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace suggests that 'with the birth of consumer culture, women were assumed to be hungry for things', and that there was broad criticism that the female desire to own and consume items was 'a kind of depletion that "eats up" everything in its path, laying waste to what men would otherwise preserve'; the highly gendered idea that while men took pains to earn and save money, women would fritter it away on shiny baubles, ribbons and furs.[104] This was, in practice, clearly not the case, and women regularly performed the essential household role of procuring necessary items, such as new linens, for themselves, their husbands, their children and their staff. In this role, Kowaleski-Wallace argues, 'women were continually viewed as powerful agents', who had the potential to disrupt the male shopkeeper's space by browsing, haggling, or refusing to buy items whilst on their shopping trips.[105] Berry emphasises the seriousness with which women could take their role, with the 'expectation that browsing would be a visual and tactile experience, with proper scrutiny and inspection of the goods' suggesting that a browsing woman, confident in their knowledge and experience, could pose a significant challenge to a shopkeeper.[106]

Joanne Bailey has explored the dynamic of 'male provisioners and female consumers' within the context of marriage, where women might buy necessities with credit in their husband's name under the law of agency, which 'allowed a woman to act as her husband's economic agent in the domestic and business spheres and in gendered marital economic roles'.[107] Here, men were the provisioners of status and reputation that permitted a line of credit, with which women could purchase and consume items. For women who did not marry, or had not married yet, these roles were merged, and they were able to build their own economic reputation and take credit in their own names; if they later married, they might still frequent the same shops they had previously built an economic relationship with.[108] Vickery likens shopping to 'a form of employment and one which was most efficiently administered

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[104] E. Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (Chichester: Colombia University Press, 1997) p. 3, p. 5.
[105] E. Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, p. 87.
[106] H. Berry, 'Polite Consumption', p. 387.
[107] J. Bailey, 'Favoured or Oppressed? Married Women, Property and 'Coveture' in England, 1660 – 1800', *Continuity and Change,* 17 (2002) pp. 351 – 372, pp. 354, 355.
[108] J. Bailey, 'Favoured or Oppressed?, p. 358.

by women'; whilst it undoubtedly brought many women great pleasure, and could be undertaken as a social activity, there was also a level of seriousness around the act, with key skills that needed to be developed in order to be a competent and successful shopper.[109]

These skills have been explored in depth by Serena Dyer and Chloe Wigston Smith in their work on women's material literacy, examining how women were makers as well as consumers; the knowledge and skill that came from making, mending and adapting material items helped to build a base of knowledge that allowed women to make better informed purchases. They argue that 'making and buying were always inherently interconnected', and that the practical skills and material literacy of these women 'ensured the maintenance and preservation of objects throughout the life cycle'; by intentionally purchasing quality fabrics to wear, women were able to guarantee reuse, with textiles being resewn into the current fashionable shapes, or handed down and refitted to other bodies.[110] Dyer convincingly argues that 'To be materially literate was to be part of the culture of fashion', emphasising the close partnership between client and dressmaker and suggesting that the construction of garments was an active collaboration between the women purchasing the clothes and the dressmaker or tailor creating them. The skills and knowledge around dressmaking and garment construction was, as a result, taught to girls from a young age; specifically, Dyer suggests, through the making of dolls clothes. Constructing clothes in miniature 'equipped girls with an intimate knowledge of cut and fit, which they retained and developed through adulthood'.[111] Here we can see how knowledge of fashion and garment production was something cultivated in middling class and gentry women across their life cycles, and contributed significantly to their identities as fashionable consumers.

The two main producers of women's dress towards the end of this period were the mantua-makers and tailors, with Emily Taylor highlighting their differing skills that were grounded in the 'gendered associations around the fabrics and vocational

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[109] A. Vickery, 'Women and the World of Goods', p. 280.
[110] S. Dyer & C. Wigston Smith, ed., *Material Literacy in Eighteenth Century Britain: A Nation of Makers* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020) p. 7, 3.
[111] S. Dyer, 'Stitching and Shopping: the Material Literacy of the Consumer', S. Dyer & C. Wigston Smith, ed., *Material Literacy in Eighteenth Century Britain*, p. 105.

trends' they employed.[112] Where tailors were 'rational and scientific, engaged with fashion but resistant to its dictation', and most often men, the women mantua-makers possessed the 'anatomical skill' to work with drapery and create garments that were intentionally flexible and 'made in expectation of changefulness'.[113] Women producers understood the need for garments that could be remade easily, and worked with the expectation that their clients would alter and redesign their garments as fashion dictated. Mantua-makers were also held as a source of fashionable knowledge and information about the latest trends; women's networks of shared information might begin with a visit to a mantua-maker to discuss the newest styles, and then circulate this information amongst friends, family and the women who worked in their household. In contrast, the tailor's role was to approach women's bodies with a sense of literal and figurative rigidity, particularly when making stays. Alison Adburgham has explored the male-dominated position of the stay-maker and uses the writing of R. Campbell in 1747 publication, *The London Tradesman* to describe how 'it requires more strength than they [women] are capable of to raise Walls of Defence around a Lady's shape'.[114] The nature of a stay-maker was by necessity one of extreme politeness and sensitivity to his clients, as 'to him she reveals all her natural Deformity'.[115] We might question the extent to which the women themselves believed their undressed bodies were examples of deformity to be fixed by the male stay-maker, but we do know that they relied on these tailors for their structured undergarments, and would often have the same pair of stays adjusted to fit their changing shape. The relationship between makers and clients was highly reciprocal, and the material literacy of women shoppers allowed them to discuss the making of garments with expertise and experience. These women were both producers and consumers, and this understanding of the dress-making process meant that they could make informed and confident purchases.

Having the skill to make, mend and adjust garments meant having experience with the touch and feel of fabrics. Kate Smith has emphasised the importance of these haptic skills of women consumers: being able to discern quality through touch

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[112] E. Taylor, 'Gendered Making and Material Knowledge: Tailors and Mantua Makers, c. 1760 – 1820', S. Dyer & C. Wigston Smith, ed., *Material Literacy in Eighteenth Century Britain*, p. 160.
[113] E. Taylor, 'Gendered Making and Material Knowledge', pp. 161, 167.
[114] A. Adburgham, *Shopping in Style: London from the Restoration to Edwardian Elegance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979) p. 41.
[115] *Ibid.*

and often requiring multiple browsing trips before deciding upon a purchase. Smith describes how the 'skills of touching and handling goods' might be regarded as a 'form of work, requiring experience and competence' from the shopper, and that the 'thoughtful, meditative act' of browsing and handling items allowed women to assess workmanship beyond visually measuring its tastefulness.[116] Smith argues that retailers intentionally created an atmosphere of 'hospitality, civility and politeness', and encouraged this haptic browsing by providing samples of materials for women to hold and examine at their leisure.[117] As a result of this, the act of shopping became one through which women could hone their material literacy, developing their understanding of material goods, as well as cultivating a relationship with dress that allowed them to express their sense of self identity throughout their life cycles.

The rise of shopping, and the knowledge and experience of women consumers in the long eighteenth century is a key theme throughout this thesis. The act of shopping granted women of the middling and upper classes, particularly those who lived in urban centres, greater access to the culture of fashion and increased opportunity to purchase garments that reflected their tastes, position, and identity. Shopping was a social activity, but also one that required discerning skills that were taught and encouraged in girls from a young age. Purchasing fabrics and accessories and commissioning clothing from dressmakers and tailors was an activity that demonstrated a woman's material literacy, their understanding of the latest fashionable trends, the ability to cultivate social and economic relationships with merchants, and their desire to own and wear garments that were of high quality, were attractive and fashionable, and communicated their experience of the life cycle, allowing them to better construct their sense of identity.

### *Studies of Dress and Fashion in Early Modern England*

Dress, and the ways in which women between 1660 and 1780 were able to utilise clothing to assert their identities throughout their life cycles, is the pivotal subject of this thesis. The study of the dress and fashion of the past has, as Lou Taylor

[116] K. Smith, 'Sensing Design and Workmanship: the Haptic Skills of Shoppers in Eighteenth Century London', *Journal of Design History*, 25 (2012) pp. 1 – 10, p. 3.
[117] K. Smith, 'Sensing Design and Workmanship', p. 8.

described in 1998, 'undergone the greatest appropriation and transformation' as a discipline, and has continued to develop and be accepted as a valuable and insightful branch of historical investigation in the past two decades.[118] Serena Dyer describes the study of material culture, the umbrella term under which dress history comfortably sits, as examining 'the myriad layers of cultural meaning embedded within objects', drawing heavily on the work of anthropologists, archaeologists and museum curators.[119] This thesis aims to investigate the dress of women throughout the long eighteenth century as a way of accessing their experiences of, and feelings towards, their progression through the life cycle; examining both the objects themselves, and the writings of the women who wore them. Taylor explains the initial divide in dress history as one between 'the object-centred methods of the curator/collector verses "academic" social/economic history and cultural theory'; the most effective modern studies look to use a combination of both, grounding their 'cultural readings of consumption' in the 'examination of the details of clothing and fabric'.[120]

Some of the most prolific and earliest object-based works have come from the Cunnington collection; C. W. Cunnington and P. Cunnington, alongside their collaborators, published a huge breadth of work examining the details and descriptions of extant dress, spanning centuries.[121] The Cunnington's personal collection of historical dress, which was donated to Manchester Art Museum's Gallery of Costume at Platt Hall, mostly consists of nineteenth century objects, although their written works cover a much broader time period. Jane Tozer has described the *Dictionary of English Costume* as a 'great, enduring achievement, to which we are all indebted', highlighting the importance of these works in providing access and drawings of objects in private collections, and the prevalence of the Cunnington's work in this field of study.[122] We should, of course, be cautious in using these texts; as Tozer writes: 'Their methods were among the best of their time

[118] L. Taylor, 'Doing the laundry?: a reassessment of object-based dress history', *Fashion Theory*, 2:4 (1998) pp. 337 – 358, p. 337.
[119] S. Dyer, 'State of the field: Material Culture' *History* (2021) DOI <10.1111/1468-229x.13104>
[120] L. Taylor, 'Doing the laundry?', pp. 338, 347.
[121] These titles include *The Art of English Costume, A Dictionary of English Costume, Costume for Births, Marriages & Deaths, Costume of Household Servants: from the Middle Ages to 1900* and *Children's Costume in England: from the Fourteenth to the End of the Nineteenth Century*.
[122] J. Tozer, 'Cunnington's interpretation of dress', *Costume*, (1986), 1, pp. 1 – 17.

[twentieth century]. Yet they cannot stand for all time'.[123] Amongst these approaches, particularly in Cecil Cunnington's independent works, was a tendency to avoid recording the provenance of items, and to draw 'mass-psychology' conclusions from the collection.[124] The scholarship of dress history has evolved greatly beyond the work of the Cunningtons, and their *Dictionary* was revised by Valerie Cumming in 2010 to include updated terms, new additions and greater detail than the original, ensuring that the foundation that the Cunnington's work established can continue to be utilised by historians today.

Janet Arnold's work on the *Patterns of Fashion* series, which is now being continued by the School of Historical Dress, similarly provides us with highly detailed technical drawings and pattern pieces of extant garments in both public and private collections, allowing readers to access accurate photographs, diagrams and descriptions and better understand the construction of these garments. Jenny Tiramani and Sebastian Passot have, in the most recent publication: *Patterns of Fashion 6*, ensured that an extensive amount of historical context and detail accompanies the patterns for each individual garment, grounding them in cultural and social historical theory.[125] These works are fundamental in their centring of objects, emphasising the importance of understanding how dress is made and what it is made from, drawing on curatorial and archaeological work.

Anne Buck's work in curation and historical research, including her book *Dress in Eighteenth Century England*, published in 1979, has been equally influential throughout the field of dress history. Buck 'pioneered the idea that people's experiences of wearing dress mattered as much as the shape, fabric and construction of the clothes themselves', utilising the collections that she had access to as the Keeper of the Gallery of English Costume between 1947 and 1972 and combining this with extensive document based research.[126] Buck also encouraged dress scholars to consider the 'importance of alterations and recycling as documenting changes in the taste, social conditions, status and, most obviously, the

[123] J. Tozer, 'Cunnington's interpretation of dress', p. 9.
[124] J. Tozer, 'Cunnington's interpretation of dress', p. 5.
[125] J. Arnold, S. Passot, C. Thornton & J. Tiramani, *Patterns of Fashion 6: The Cut, Construction & Context of European Women's Dress c. 1695 – 1795* (London: The School of Historical Dress, 2022).
[126] A. Jarvis, 'Reflections on the Development of the Study of Dress History and of Costume Curatorship: A Case Study of Anne Buck OBE', *Costume*, 43 (2009) pp. 127 – 137, p. 135.

shape of their wearers', reading the textural life of the object and then using this as a window through which to consider the experience of its owner.[127]

As Beverly Lemire has noted, 'stark descriptions of artefacts are not enough; we must venture into analysis and explanation, blending these historical forms into the wider currents of historical scholarship'[128] It is in this merging of object study and social and cultural examination that dress history allows us to ask questions about identity. Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil have described how 'dress is central to…a shaping of personal and collective identities, for what one wears tells other people who this person is or might wish to be'; through understanding the objects of fashion themselves, and placing them within the social and cultural context of the period, dress history can engage with the topics of identity, gender, consumerism, and social class in unique and thoughtful ways.[129]

Sociologists pioneered this approach to dress in the early twentieth century: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Dress of Women*, which was republished in 2001 with commentary from Michael R. Hill and Mary Jo Deegan, contains 'insightful analyses [which] remain astonishingly fresh'.[130] These include the five basic motivations for wearing clothes: 'protection, warmth, decoration, modesty and symbolism'.[131] This is an elementary but solid foundation for the study of dress that historians have been able to draw upon and utilise, contributing to the interdisciplinary nature of the field. A more recent example of the sociological approach to dress can be found in M. E Roach-Higgins, J. B. Eicher and K. K. P. Johnson's book, *Dress and Identity*, which considers the complex ways that dress intersects with identity and the self, and can act as a tool of communication, as well as considering the relationship between dress and the body. Similarly, Joanne Entwistle focusses on the impact of both dress and fashion on the body in *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory,* and emphasises that 'dress in everyday life cannot be separated from the

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[127] A. Jarvis, 'Reflections on the Development of the Study of Dress History, p. 136.
[128] B. Lemire, 'Draping the body and dressing the home: the material culture of textiles and clothes in the Atlantic world, c. 1500 – 1800', in K. Harvey, ed., *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (Oxon: Routledge, 2009) pp. 85 – 99, p. 99.
[129] G. Riello & P. McNeil, ed., *The Fashion History Reader: Global Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2010) p. 7.
[130] C. Perkins Gilman, M. R. Hill & M. J. Deegan, *Dress of Women: A Critical Introduction to the Symbolism and Sociology of Clothing* (London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001) p. x.
[131] C. Perkins Gilman, M. R. Hill & M. J. Deegan, *Dress of Women*, p. 7.

living, breathing, moving body it adorns'.[132] We are reminded that it is the individual person wearing the garments which gives them layers of meaning, and that the study of historical objects can only achieve so much without engaging with the voices of those people who owned and wore the items.

John Styles' book, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth Century England*, is a key example of scholarship that uses dress as a lens to explore class, social status and consumerism in the eighteenth century. Early modern extant garment collections in museum and private collections tend to skew towards expensive or unique items that were stored and preserved as opposed to being reused and repurposed; for this reason it is more challenging to undertake material culture studies of the lower classes, and part of the reason as to why this remains a comparatively sparse area of scholarship. Anne Buck argued throughout her curatorial and research career that 'working dress, and working class dress, was just as important as couture clothing, possibly more important because of its scarcity', and devoted several chapters to the topic in *Dress in Eighteenth Century England*, but there was still relatively little work done on this area until the 2000s.[133]

Styles reminds us that fashionable clothing was not only to be enjoyed and embraced by the elite, but that 'ordinary people' also took great care in their appearance, often coinciding with key events in the life cycle: 'when the [Latham] daughters reached their mid-teens, they each began to acquire relatively costly and decorative accessories' coinciding with their approaching entrance onto the marriage market.[134] Styles' focus on the dress of the plebian classes provides a necessary counterpart to the ongoing work on elite dress, and is, in this sense, similar to the work done by Laura Gowing on the social and cultural attitudes surrounding the bodies of ordinary women in *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth Century England*. This thesis, which combines an examination of objects with written accounts, focusses on upper and middling class women for a number of reasons: the availability of extant garments and portraiture in collections; that these women would have had the most amount of disposable income to spend

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[132] J. Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000) p. 9.
[133] A. Jarvis, 'Reflections on the Development of the Study of Dress History, p. 136.
[134] J. Styles, 'Custom or consumption? Plebian fashion in eighteenth century England', in G. Riello & P. McNeil ed, *The Fashion History Reader*, pp. 179 – 191, p. 185.

on clothing and to purchase items that reflected their tastes and style; and that these women were the most likely to leave personal written records in the long eighteenth century. Whilst the clothing of the lower classes is incredibly useful to our understanding of their social, cultural and economic lives, it is much harder to gain a sense of personal identity and the self without the corresponding written records that can be found from the middling and upper classes.

Susan Vincent's book, *Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern England*, focusses on the garments of the upper classes and explores the variety of meanings that could be communicated through dress, and the ways in which dress could reflect, but also shape, a sense of the self; examining not only extant garments, but also the depictions of dress in literature and portraiture. J. Batchelor's work, *Dress, Distress and Desire: Clothing and the Female Body in Eighteenth Century Literature* takes this approach to dress history even further, focussing solely on descriptions of dress and women's bodies in novels, women's magazines and conduct literature; emphasising the ways in which 'dress, the body and female morality were yoked together' in these mediums during the eighteenth century.[135] These contributions demonstrate that studies of dress history do not necessarily have to purely draw from surviving items of clothing, and that adopting a broader base of primary source materials can be greatly beneficial: the importance and influence of fashion in early modern England can be seen in portraiture, literature and personal writings, and using these in conjunction with surviving garments provides us with a much richer understanding of how dress was understood and utilised by women in this period.

Similarly to Styles, Amanda Vickery has used dress history as a way of engaging with the social and cultural world of the eighteenth century, particularly focussing on the life of genteel women, and how the upkeep and purchasing of dress was an integral part of managing a household. Vickery has also written about the less prolific topic of dress in old age, and how women in Georgian England navigated the often challenging notion of remaining fashionable without overstepping social boundaries. In 2013, when Vickery's article 'Mutton Dressed as Lamb? Fashioning Age in Georgian England' was published, she noted that there had been 'almost no

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[135] J. Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire: Clothing and the Female Body in Eighteenth Century Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) p. 16.

research on fashion and the life cycle', and 'surprisingly little social and gender history of eighteenth century dress'; this thesis looks to fill some of these gaps, and consider the ways that women interacted with dress throughout their life cycles across the long eighteenth century.[136]

There has been a recent interest in consumer and material literacy throughout the broader field of material culture studies, under which dress history falls; the 2020 publication of *Material Literacy in Eighteenth Century Britain: A Nation of Makers*, edited by Serena Dyer and Chloe Wigston-Smith approaches dress, amongst other objects, from this perspective. Dyer argues that 'genteel and elite women acquired and deployed making skills throughout the life cycle', and that this knowledge and grasp of material literacy enabled women to be active participants in the culture of fashion, and influenced the way they interacted with dress.[137] Approaching dress history through the lens of making, consumption and consumerism allows us to provide even greater context for garments, and deepens our understanding of the social networks that were cultivated between women in the eighteenth century, with dress at their centre.

This thesis sits comfortably within the subject of dress history, but also within social, cultural and gender studies. Drawing upon the work of historians such as Buck, Styles, Vickery and Dyer, this thesis will examine the personal writings of women from 1660 to 1780, alongside examples of surviving garments, in order to examine how they used dress to convey social meaning, explore their identities and navigate their life cycles. In concentrating on the structure of the life cycle, and how women's interactions with dress adapted and changed as their life cycle progressed, this thesis will look to fill some of the gaps that have been acknowledged within the field, whilst building on the successful interdisciplinary approach that has been developed over the past several decades.

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[136] A. Vickery, 'Mutton Dressed as Lamb? Fashioning Age in Georgian England', *Journal of British Studies*, 52 (2013) pp. 858 – 886, pp. 858, 862.
[137] S. Dyer, 'Stitching and Shopping: the Material Literacy of the Consumer', S. Dyer & C. Wigston-Smith, ed., *Material Literacy in Eighteenth Century Britain: a Nation of Makers* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020) p. 114.

## Sources and Methodology

This thesis uses a collection of written documents, primarily women's personal writing, fashion plates and other visual representations of clothing, in conjunction with extant objects and paintings. Whilst objects are highly valuable sources that can reveal much about the nature of people in the past when examined in their own right, by combining this material culture approach with an examination of women's writing, this thesis will look to explore how women perceived their own identity and used their clothes as indicators of their progressing life cycle. Women's personal writing can provide insight into their emotional connections to clothing, their private responses to the dress of others, and the fashioning of their own distinct identity.

The relatively broad time-frame of the thesis will allow comparisons between seventeenth and eighteenth-century practices and social customs, with the potential for identifying patterns of change and continuity in dress. Many of the surviving material objects are dated from the mid-to-late eighteenth century, and the bulk of primary sources are dated from approximately 1720-1780, but by allowing comparisons from as early as 1660, the thesis will be able to address developing ideas of dress and the life cycle from a chronological perspective. A further boundary to the primary source material will be the emphasis on female writing: primarily examining women writing about themselves and their female peers. This will allow the thesis to better focus on female identity without it being obscured by overwhelmingly male voices. This thesis will not claim to access the inner workings of any individual's mind, but will rather suggest a number of ways that dress could be employed as a tool for examining women's identity and experience of the life cycle, in conjunction with diaries, letters and other personal writings.

The sources used in this thesis have been drawn from a variety of collections, archives and published works. The extensive collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, Manchester Art Gallery, Hampshire Cultural Trust and Bath Fashion Museum have provided a variety of extant examples of clothing that will be used to illustrate the changes and developments in dress over this period. Portraiture and artwork from the National Gallery, the Tate Gallery, the Courtauld Institute of Art and the Holburne Museum of Arts, amongst others, will also be used to explore

perceptions of women and dress, and to consider the importance of portraits in the construction of bodily identity. There are a number of individuals that have formed detailed case studies which will be referred to frequently throughout the thesis: the autobiography and correspondences of Mrs Delany, the fashion album of Barbara Johnson, the diary of Sarah Hurst, the Verney Memoirs, the diaries and letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montague, and the diary of Elizabeth Shackleton recur most frequently, and a brief introduction to each of these women can be found below. This combination of sources, blending the material and the written, allows the thesis to examine how these individual women perceived their identities and utilised their dress to outwardly express themselves as they progressed throughout their life cycles.

*Mary Verney, née Abell ( b. 1641, d. 1715)*[138]

Mary Abell was the granddaughter of a Royalist merchant, William Abell, who bought a manor at East Claydon, Buckinghamshire during the Civil War in order to avoid political targeting in the capital before eventually fleeing to Holland. William Abell the younger, Mary's father, lived at the East Claydon manor with his daughter as a widower, after the death of Mary's mother, Anne Abell, in 1643. The East Claydon manor bordered the land belonging to the Verney family, and after a period of courtship, Mary Abell married Edmund (Mun) Verney in 1662 and moved into the Verney home of Claydon House. Mary suffered from recurring physical illnesses and bouts of 'hysteria' and 'melancholy' that were likely symptoms of mental health issues throughout her life, prompting concern from her husband Edmund and frustration and resentment from her father-in-law, Sir Ralph Verney. Mary's husband was frequently away in London, and she was under the care of doctors and Lady Hobart, a relation of the Verneys, in his absence. In 1664, her hair was cut off

[138] For an edited collection of the Verney papers, see *The Memoirs of the Verney Family During the 17th Century,* ed. Lady Frances Parthenope Verney (London: Longmans, 1907). See also S. E Whyman, *Sociability and Power in late-Stuart England: the Cultural World of the Verneys, 1660 – 1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); M. Slater, *Family Life in the Seventeenth Century: the Verneys of Claydon House* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984); A. Tinniswood, *The Verneys: A True Story of Love, War and Madness in Seventeenth Century England* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007). The correspondence of the Verney family is stored in the Verney Archive, which is maintained by the National Trust at Claydon House. Within this collection is also several surviving garments belonging to Mary Verney.

and she was kept in a boarded room as her mental health deteriorated. Mary had three surviving children with Edmund Verney: Ralph in 1666, Edmund in 1668 and Mary in 1675, although she was largely absent from them in childhood as a result of her unstable moods. Mary outlived her husband and all three of her children, dying at the age of seventy four, but had been estranged from her family for most of her later life. Some of Mary's life is documented in the Verney family memoirs, compiled from letters and writings of the Verney family, and some of her garments survive at Claydon House.

*Mary Verney, also called Molly or Moll, (b. 1675, d. 1696)*[139]

Mary Verney, often referred to as Molly, was the daughter and youngest child of Mary and Edmund Verney. At the age of fifteen, she was living in the East Claydon house inherited from her mother with her brother, Edmund, but was left the sole surviving heiress after his death in 1690. Molly had a better relationship with her grandfather, Sir Ralph Verney, than her mother did: he wrote to her with allowances of money and gifts after the death of her father and two older brothers. Molly was also supervised by Ralph's sister, Lady Cary Gardiner, who petitioned Ralph on behalf of her great-niece. Sir Ralph eventually attempted to arrange a marriage for Molly, but she rejected her potential suitor and eloped in 1693 at the age of eighteen with a Mr Keeling, who was financially and socially beneath Molly's status as a Verney. She revealed the marriage and her flight from East Claydon in a letter sent to Sir Ralph a week later. This marriage was born out of love, but was sadly short lived, as Molly died in 1696 after giving birth to a girl, another Mary, to whom Sir Ralph was named godfather. Baby Mary also died after a few weeks, ending Molly's family line. Molly's experiences are also documented in the Verney family memoirs, collated from the letters and diaries of the Verneys.

[139] See Footnote 132 for further references.

*Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, née Pierrepoint (b. 1689, d. 1762)*[140]

Mary Pierrepoint was baptised at St Paul's Cathedral, London in 1689, and was the eldest daughter of Evelyn Pierrepoint; upon her father's promotion to the Earl of Kingston in 1690, she was given the title of Lady. After the birth of three siblings, Mary's mother died in 1692, and care of the children was passed to their grandmother. After her grandmother's death, Mary moved to her father's house, Thoresby Hall, in Nottinghamshire, where she cultivated her interest in languages and writing. In 1712, at the age of twenty-three, Mary was married to her close friend Anne's brother, Edward Wortley Montagu, after an extended period of written courtship and pressure from her father to marry an Irish peerage heir. The pair eloped and married in Salisbury. Now Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, she spent the beginnings of their marriage at Middlethorpe Hall in Yorkshire; travels to London were frequent, however, and her first child, Edward, was born there in 1713. After the accession of George I, Mary was able to immerse herself in court society and literature circles but left the capital in 1716 to accompany her husband to Constantinople.

This trip took the couple across Europe, and Mary recorded her experiences of Vienna and Hanover as well as her time in Turkey, during which her daughter Mary was born, in January 1718. In July of the same year, the family embarked on their return trip, spending time in Genoa and Paris. Upon their return, Mary lived in their London properties, whilst Edward spent most of his time on business in Yorkshire. Mary cultivated a broad circle of friends, compiled her travel letters and kept up numerous correspondences with family. In the 1720s, Mary contracted smallpox and pushed for inoculation to be practiced in England; she lost her brother to the disease and had her young daughter immunised. Mary was the target of much controversy

[140] For Mary Wortley Montagu's letters, see the edited collection, *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Worley Montagu*, ed. R. Halsband (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). See also I. Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), L. France, *The Toast of the Kit-Cat Club: a Life of Lady Wortley Montagu in Eleven Chapters* (Tarset: Bloodaxe, 2005); D. G. Barnes, 'Tenderness, Tittle-tattle and Truth in Mother-Daughter Letters: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Mary Wortley Montagu Stuart, Countess of Bute, and Lady Louise Stuart, *Women's History Review,* 4 (2015) pp. 570-590; ODNB entry for Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, I. Grundy (2004) [https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/19029].

following this, and a slew of written material criticising her and her actions was published, most notably by Alexander Pope.

Mary experienced a tumultuous relationship with her children, and had her son sent abroad under the care of a tutor. Once her daughter had reached a marriageable age, Mary had to contend with her own husband's plans to acquire a wealthy son-in-law, and allowed her daughter to marry Lord Bute; Edward withheld his daughter's dowry, perhaps in an act of retaliation. Mary's relationship with her husband Edward was largely estranged, although they remained on good terms in their letters. She conspired to leave London for Venice in 1739, and moved frequently around Italy, integrating herself into the social and political scene. From 1742, Mary was forced to leave Italy for fear of war, and eventually settled in Avignon before moving back to Brescia in the north of Italy around 1745. There she remained, continuing her correspondence with her daughter, until 1761 when she was forced to return to London following her husband's death, and her son's contest of his will. Mary arrived back in London in 1762, but died shortly afterwards, at the age of seventy three. Her travel letters, along with a huge catalogue of poetry, essays, plays and fiction, were published after her death.

*Mary Delany (b.1700, d. 1788)*[141]

Mary Delany, the prolific eighteenth-century writer, artist and court favourite, was born in Wiltshire and moved with her family to London where she was placed in the care of her aunt, Lady Ann Stanley, who had been the maid of honour to Queen Mary. Her family's position was challenged after the death of Queen Anne and the subsequent Whig control of parliament; Mary's uncle, Lord Lansdowne was imprisoned in the Tower of London for two years, and her father was temporarily detained. Just before her eighteenth birthday, Mary was married to the wealthy, fifty-

[141] For Mary Delany's letters and autobiography, see the edited collection, *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany: With Interesting Reminiscences of King George the Third and Queen Charlotte*, vol 1 – 6, ed. A. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1861); M. Laird & A. Weisberg-Roberts, ed., *Mrs Delany & Her Circle* (London: Yale University Press, 2009); ODNB entry for Mary Delany, B. Brandon Schnorrenberg (2008) [https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7442]; R. Hayden, *Mrs Delany: Her Life and Flowers* (London: British Museum Press/Collonade Books, 1988)

seven year old Alexander Pendarves, an MP from Cornwall, as a way for her family to regain some of their finances and influence. Mary was deeply unhappy during her first marriage, even after moving back to London; however, her situation rapidly changed after the sudden death of Pendarves in 1725. Over the next two decades, Mary was able to live freely in London, attending court with the Stanleys, going to functions and balls, visiting the theatre, the opera, and expanding her social circle. During this period, her extensive correspondence with her sister, Anne Granville Dewes continued, and she became good friends with Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Portland.

Mary eventually remarried in 1743, to the Irish Anglican cleric, Patrick Delany; he was considered to be a poor choice by her male relatives due to his lack of social status and money, but this time Mary was permitted to marry for love and affection. They lived in Ireland, making regular visits to Mary's friends and family in England, until Patrick's death in 1768. Mary moved back to London, staying in St James' Palace and summering at Bulstrode, the Buckinghamshire country house belonging to the Duchess of Portland. There the two friends embarked on botanical projects and natural specimen collections, and Mary worked on her cut-paper flower illustrations. During this time, Mary wrote frequently to her niece, Mary Dewes Port, and took great enjoyment in her role as great-aunt to the young Georgina Mary Ann Port. Mary was held in high regard by the royal family; King George III and Queen Charlotte visited Bulstrode, and provided Mary with accommodation in Windsor, along with a pension, after the death of Margaret Cavendish. Mary died in 1788, leaving a prolific collection of letters and autobiographical writings.

*Elizabeth Shackleton née Parker (b. 1726, d. 1781)* [142]

Elizabeth Parker was born in London in 1726 to John Parker, a linen draper, and Elizabeth Southouse, the daughter of an Essex merchant. From 1728, they lived in Lancashire after her father inherited Browsholme Hall, near Clithero, and accompanying farm lands that generated a substantial amount of rent. Elizabeth became the mistress of Browsholme Hall after her mother's death at the beginning of the 1740s. Elizabeth was expected by her family to marry well, and as a result increase their wealth and social position, but she eventually married her second cousin, Robert Parker, a man of comparatively modest inheritance. Elizabeth's brother, in contrast, married the daughter of a baronet, and thus became related to the elite of the Yorkshire area. Elizabeth moved to her new husband's home at Alkincoats Hall, Lancashire, in 1751, where they had three sons: Thomas, Robert and John.

Robert died in 1758, and Elizabeth became a widowed mother of three young boys, just seven years after her marriage. She began writing her diaries in 1762, and experienced a relatively sociable widowhood. In 1765, Elizabeth remarried John Shackleton, a twenty-one year old local wool merchant, who was notably eighteen years younger than the nearly thirty-nine year old widow. They eloped and married in Gretna Green, which caused a local scandal and led to Elizabeth being shunned by her brother's circles and being banned from her family home. Elizabeth and John lived at Alkincoats until her eldest son took over the household in 1779, and they moved to a new home: Pasture House, near Barrowford. Elizabeth's diaries document the strain on their relationship; her second husband was regularly drunk and unruly, and often abusive towards her. Elizabeth died in 1781 after suffering a number of illnesses; her letters and diaries were kept within her family and eventually given to the Lancashire Record Office.

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[142] A comprehensive biography of Elizabeth Shackleton has been written by Amanda Vickery for the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-59566>; see also, A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*: *Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Elizabeth Shackleton's diaries and correspondences can be accessed from the Lancashire Record Office, DDX 666/1.

*Sarah Hurst (b. 1736, d. 1808)*[143]

Sarah Hurst was born in the town of Horsham, Sussex in 1736 to middling class parents; her father, Richard Hurst, was a local merchant and owned a tailor shop where Elizabeth worked during her early twenties. Sarah's daily diary entries between the years of 1759 and 1762 have survived and been transcribed, providing us with an insight into the life of a young, middling class woman between the ages of twenty two and twenty five. Sarah was the eldest daughter of four, and her diary reveals a tempestuous relationship with her younger sister, Elizabeth. Sarah had an economic and social connection to fashion, and regularly recorded her experiences with dress; both her personal choices in fashion, and those of her friends and customers. Sarah also describes her courtship and subsequent elopement with a Marine Captain, Henry Smith, in the diaries. Henry's family regarded themselves as above the station of the Hursts, as they conducted their business in London rather than locally in Horsham; misgivings about the pair may also have stemmed from Sarah and Henry's thirteen year age difference. Sarah had been in correspondence with Henry since she was sixteen, and made a conscious decision to think seriously about marriage when she reached twenty; unfortunately her suitor was deployed during the Seven Years War and the couple had a long-distance relationship, exchanging letters and gifts, until 1762, when the couple were able to marry in secret. Sarah's father protested her dreams of marriage, motivated by a desire to keep his daughter working in the tailor's shop and helping to run his business, as well as potentially out of concern around raising funds for her dowry. Sarah's diary reveals a young woman who was educated, mature and ambitious, and who chafed against eighteenth-century notions of female dependency.

[143] For an edited collection of Sarah Hurst's diaries, see *The Diaries of Sarah Hurst, 1759 – 1762: Life and Love in Eighteenth Century Horsham* (Stroud: Amberly Publishing, 2009).

*Barbara Johnson (b. 1738, d. 1825)*[144]

Barbara Johnson was born the eldest daughter of the Revd Woolsey Johnson and his wife Jane in 1738, in the parish of Olney, Buckinghamshire. Barbara's father had inherited the parish from his father, and established his family there; three more children followed Barbara, sons George, Robert and Charles. Barbara's father had held several posts in London, as well as in Northamptonshire, and was relatively wealthy. Barbara's education and upbringing was carried out by her mother, who encouraged her use of the fashion album from the age of eight. Woolsey Johnson died in 1756, and Jane shortly after in 1759, leaving Barbara the eldest sibling of four. The children were placed under the care of a family friend, Revd Edmund Smythe, and each of them inherited a sum of £1500 from their mother's will; the ensuing £45 of interest each year provided Barbara with money to live off. Barbara never married, although her brother Robert was able to marry into fashionable and aristocratic circles in 1773. She travelled frequently, staying with friends and family for extended periods of time; particularly the Wodhulls, who had a house in Thenford as well as a property in Berkeley Square, London. After the death of her brother George in 1814, Barbara inherited an extra £50 per year, as well as a further £200 from the Wodhulls following their deaths. This dramatic increase in income prompted a move to Bath, where she appeared to set up a permanent residence before her death in 1825. Throughout her life, Barbara maintained her fashion album, updating it with fabric swatches and yardage information for dresses that she had made for herself. As well as the fabric swatches, Barbara included fashion plates and illustrations, indicating her ongoing enjoyment of fashion and knowledge of changing trends.

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These women's autobiographical writings, correspondences and publications make up a large portion of the thesis; their extensive diaries and letters span multiple stages of their life cycles and provide an insight into their changing identities and shifting relationships with their outward appearance. These will be supported by

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144 For an edited edition of Barbara Johnson's album, see *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashion and Fabrics*, ed. N. Rothstein (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987); see also S. Dyer, *Material Lives: Women Makers and Consumer Culture in the 18th Century* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021); S. Dyer, 'Barbara Johnson's Album: Material Literacy and Consumer Practice, 1746 – 1823', *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 42 (2019) pp. 263 – 282; A. Ribeiro, 'Review: Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics', *Textile History*, 19 (1988) p. 103.

examples of other women whose records do not span the entirety of the life cycle, but rather allow us a glimpse into a single stage, as well as examples of extant dress objects that illustrate the styles and sartorial choices made by middling and upper class women throughout this period.

*Methodology*

The methodological approach of this thesis is an interdisciplinary one, incorporating practices used in sociology, anthropology, literature studies, art history and the discipline of history itself. One of the overarching methodological techniques of this work is that of material culture studies, which has been described by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello as the examination, 'not merely of 'things', but also of the meanings they hold for people'.[145] The study of historical dress and fashion presents a key opportunity to incorporate the approaches of material culture studies into this thesis, and allows for extant garments and accessories to support the written source material in the thesis. In 2017, Leonie Hannan and Sarah Longair commented on the fact that 'historical material culture studies is now well established', but this does not mean that there is a prescriptive or universal method of interrogating material culture history.[146] When considering material culture, we must acknowledge the importance of objects, the potential for them as 'having agency in human lives' and occupying 'social networks and [being] capable of active participation', but also be aware of whether objects are the central focus of the research, or if they are allowing us to further our understanding of broader historical themes.[147]

In Karen Harvey's edited collection, *History and Material Culture*, attention is drawn to the work of Bernard Herman, who emphasised ' a distinction between studies that are 'object-centred' and those that are 'object-driven'.[148] The object-centred approach is one concerned with learning about the physicality and material construction of an object, which is not the central focus of this research. The object-

[145] A. Gerritsen & G. Riello, *Writing Material Culture History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) p. 2.
[146] L. Hannan & S. Longair, *History Through Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017) p. 3.
[147] L. Hannan & S. Longair, *History Through Material Culture*, pp. 19, 20.
[148] K. Harvey, ed., *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (Oxon: Routledge, 2009) p. 2.

driven method is described as 'one rooted in an art historical approach…focus moves from the object to what we might regard as the emotional or psychological dimensions of material culture'.[149] This is the framework of material culture studies that this thesis follows most closely, attempting to uncover women's thoughts and feelings about dress as they progressed through the life cycle. This approach is not possible without the use of other, textual sources that can further inform us about attitudes to clothing; whilst extant garments do speak to us in a way, what we can determine from them about their owners' feelings is clearly limited.

Catherine Richardson has addressed this issue in her chapter, 'Written Texts and the Performance of Materiality' in *Writing Material Culture History*, stating that 'historians of material culture tend to begin with written documents that describe objects rather than the objects themselves'.[150] Whilst this could be attributed to a sense of unease when confronting material objects, and comfort in the familiarity of texts, Richardson also points out that documents allow us to 'access evidence of attitudes towards [objects], feelings about them and, therefore, their social and cultural meanings and functions'.[151] This point is of central importance to this thesis, which is looking to examine the social and cultural importance of dress in representing the life cycle, and the attitudes of the women wearing these clothes.

Many studies of material culture take a quantitative approach, gathering data about objects, possession and distribution that can allow us to track broad trends in consumption and availability throughout history. However, this approach is not the only valid way of using objects: Richardson emphasises that 'we cannot understand individuals' interaction with their material environment [with purely quantitative research], and it is into this gap that literary analysis can step'.[152] By considering written documents in a way that is similar to the approaches of literary study, we can uncover information that is suggestive of the particular relationship between individuals and their objects. Harvey also stresses this combination of written and object-based sources, with an emphasis on using historical writing to 'peel off past layers of meaning around objects…find out things about the people that made, used

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[149] *Ibid.*
[150] C. Richardson, 'Written Texts and the Performance of Materiality', in A. Gerritsen & G. Riello, *Writing Material Culture History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) pp. 43-58, p. 43.
[151] *Ibid.*
[152] C. Richardson, 'Written Texts and the Performance of Materiality', p. 44.

and lived with those objects', which is one of the main objectives of this thesis' research.[153] The focus of this work is very much on stressing the relationships of individual women with clothing and how this could change or develop as they progressed through their life cycles. There is a limited amount of quantitative research in the thesis because this work is not seeking to make broad statements or identify larger trends about all women in this period, but rather highlight several examples of individual women who interacted purposefully with their clothing, and who did so in an attempt to make sense of their own life cycles.

A major influence on the development of material culture studies has been the art historian, Jules Prown, who emphasised the 'possible connections between objects and people based on both intellectual but also emotional responses' suggesting that 'the researcher engages in speculation using external evidence but also 'creative imagining' to understand why the object is the way it is'.[154] Whilst this line of enquiry is certainly useful with regards to external evidence being used in conjunction with material objects, it is perhaps best to be cautious with Prown's 'creative imagining', to avoid excess speculation far beyond the scope of what the object can actually tell us. Prown does helpfully distinguish between the different kinds of value that can be observed in an object: that which is 'intrinsic in the value of an object itself', for example, a garment made of fine damask silk, and that which is 'more transient and variable…those values that have been attached by the people who originally made or used the object'.[155] These values are psychological, emotional, and not necessarily rational, and thus harder for us to access through the object alone. When analysing material objects, Prown calls for a substantial descriptive analysis of the 'physical dimensions, material and articulation of the object' as a starting point from which we can move 'from the object itself to the relationship between the object and the perciever': the deduction phase, during which we might employ more sensory, intellectual and emotional engagement with the object, which will be the main focus of this work.[156]

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[153] K. Harvey, ed., *History and Material Culture*, p. 2.
[154] *Ibid*.
[155] J. D. Prown, 'Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17, 1 (1982) pp. 1 – 19, p. 3.
[156] J. D. Prown, 'Mind in Matter', p. 7.

Prown highlights objects as 'excellent and special indexes of culture, concretions of the realities of belief of other people', as well as emphasising that 'the techniques of material culture should be part of the tool kit of the well-equipped cultural scholar'.[157] This thesis will look to apply these techniques alongside more traditional historical and literary approaches in order to cover a broad spread of methodological practices; a 'tool kit' with a variety of interpretive options. Whilst Prown describes a 'large space of interpretation between the object and the scholar', in this research it is the crucial role of historical documents and literary scholarship that will help shape and guide us through this space to avoid excessively applying contemporary emotional, critical and aesthetic perspectives to historical objects.[158]

Harvey suggests that it can, in the right circumstances, be beneficial to draw on our own sensory knowledge and emotional experience of objects.[159] A key way of achieving this with historical fashion and clothing is to attempt the construction of accurate replica garments. This can shed light on the emotional connection between an individual and a piece of clothing made with their own hands, or even the frustration that comes from not being a particularly accomplished creator. As part of the research for this thesis, I was able to attend a course at the School of Historical Dress, making eighteenth-century pocket-hoops. The pattern for this piece was devised by Jenny Tiramani, and based on surviving eighteenth-century pockets that had been x-rayed and repaired to determine their structure and techniques of production. Although my ability to sew an authentic eighteenth-century pocket was lacklustre at best, I felt a newfound empathy for those women who created their own garments, or who worked on clothing for others, as well as a strong emotional bond with my imperfect creation. This approach to research has recently been undertaken by both Serena Dyer and Sarah Bendall, who have made replica garments as a way of further understanding the construction and purpose of clothes.[160] The School of Historical Dress has championed this method of research, and through their work on reconstruction and pattern drafting, have helped to further our historical understanding of how garments were made, and the impact this had on the wearer.

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[157] J. D. Prown, 'Mind in Matter', p. 16, 5.
[158] K. Harvey, ed., *History and Material Culture*, p. 6.
[159] K. Harvey, ed., *History and Material Culture*, p. 12.
[160] Sarah Bendall's work on early modern undergarments is particularly fascinating and has been published in the monograph *Shaping Femininity: Foundation Garments, the Body and Women in Early Modern England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

Historical recreation, particularly in the field of dress, is a valuable research experience that can give us a glimpse of lived experience in the past; whilst it cannot inform the entirely of this thesis alone, in conjunction with extant objects and documents, it provides a unique and fascinating insight into the past.

Portraiture is another form of material culture, aside from extant and reconstructed garments, that will be examined throughout this thesis. Portraiture has often been characterised as distinct and separate from the more mundane or everyday artefacts of material culture, as something that is created with a specific and highly visible narrative of self-expression representing both the sitter and the artist. Whilst this means that portraiture is often separated from other types of material culture, it is precisely this evidence of individual presentation that makes it valuable for this thesis. Julia Marcian Alexander has argued that 'painted portraiture must be considered one of the central sites for early modern self-presentation', particularly for elite women, whose literacy remained different and distinct from elite men.[161] Alexander emphasises that portraits 'demonstrate the extent to which women attempted to control their own appearance through the return of their gaze', raising interesting ideas regarding the agency of the women looking out from early modern portraits.[162]

Portraiture has been a central body of sources for the first chapter of the thesis, focussing on youth and childhood; here we might question the extent to which young girls were able to control the manufactured image of their person, or if, as is more likely, portraits reflected the identity of the child as perceived by their parents or guardians. This is still helpful; we are able to see the garments that were associated with adult notions of ideal youth and appropriate ageing, and determine the extent to which this was adhered to or accepted through the letters and diaries of young women. Similarly, portraiture during life stages such as pregnancy can allow us to uncover how the sitter wanted their personal identity to be visualised. The *Portraying Pregnancy* exhibition, curated by Karen Hearn in 2020, brought together pregnancy portraits from the past five-hundred years and examined the ways in which women celebrated, revealed, concealed and memorialised this

[161] J. M. Alexander, 'Painting a Life: The Case of Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland' in K. Sharpe & S. N. Zwicker, ed., *Writing Lives: Biography and Textuality, Identity and Representation in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 161-184, p. 163.
[162] J. M. Alexander, 'Painting a Life', p. 182.

moment in their life cycles, emphasising both the importance of pregnancy as a life-stage for women, and the popularity of portraiture as a way of commemorating, idealising and visualising women's identity.[163] We can also examine portraiture to glean a sense of women's feelings towards ageing and their arrival at old age in particular: whether portraits were used to obscure the physical signs of ageing in the sitter, or to indicate a graceful acceptance of this stage of the life cycle and establish a visual distinction from the sitter in their youth.

The use of portraiture as a source material by dress historians has been questioned by Marcia Pointon, who argued that 'portraiture does not reflect or illustrate fashion though it is often used in this way'.[164] Pointon emphasises the fantasy of portraiture, and how it was employed to demonstrate what was 'desireable rather than what is', highlighting the potential trap for unwary viewers who might take a portrait at face value, as an unaltered window into the past.[165] Despite this, the links between portraiture and clothing are undeniable, and Pointon reminds us that the commissioning of a dress or a portrait 'both originate in an imagined image of the self'; women who were able to order a dress to their preferred specifications, or sit for a portrait and influence the final image were using these commodities as tools to construct their ideal outwards selves in a society that practiced a 'culture of visibility'.[166] When considered in this way, portraiture is of great significance to this thesis, allowing us to see not necessarily the exact garments women wore, but the garments that they wanted to be perceived as wearing as part of the construction of their idealised selves.

Laura Sangha's work on personal documents, particularly diaries and correspondences, have been particularly valuable in developing a methodology for this thesis. Sangha acknowledges that diaries and letters 'seem to offer the promise of candour; directness; and an expression of inner desires, beliefs and expections', but warns the researcher to remain cautious in using them as primary source material, and to carefully consider the author, audience and context.[167] As with any historical

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[163] K. Hearn, *Portraying Pregnancy*, The Foundling Museum, 2020
[164] M. Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2013) p. 125.
[165] M. Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity*, p. 126.
[166] M. Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity*, p. 128, p. 124.
[167] L. Sangha, 'Personal Documents' in *Understanding Early Modern Primary Sources* (London: Routledge, 2016) pp. 107 - 128, p. 107.

source, it is important to consider the influences that shaped the production of these documents, and how these work together to create a form of writing that contains a construction of the author's self. Sangha advises that 'these documents should not be treated unthinkingly as direct, personal accounts, but as 'calculated performances"; that is not to say that they are unhelpful in uncovering aspects of the author's self, but to remain aware that it is a constructed, self-fashioned part of the author's identity.[168] This is of particular interest to this thesis, which considers the nature of how women were able to use clothing to shape their own identities throughout the life cycle; the performative, conscious version of the self, found in diaries and correspondences, is helpful in considering how women wanted to be perceived at different points throughout their lives. Sangha makes particular reference to this when she describes how 'personal documents…give us special insight into the construction of the self, into self-representation, self-fashioning, self-perception, self-presentation, self-awareness and self-consciousness', all of which are topics of interest to this thesis.[169] Particularly when considering diaries, it is important to note that these documents 'were the products of social and cultural ideas and practices, and they had their own set of rules, methods and conventions of production', which might include collecting notes into a formal written document at a later date, drawing issues of memory, hindsight and perception into our reading of the source.[170]

When using correspondences or letters, we encounter different challenges; the document is written in a style and tone that suits its purpose, which could vary greatly depending upon the recipient, causing us to question 'how authentic the personality projected in the letter is'.[171] It is perhaps feasible, however, to argue that these constructed personalities of letter-writers are all facets of an individual, carefully mediated in order to successfully navigate complex social structures, and are all deserving of our attention. A further benefit of correspondences is that they 'were capable of maintaining mental intimacy across time and space, and networks of epistolary exchange could provide spaces of creative thought, facilitating self-education and self-fashioning'. [172] This is of particular interest when considering the

[168] *Ibid.*
[169] L. Sangha, 'Personal Documents', p. 111.
[170] L. Sangha, 'Personal Documents', p. 113.
[171] L. Sangha, 'Personal Documents', p. 114.
[172] L. Sangha, 'Personal Documents', p. 115.

giving of clothing as gifts, and the letters which accompanied these objects, or described the reaction of the recipient. The potential for uncovering advice on self-fashioning and appropriate dress from one woman to another is an exciting prospect when looking at women's correspondences across this period, and one that greatly informs this thesis.

Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker have considered the nature of early modern biographies or life-writings, and the ways in which historians can interpret these written accounts of life. Whilst this thesis will mostly focus on autobiographical accounts through diaries and letters, it is still important to acknowledge early modern attitudes towards life-writing and memory. Sharpe and Zwicker write that 'While we urge the full application of the concepts of representation and self-fashioning to the writing of early modern lives…[by] emphasising the social and secular, [historians] underplayed interiority and spirituality', drawing our attention to the ways in which biographical or personal writing does not only reflect a desire for outward self-fashioning, but can also reveal more intimate, private notions.[173] They argue that this 'returns our attention to the interior life, to…the spiritual, but as well to the affective, the sexual, the psychological', all of which are important themes to consider when examining dress and self-presentation.[174] The issue of gendered writing is also touched on, raising the question of 'How differently were they [women] represented and written' in these types of sources; by looking primarily at autobiographical writings of women, this thesis will look to establish a narrative of women who were able to choose how they were presented through these written documents.[175] Sharpe and Zwicker claim that 'we have not yet recovered a highly individuated sense of female lives, of lives self-fashioned, engaged, active', and whilst this may have been true for the early modern genre of written lives and biography a decade ago, this thesis will present examples of individual women who do actively engage in their self-presentation and the fashioning of their selves throughout the life cycle, using dress as a visual medium.[176]

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[173] K. Sharpe & S. N. Zwicker, ed., *Writing Lives: Biography and Textuality, Identity and Representation in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 10.
[174] K. Sharpe & S. N. Zwicker, ed., *Writing Lives*, p. 11.
[175] K. Sharpe & S. N. Zwicker, ed., *Writing Lives*, p. 13.
[176] *Ibid.*

By engaging with written documents that emphasise both an outward perception of self and a more private, inner conception of individuality, this thesis will aim to establish a methodology that moves between object-based, material culture study and textual analysis to identify and explore the relationship between female identity and dress throughout the life cycle between 1660 and 1780. Material culture studies has been described by Serena Dyer as focussing 'on objects and their meanings, and it encompasses a body of source material made up of the objects and spaces through which people have constructed and defined their…identities'; this thesis will examine both the objects and the spaces, so often contained in women's writing, that allowed women in this period to fashion their own identities as they moved through their life cycles.[177]

[177] S. Dyer, 'State of the Field: Material Culture', *History* (2021) DOI 10.1111/1468-229x.13104 [accessed 10/03/2021] p. 2.

## Chapter Outlines

This thesis considers the clothes that women wore throughout several stages of their life cycle: how these clothes were a tool to communicate their passage through a variety of life stages, a way of visualising their fluctuating identities and developing social networks with other women – a constant thread across the changing periods of their lives.

The first chapter, concerning childhood, will examine the ways in which young girls' dress differed from that of adult women, visually symbolising their age in more complex ways than just the reproduction of adult dress in miniature. This chapter will also consider the historiographical debate surrounding the notion of children as smaller copies of their elders. Ewing's claims that 'children continued to be dressed as miniature adults… [with] little evidence of children being recognised in their own right' have already been contested in the work of Anne Buck, amongst others, who writes that the differences between children's and adult's clothes 'would be obvious and significant to their contemporaries'.[178] This chapter will look to identify the ways in which young girls perceived themselves as different to adult women, as well as the extent to which girls were able to shape their own identities using dress, and how far parental decisions influenced or impeded this.

The second chapter of this section will deal with the stage of adolescence, the often complex period that occupies a liminal space between childhood and adulthood. Buck states that 'Girls began to wear adult gowns from about the age of twelve', noting the visual change that accompanied girls as they entered their teens.[179] Here, we will attempt to explore further nuance in the clothing of girls moving through their life cycles; there is the suggestion of small, subtle differences between the clothes of an adult woman and an adolescent in images and surviving garments, as well as clear distinctions of identity made in the writing of young women.

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[178] E. Ewing, *History of Children's Costume* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1977) pp. 38, 39; A. Buck, *Clothes and the Child* (Bedford: Ruth Bean Publishers, 1996) p. 13.
[179] A. Buck, *Clothes and the Child*, p. 207.

Chapter Three will examine young women's dress during periods of courtship and their first marriage, and how this preparation for a dramatic shift in social position influenced their outward appearance and perception of the self. One of the issues considered in this chapter will be the extent to which these young women were consciously dressing to attract a husband, or if this part of the life cycle was rather an opportunity for them to try the latest fashions and use dress as an outlet of self-expression. Women such as Barbara Johnson, who created her unique album of fashion between 1746 and 1823, are interesting to examine in this context: whilst Barbara never married, during her late teens and twenties she wore a wide selection of fabrics, patterns and styles, suggesting that this period of her life gave her greater freedom to experiment with clothing.[180] Chapter Three will also look at the use of dress during this stage of the life cycle as a reflector of identity, position and status: marriages and wedding ceremonies were particularly notable occasions during which dress could be used to convey clear social messages. Susan Vincent remarks on how 'weddings had a greater public impact' as a result of their associated clothing, and stresses that this dress is 'fundamental to an individual's experience and creation of self'.[181] This chapter will seek to explore this concept further, concluding with the ceremony that ushered the majority of young women into adult life.

Chapter Four will focus on the experience of being a wife; how both newly married and well-established wives constructed their own identities within this social role and how this might extend to the running of a household. Clothing and linens were one of the main areas overseen by the mistress of a house, and dress could distinguish wives from unmarried women. Single women will also be considered in this chapter, and the extent to which their own identities were linked to their unmarried status; the difference in financial circumstances between single and married women could have a considerable impact on the way that they engaged with material goods and how they experienced the growing consumerism and shopping culture of the eighteenth century. This chapter will examine newly-wed women, and their experience in moving from one household to the next, well-established wives,

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[180] B. Johnson, *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics* ed. by Natalie Rothstein (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987)
[181] S. Vincent, *Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Berg, 2003) pp. 60, 5.

and unmarried women, and will seek to explore the different ways in which dress was used by individual women to indicate their experience of this stage of the life cycle.

Chapter Five will examine pregnancy, and how dress could be used to disguise, celebrate, accommodate and comfort a woman's rapidly changing body during this stage of their life cycle. There are some extant examples of pregnancy garments from 1660 – 1780, and this chapter will assess the ways in which particular items of clothing might be modified to suit a pregnant body. Pregnancy could require considerable adjustment to clothing, as well as adjustment to a new facet of identity for first-time mothers, and this chapter will investigate the ways in which pregnant women might use dress to both physically and mentally ease themselves into motherhood. This chapter will also touch upon the variety of medical discourse surrounding the pregnant woman's body, and how this advice was interpreted by individual women. Pregnancy, as this chapter will explore, was also a time for women to offer advice, guidance and gifts for expectant mothers; an example of how this particular stage of the life cycle fostered women's social networks, and the ways in which dress fed into these relationships.

After the liminal life stage of pregnancy comes motherhood, and Chapter 6 will consider how women's experience of, and attitudes towards, dress changed as their identities adapted to encompass the status, responsibility and expectations of motherhood. This chapter will focus on both new mothers, who arguably experienced the most drastic change to their sense of self; as well as older mothers, who needed to simultaneously navigate their own ageing and the ageing of their children, and would experience their children becoming adults and leaving the family household. Dress is woven into these experiences, and we shall consider the ways in which clothing was used to depict an idealised form of motherhood, could establish emotional bonds between mothers and their children, and would be an area over which mothers, as the mistress of a family household, had considerable influence and agency. Similarly to marriage, some women across this period, either through conscious choice or inability, were not mothers. As N. Miller argues, the 'spectrum of…maternal roles and responsibilities extended well beyond actual mothers to the

many female caregivers' who assisted with the upbringing of children.[182] This chapter will also reflect on the way that these women shaped their own identities and often adopted roles that were socially adjacent to that of a mother, providing advice and gifts to younger women and girls.

The next chapter examines women who had reached the period of old age, and how they navigated the often complex social rules surrounding the appearance of older women, and what would be considered respectable. Within this chapter we will see the distinction between the beginnings of old age, during which many women remained active, healthy, and sociable, and the end of old age, which often heralded illness, difficulty undertaking daily tasks, and reflection upon the end of life. During this period of old age, the identity of the mother also changed; we shall consider how women adapted to their own children becoming adults, and how this was reflected in the way they chose to present themselves. Chapter Seven will consider the styles of dress that women in this stage of the life cycle continued to wear, and which they felt necessary to have altered, or passed down to younger family or friends; whether as a result of changing fashions, prevailing social commentary ridiculing vain older women, or to adapt to their changing bodies and ensuring comfort as they aged.

Chapter Eight looks specifically at death and mourning, and how women might use dress to emotionally, physically and financially prepare for the end of life; both their own, and the lives of those around them. This chapter examines instances of both personal and national mourning throughout the life cycle, and the ways in which these might differ in terms of dress, as well as emotional significance and impact on self-identity. We will also consider how women could exert agency over their own bodies as they approached death through their use of clothing; establishing an image of themselves that would be remembered, and accompanied by gifts of garments, either left in their will or given out to friends and family shortly before their death.

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[182] N. Miller, 'Mothering Others: Caregiving as Spectrum and Spectacle in the Early Modern Period', N. Miller & N. Yavneh, ed., *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) p. 1.

## Section One: Growing Up

Anja Müller, in her edited volume *Fashioning Childhood in the Eighteenth Century: Age and Identity,* argues that eighteenth century thought celebrated youth, and the experience of growing up, as something 'more beautiful, vigorous and attractive than old age'.[1] Clothing was a crucial social indicator of age during both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England, and was employed as significantly during this life stage as it would be throughout other phases; the beauty, vigour and appeal of childhood and youth were visualised through the dress worn by girls and young women as they were growing up and moving towards adulthood.

'Growing up' is used here as a term that encompasses the stages of childhood and adolescence, as well as the experience of being introduced to wider society and embarking upon courtship and potentially marriage. Those growing up might be a girl of seven, in her childhood, or a young woman in her early twenties, approaching full adulthood. Cohen and Reeves have argued that adolescence gave way to youth when girls began to become 'sexually mature, developing the varied skills required for adulthood – that is, education broadly construed – and entry into social networks and work life beyond her natal household.'[2] Whilst marriage was not necessarily an indication of adulthood in all cases, it was the point at which the majority of women in this period left the dependence of their parents and regarded themselves as embarking upon adult life. Within the structure of this thesis, 'growing up' will be divided into the distinct phases of childhood, adolescence, and courtship and first marriage.

Childhood can be understood as the earliest stages of growing up, broadly encompassing the ages between birth to around six to eight years old. Müller has stated that childhood was defined as 'an age of both sexual and moral innocence'.[3] This suggests that childhood during this period was less concerned with a concrete numerical age and more with a state of mind or attitude, as well as the level of access

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[1] A. Müller, *Fashioning Childhood,* p. 5.
[2] E. S Cohen & M. Reeves, *The Youth of Early Modern Women* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018) p. 20.
[3] A. Müller, *Fashioning Childhood,* p. 5.

to certain social activities. Müller describes how this age is conceptualised as a 'period in which a human being's identity is not yet fully developed', resulting in the dependency upon parental figures that we see depicted in Philippe Ariès' analysis of childhood.[4] We might consider childhood as a precursor to developments in maturity and responsibility, and the period of time before the physical and social transitions of adolescence begin. Childhood can also be defined, to a certain extent, through dress: the swaddling of infancy and the loose gowns worn by toddlers met the practical needs of a child, but also established messages of social acceptability, fashion, status, and communicated their position in the first stage of the life cycle.

There have been significant historiographical debates surrounding the concept of adolescence: Ariès claimed that prior to the nineteenth century, 'the period of adolescence was virtually unknown', and that it was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that the 'prolongation of childhood began'.[5] This notion has been rightly challenged by scholars such as I. K. Ben-Amos, who argues that Aries' model 'fails to capture the very long transition to full adult life', and suggests that adolescence was a 'long and dynamic phase in the life cycle' prior to, and during, the eighteenth century.[6] More recently, Barbara Crosbie has explored the distinct phase of adolescence in the eighteenth century through apprenticeships, which would have offered training for work as well as encouraging teenagers to leave their parental home. Working and lower middling class girls would have experienced domestic apprenticeships during adolescence by being taken on as servants in large households.[7] The distinction in class is important here: the majority of the girls that are featured in Chapter Two would not have undertaken apprenticeships, but they were of the right age to do so, had they been born into a lower class.

Adolescence might encompass changes in physicality as a result of puberty; changes in identity, and a developing sense of personality and perception of the self; as well as a shift in social status, as the individual was given more responsibility and independence. These changes would have occurred in young people throughout the

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[4] A. Müller, *Fashioning Childhood,* p. 5; P. Ariès, translated by Robert Baldick, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1962) p. 26.
[5] P. Aries, in I. K. Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth,* p. 4.
[6] I. K. Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth,* p. 8.
[7] B. Crosbie, *Age Relations and Cultural Change in Eighteenth Century England*, (Boydell & Brewer, 2020) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/97817874486817> p. 92.

seventeenth and eighteenth century before they were regarded as adults, and it is these experiences that made up the period of adolescence. As Ben-Amos has described, it was a 'series of mental, social and economic processes through which the young were transformed into adults'.[8] Peter Borsay has stressed the impact of "urban renaissance'…on young people', suggesting that geographical and social shifts towards urban centres during the late seventeenth and eighteenth century impacted the role of adolescence within a girl's life cycle.[9] Borsay argues that the stage of adolescence was of crucial importance for young women looking to enter fashionable society, and might occur relatively early in life. [10] Adolescence as a stage of growing up was clearly reflected in dress: accounts in diaries describe the changing appearance of girls as they came to the end of childhood, such as Mally Blundell, who 'at eight years old was beginning to dress like her mother', leaving behind her leading strings and the back fastening, unstiffened bodices they were attached to.[11]

Marriage, particularly, was central to women's lives across this period, it being 'conceived as women's proper and 'natural' destiny'; the social construct of the wife provided a model of identity for women to either strive for or compare themselves against.[12] Mary Abbott claims that 'marriage was, conventionally, the final stage in the metamorphosis from irresponsible youth to adult maturity', suggesting that there was a distinct shift in attitudes and identity that accompanied an increase in social responsibility. [13] These changes were visually emphasised through the kinds of garments available to young women at this time. Emphasising the significance of dress in highlighting these transitions through the life cycle, Vickery writes that 'For most genteel women, the assumption of their most active material role coincided with marriage, when they became mistress of a household', responsible for the inventory and upkeep of domestic goods, of which linens and other items of dress were central. As the mistress of a household, a woman might also choose to share

[8] I. K. Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, p. 8.
[9] P. Borsay, 'Children, Adolescents and Fashionable Urban Society in Eighteenth Century England', in A. Muller, *Fashioning Childhood,* p. 53.
[10] P. Borsay, 'Children, Adolescents and Fashionable Urban Society', p. 62.
[11] A. Buck, *Clothes and the Child*, p. 185.
[12] N. H. Keeble, *The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth Century Women*, p. 116.
[13] M. Abbott, *Life Cycles in England 1560-1720: Cradle to Grave* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 87.

items of dress amongst their staff, making up a portion of their wages in garments, and determining a hierarchy based on who was afforded which items of clothing.[14]

We can also consider this period of courtship and potential marriage as a time in which young women were able to exercise greater choice and independence over their dress, in contrast with earlier life stages that were beholden to parental authority. The term courting, or courtship, here refers to the point in a young middling or upper class woman's life during which she was presented within adult society with the intention of eventually securing a marriage.

It is important to note the development of education for girls and the growing popularity of schools for upper and middling class girls throughout this period, where they would be taught to read and write, but also cultivate skills like sewing, book-keeping and household management, as well as some level of proficiency in an instrument or in dance. Anthony Fletcher argues that the growth of female education was used as 'a defence against fashion and triviality'; parents hoped that by sending them to school, their daughters might achieve social advancement, independence from them through a good marriage, and perhaps support them in their old age.[15] A result of this growth in the ability to read, write and record their experiences was that more women were able to document their thoughts in diaries and letters, and have provided us with evidence of their experiences throughout their life cycles. By 1800, it has been estimated that only 40% of women in England were fully literate, so those women who were able to be educated before this time, even to a limited extent, were still in the minority of their gender and very much reflective of the upper and growing middling classes.[16]

The young Mary Verney, Mary Delany and Barbara Johnson are featured in all the chapters within this section, as these three individuals have left a considerable amount of written and material evidence from their own youth, and in the case of Mary Delany, the childhood of their young relatives as well as their own. Sarah Hurst

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[14] A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (London: Yale University Press, 1998) p. 8.
[15] A. Fletcher, *Growing Up in England: The Experience of Childhood, 1600 – 1914* (London: Yale University Press, 2008) p. 33; P. J. Millar, 'Women's Education, 'Self-Improvement' and Social Mobility: A Late Eighteenth Century Debate', *British Journal of Education Studies*, 20 (1972) pp. 302 – 314, p. 306.
[16] A. J. Lloyd, 'Education, Reading and the Literate Public', *British Library Newspapers* (Detroit: Gale, 2007)

is a key individual in Chapter Three whose diary details her experience of courtship and marriage in her twenties. As well as these recurring figures, we will also examine a number of garments, portraits, diary entries and letters from women who left us with more fragmented evidence of their lives.

One of the most important methodological considerations in this section of the thesis is the use of children and young women's diaries and letters. It is crucial for us to be critical and questioning of the accounts of children, and the adults who regularly wrote on their behalf. Although we are more often than not presented with the voice of parents or guardians rather than direct writing of children, and occasionally given accounts of childhood written in hindsight, these sources can still be incredibly valuable in revealing individual social attitudes towards children and their perceived identities. Portraiture is also used extensively throughout this section, providing visual examples of the styles of dress worn by young women and girls, but this must also be treated with caution; in these sources we see idealised images of childhood and youth, carefully constructed to satisfy the adult who commissioned the portrait. We must also be careful in supposing that the available source materials speak for all young women in this period, or are unquestionably indicative of broad social and cultural beliefs. This thesis focuses on the experience of a number of individual girls and women, and looks to examine them as such: distinct individuals, with different perceptions of self-identity and the life cycle that are, in themselves, valuable historical sources of women's relationships with clothing, the body and ageing in seventeenth and eighteenth century England.

This section focusses on the early stages of a woman's life cycle in the long eighteenth century, and considers how dress was used as a way of communicating individual identity from very early childhood to the point of being able to marry, arguing that throughout these stages, many girls and young women were able to exert some level of control over their outward image to reflect their developing sense of self.

## Chapter One

*'I must have my bib and apron': Children and Their Clothes*

Of all the stages of a woman's life cycle, the earliest ones are, unsurprisingly, those that provide the least amount of direct agency over their appearance. Adult parents, guardians and relatives chose the dress worn by infants and young children, and these choices were informed by notions of practicality, ease of movement, and safety, but could also be used to reflect the status of the family and the fashionable taste of the adult. Young girls might express a desire to dress like their mothers or older sisters; their early material education could include accompanying adults on shopping trips, watching dress fittings, and learning how to sew and embroider, emulating the behaviour of the adult women around them. Where we have evidence of young girls' thoughts and emotions surrounding clothing, it becomes apparent that their guardians may have indulged or humoured their requests, but the ultimate decision lay with the adult who was responsible for the child's wellbeing, and who would be ordering and paying for the garment.

### *Infancy*

We begin with the very first part of childhood: infancy. Anne Buck writes that 'Infancy has always been recognised as a separate state', that time in which a child is entirely dependent upon its guardians, and when clothing is wholly determined by adults.[17] From the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth, swaddling was a common social practice: Buck argues that the swaddling of infancy represented a 'concern for the child's physical well-being', with a long 'mantle' or 'robe' subsequently adopted for crawling and increased movement.[18] E. Ewing describes the swaddling band as a 'complete denial of physical freedom, a total subjection', but this perhaps casts too harsh a judgement on the actions of parents during this period.[19] Genuine concerns for the health and physical wellbeing of infants, and the worry that their soft, yielding bodies might grow out of shape undoubtedly

[17] A. Buck, *Clothes and the Child* (Bedford: Ruth Bean Publishers, 1996) p. 17.
[18] A. Buck, *Clothes and the Child*, p. 24.
[19] E. Ewing, *History of Children's Costume* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1977) p. 16.

contributed to the continued use of swaddling bands and infant stays during the earlier years of this period.

This example of a French swaddling band (see Figure 8) from the beginning of the eighteenth century illustrates the restrictive nature of these infant clothes, but also the level of luxury and taste that could be imbued in these fairly simple garments. The museum label states that this piece was 'worked by the Ladies of the French Court for the Dauphin', explaining the elaborate and decorative floral embroidery befitting a young member of the royal family; a practice that we might assume was also part of the English court.[20] Whilst most children would not have the same quality of swaddling bands as French royalty, this example suggests that even something as well-used and commonplace as a swaddling band could be used to imply the infant wearer's status and lineage.

Other forms of late seventeenth century baby clothes might include caps and bibs. These Christening sets are typical of their kind, with a body and head garment, although these could have been made from silk as well as linen. Although the intended purpose of this outfit was for a specific ritual, similar styles of clothing would be used for everyday wear. As a Christening outfit, these garments may have been treasured as a keepsake by the child's parents, or saved for use by later children, perhaps explaining the number of Christening sets in museum collections, such as the Fashion Museum in Bath. The prevalence of headwear in infant clothing suggests 'a particular concern for the protection of the head', reinforcing the seventeenth and early eighteenth-century concern with the fragility of small children.[21]

These themes of rigidity and protection were continued throughout much of the eighteenth century, prompting wide-scale social debate on the medical dangers of swaddling and infant stays. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, we see the emergence of shorter bodices, less stiffness in the structure of the clothes, and changes in fabric and technique. This child's dress, which might be worn by either a boy or girl, (see Figure 9) from around 1775 is made of block printed cotton, and

[20] V&A Museum Collections, B.13-2001, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O62960/swaddling-band/> [accessed 10/02/18]
[21] A. Buck, *Clothes and the Child*, p. 37.

*Figure 8: Swaddling band, made of white linen and embroidered in white thread. France, 1700 - 1750. V&A Collections, B.13-2001*

*Figure 9: A child's dress, made of white cotton with a floral print. England, 1775 - 1799. V&A Collections, T.100-1924*

shows the change from long, fitted bodices to very short torsos and long, wide skirts at the end of the century, inspired by practicality, but also style and fashion.

Infancy quickly gives way to childhood, when children begin to walk and talk, and think, for themselves. For growing girls, a bib and apron would 'conceal the front of their dress', a back fastening garment with leading strings that could be used as reigns to hold a walking child, but were also regarded as a 'formal, symbolic mark of childhood.'[22] This 1750s silk brocaded bodice (see Figure 10) is a good example of the back fastening and leading strings that characterised the bodices of young girls. Buck writes that bibs and aprons were 'still used for their original protective purpose but had acquired another; a decorative addition to the dress, essential for a well-dressed child.'[23] Here we see how clothing met the practical needs of the child, but also established messages of social acceptability, fashion, status and position in the life cycle.

*Childhood*

It is commonplace to read that 'infants, young boys and girls, and to some extent, adolescents, had little control over how they were clothed'.[24] There is a distinct perception of children in early modern England as being subservient to their parental figures, and never expressing their own desires and thoughts regarding dress. Whilst evidence of children's feelings towards clothing and their identity is scarce compared to the writings of adult women, there are some suggestions to be found. This example, taken from the records of the Verney family, shows the needs and requirements, here written as 'wants', of the five-year-old Mary Verney and the misgivings of her father, Edmund, written by his servant in 1679:

[22] A. Buck, *Clothes and the Child*, pp. 64, 96.
[23] A. Buck, *Clothes and the Child*, p. 71.
[24] L. Sorge-English, *Stays and Body Image in London*, p. 9.

*Figure 10: Child's dress bodice, made from Spitalfields silk brocade with floral decoration. England, 1750. V&A Collections, T.2-1917*

> Mis wants an upper Coate…and I have heere Inclosed a measure taken by a Tayler. She also wants a Petty Coate or too, and a Copple of frockes, my mr Understands not the fashones of Collar or stff Therefore he Leaves those things to you, but he doth not think Silck so Proper for soe Little a Child, and therefore is unwilling to goe to the cost, he soposes Tammy or sum such kind of stuff most fitt for her and Genteele, my Mr desires you to Enquire what sort of Linen Sutes such Children ware and send him word.[25]

The letter evokes an image of a little girl who is sorely lacking a good coat, a fact that has perhaps been noticed by a female relative or maid who would be knowledgeable about the fashions of the period, knows what a young girl requires, and might enjoy fitting Mary for new clothes and encouraging a love of dress. Mary was measured for an 'upper Coate' by a tailor, a relatively complex and structured garment that would not fit a growing child for long. She also needs 'a Petty Coat or too' and a 'Copple of frockes', illustrating the need for a child in her social position to own multiple garments; a burgeoning wardrobe collection. What is perhaps most interesting about this letter is the sense of compromise reached between the requirements of the growing girl and her father's purse; Edmund requested that these garments be ordered, but stipulates that they should be made of 'Tammy' or 'stuff', as 'he doth not think Silck so Proper for soe Little a Child'. Here we see that the main point of contention for Edmund is the fabric; the expense and fragility of silk compared to harder-wearing linen fabrics was deemed inappropriate for little Mary. Edmund askes for advice on 'what sort of Linen Sutes such Children ware' and 'the fashones of Collar or stff' that he 'Understands not', suggesting that his finger is not necessarily on the sartorial pulse of children's clothing, and that he was hesitant to dress his young daughter in something that might be inappropriate or unfashionable. This letter gives us an insight into the material literacy required to properly outfit a young girl, as well as allowing us to imagine the undoubtedly amusing exchange when Mary's somewhat bewildered father is faced with the prospect of ordering her new clothes.

This set of dresses (see Figure 11) from 1740 illustrates both the similarities and differences between clothes designed for infants, and those for young girls. Both the girl's dress and the infant's bodice and skirt are made from the same fabric: ivory Spitalfields silk, and embroidered with popular eighteenth-century floral motifs.

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[25] M. Verney, ed. F. P. Verney, Memoirs of the Verney Family, vol. IV, From the Restoration to the Revolution 1660 to 1696 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1899) pp. 176-177.

Perhaps in the making of the larger dress, there was enough spare fabric for the younger sibling; or the smaller gown was intended to mimic that of a more adult outfit. The dresses both fasten at the back, and would probably have been worn with leading strings and a style of soft stays to maintain posture. One of the main differences is in the shape of the bodice; Buck observes that 'once out of infancy [girls'] dress began to show the same shaping as women's dress', with longer, pointed bodices.[26] This example of another infant bodice (see Figure 12) from 1740-1770 illustrates the shortness of the torso in infant clothing during the eighteenth century. The very practical, and somewhat obvious, reasoning for this is that the body of an infant is simply not long enough to warrant a full bodice, but there is also an implication that once infancy has been left behind for girlhood, the body is able to be shaped from something comparatively amorphous and fragile into its more rigid, recognisably female form.

A knowledge and awareness of clothing at a young age is something that continues from the end of the seventeenth century through to the eighteenth. In Mary Delany's autobiography and correspondences, she recalls a moment from her youth, in 1715, when her father was arrested and her home stormed by armed men during the night. Mary's uncle and father were implicated in the Jacobite uprising of 1715, after her uncle maintained correspondence with James II, and her family were taken to the home of Lord Townsend, who was a prominent Whig in government and had been made Secretary of State for the Northern Department the year before. Mary's younger sister was being hurriedly dressed to leave the house:

> My mother's maid was with difficulty admitted into the room to dress us. My little sister, then but nine years' old, had conceived no terror from this intrusion, but when the maid was going to put on her frock, called out: 'No, no, I won't wear my frock, I must have my bib and apron; I am going to Lord Townshend's.[27]

[26] A. Buck, *Clothes and the Child*, p. 96.
[27] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover, The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol I (London: Richard Bentley, 1886), p. 10.

*Figure 11: Set of child's dresses, brocaded Spitalfields silk. England, 1750. V&A Collections, T696&A-1913*

The nine-year-old Anne Granville, having been abruptly awoken by an intrusion in her home, insists that the maid dress her in a full bib and apron, rather than a frock. The frock would have been the quickest and easiest option with which to dress Anne, but she was mindful that she would be at the home of a prominent figure, and wished to dress accordingly. There is a sense that Anne finds the prospect of clothing and her outward appearance much more pressing than the adults in the situation; she is not concerned by political intrigue, only that she be dressed appropriately. The parental preoccupation with a girl's appearance described by Fletcher previously has created the issue in this situation: Anne knew that the way she was dressed was usually of critical significance, and did not differentiate between a normal occasion, and one of significantly more danger and urgency.[28]

In the portrait, *The Second Duchess of Bedford and her Children*, painted by Charles Jervas around 1712 (see Figure 13), we find depictions of mourning dress being worn by the four children of the Duke and Duchess of Bedford: Rachel, Elizabeth, Wriothesly and John.[29] The children are all at different ages, making this painting an interesting study in comparisons of dress. Lady Rachel has already moved on to more adolescent clothing, reminiscent of her mother's mantua and petticoat. Elizabeth and the two boys are wearing back fastening gowns and skirts, with stiff bodices that give them all a rigid and upright posture. Leading strings are visible on the boys' bodices, indicating their juvenile status. Ewing argues that 'To dress small boys like girls seems to contradict the fact that every effort was made to turn the child into an adult as soon as possible', but this sentiment perhaps overlooks the practicalities of young children's dress.[30] Long skirts allowed for crawling, walking, and greater ease when teaching a child to use the toilet, whilst the bodices and infant stays reflected the 'deep seated fear among many that the [child's] body would not be stable'.[31] It is also possible that children's clothing was distinctly feminine during this period as a result of the overwhelmingly

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[28] A. Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, p. 7.
[29] Lady Rachel, born 1700, would have been around twelve at the time of the painting. Her sister Elizabeth was born in 1704, making her around eight years old. Wriothesly was born in 1708, so is around four years old in the painting, and his brother John is approximately two years old, having been born in 1710. C. Jervas, *The second Duchess of Bedford and her Children* (Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire, c.1712) in A. Buck, *Clothes and the Child*, p. 145.
[30] E. Ewing, *History of Children's Costume*, p. 31.
[31] L. Sorge-English, *Stays and Body Image in London: The Staymaking Trade, 1680-1810* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014) p. 112.

*Figure 12: Child's bodice, made of golden-yellow damask. England, 1740 - 1770. Manchester Art Gallery Collections, 1953.211*

*Figure 13: The Duchess of Bedford and Her Children, C. Jervas, c. 1712. Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire. From A. Buck, Clothes and the Child (Bedford: Ruth Bean, 1996) p. 145*

female involvement with the raising of infants and young children; they were dressed in the likeness of the people who spent the most time with them.

Much later in the life of Mary Delany, she became something of a mentor for her young great-niece, Georgina Mary, bestowing advice and suggestions upon her. In 1774, when Mary was seventy-four years old, she wrote a letter intended for her three-year-old great-niece:

> I hope I need not recommend to you neatness and regularity in taking care of cloaths, &c., keeping them in nice order, and proper repair not depending on its being done for you… As the cleanly part of your dressing will mostly be done when you first get up, bestow as little time on dress as possible, but let it always be neat and suitable to your circumstances (or position,) and never extravagantly in the fashion, which is very vulgar, and shows levity of mind.[32]

Here we find the words of an elderly woman, advising a small child to practice restraint and to not be swept up in fashionable excess. Mary advises Georgina on taking proper care of her clothes, storing them neatly and repairing them as necessary; confirming in the child's mind that clothes are an important investment, and also a way of judging character. There is also a sense that clothes are the responsibility of the individual, 'not depending on its being done for you', further emphasising that clothing was an extension of the person, and could be used to interpret their social and moral value.

Another letter was written for Georgina in 1777, when Mary was seventy-seven and her great-niece was six. Lady Llanover, the compiler of Mary's autobiography, supposed that the letter was intended to be given to Georgina when she was a little older.[33] This extract is entirely concerned with dress and fashion:

> this leads me to the article of dress; a most tender point, for I have given less offence in observing on a moral failing, than in setting a cap in better order! The fashion, if you chance to live with the beau monde, must be complied with; but sense forbids it should be to any extremity, and, indeed, in my youth it was reckon'd very vulgar to be extravagantly in the fashion: but the fair lady who I hope will be your constant companion, when she finds you are upon the point of being seduced by her enemies Vanity or Assurance, will give you a twitch and save you. In the country nothing is more absurd than to dress fantastically, and turn the brains of your humble neighbours; who will pique

[32] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover, The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol 2, p. 56.
[33] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover, The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol 2, p. 311.

> themselves in apeing the squire's daughter! And believe me this can't be innocently done, as (such an example) will certainly interfere with their station of life, and make them less willing to submit to the duties of it. Dress ought always to be suited to the situation and circumstances of the person. The appearance of great economy, where economy is required, is most respectable, where it is not, it is reproachable; tho' never to be neglected by the most opulent. The friend at your elbow (Lady Propriety) is the best frisseur in the world, and the most reasonable. She understands every part of dress to admiration. She will never suffer you to wear your hat with one edge to touch your nose, and the other edge perpendicularly in the air! with long streamers dangling like a poor mad woman, who I remember lived in a hollow-tree and a toad was her companion; she used to beg ribbons to dress herself with, but yet was not so mad as to wear her head-dress too high to go under the arch of her hollow-tree! Fashions are fluctuating, by the time you wear lappets or a womanly dress it may be less lofty, but whatever it is bear in mind that moderation is always genteel.[34]

This piece of writing is fascinating in its approach to dress, fashion, societal norms, childhood and identity. Mary writes to her great-niece in an engaging and lively manner, evoking anthropomorphised virtues and fairy-tale stories to illustrate her lessons on propriety for a young girl. Her tongue-in-cheek remark at the beginning, 'a most tender point, for I have given less offence in observing on a moral failing, than in setting a cap in better order', emphasises the emotional connection between individuals and their clothes; it is perhaps more distressing for many to be criticised for their dress than their actions, and Mary finds herself more readily able to critique dress. Mary advises Georgina to practice restraint and avoid extremities of fashion, though staying within the bounds of the fashionable 'beau monde'.

There is a clear sense of class and status in the letter; Mary and Georgina are both of wealthy, high society families and Mary explains to her grand-niece the responsibility of dressing suitably, and not provoking envy amongst the working class. While this notion of dressing to set an example for the lower classes but not extravagantly enough to cause them to seek to rise above their own social class would probably not have been perceived as particularly gracious or helpful by the 'humble neighbours', if it was indeed noticed at all, it is important to acknowledge that Mary is creating a clear link between class and dress to the young Georgina, further emphasising the link between dress, identity and social status in the child's mind.

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[34] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover, The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol 2, pp. 310-311.

In her description of the 'poor mad woman' who lived in a hollow tree, Mary is emphasising the practicalities of clothes to Georgina: even this woman did not wear a hat 'too high to go under the arch of her hollow-tree!' It is an anecdote no doubt intended to amuse Mary's great-niece, but it also conveys the importance placed on fashionable restraint by the now elderly woman. We might question the extent to which Mary is reflecting on her own sartorial choices as a young woman and attempting to impart the wisdom of hindsight on her great-niece; Mary had, however, been regarded as a source of fashionable advice for most of her life; her female friends and relatives wrote to her for sartorial help at various stages of their life cycles, and these examples will be explored in their relevant chapters.

In the 1742 painting, *The Graham Children* by William Hogarth (see Figure 14) we can see more visual representations of the back fastening bodices, aprons and baby caps for infants and young girls.[35] The sheen of the fabric suggests that Hogarth painted the children as wearing silk, potentially in their finest clothes, indicating their status as children of the prosperous Apothecary to the King, Daniel Graham. The painting was a posthumous depiction of the infant Thomas; the children were perhaps painted in luxurious and beautiful clothes to create a scene of them at their very best, alive, and charming. The choice of clothing in portraiture is a deliberate one, and the Graham children are an example of the height of children's fashion in the mid-eighteenth century.

[35] From left to right, the infant Thomas who died prior to the painting's commission, aged around two; the eldest daughter Henrietta, born 1733, aged nine; Anna Maria, born 1738, aged five; the eldest son, Richard, born 1735, aged seven.
W. Hogarth, *The Graham Children* (The National Gallery, London, 1742)

*Figure 14: The Graham Children, W. Hogarth, 1742. National Portrait Gallery, NG4756*

In 1780, when Mary Delany was eighty years old, she wrote to her niece Mrs Port concerning Georgina's appearance at the upcoming Royal Birthday:

> I have made her [Georgina] up a pink lutestring for the King's b. day; as perhaps some of the Royal Family may spy her out when she is peeping at them. I have tried her hair up, but her forehead is now too bald, tho' it will not appear so another year with a little management of shaving the young hair. She has a very easy, good air, and a fine chest. The coat maker advises girts to be fastened on ye top of the stays, and crossed over the shoulder blades and fastened before, which will not appear, being under her slip, to keep her back flat for a year or so, but I would not have it done without your approbation. Tho' I don't turn up her hair I don't suffer it to make a dowdy of her by covering her forehead, but only a little thin shade about an inch over it, which looks becoming and natural.[36]

In this letter, we see Mary deferring to the authority of Georgina's mother: 'but I would not have it done without your approbation', suggesting a hierarchy of adult authority when concerned with the appearance of young girls. It is unfortunate that Mary's accounts do not provide much insight into what the nine-year-old Georgina thought of her 'too bald' forehead, but we can assume that she was greatly pleased at the prospect of receiving a new silk dress for the occasion. The emphasis on Georgina looking 'becoming' and 'natural' further suggests that there was a focus on children dressing in socially appropriate ways; mimicking adult styles of dress completely was not necessarily advisable, particularly in the later eighteenth century, and Georgina's 'natural' childhood charm should remain visible and apparent. Mary had sought the advice of a coat maker with regards to Georgina's posture, who recommends the use of structural 'girts' to be worn over the stays to 'keep her back flat for a year or so', again highlighting the concern with children's posture that was clearly still prevalent towards the end of the eighteenth century.

The need for structure and undergarments was a theme throughout this period: in the *Letters and Papers of the Banks Family of Reresby Abbey*, we find that in 1721, the five-year-old Lettice Banks 'wants a hoop ever ill. This is so bad she hath she can scarce ware it'.[37] The family's servant, William Burbidge, writes to Joseph Banks on behalf of little Lettice, inquiring as to whether the young girl might be bought the replacement garment that she needs. Around twenty days later,

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[36] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover, The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol 2, pp. 526-527.
[37] J. W. F. Hill, ed., *Letters and Papers of the Banks Family of Reresby Abbey* 1704-60, (Lincoln: Lincoln Record Society, vol 45, 1952) p. 75.

William writes to Joseph again, but this time to inform him that the two-year-old 'Miss Betty wants [needs] a pair of new shoose very ill', presumably as she would be beginning to walk at this age.[38] Here we can see that, particularly in the case of Lettice, young children could be expected to wear garments that would give them a fashionable silhouette, and that their items needed replacing much more frequently than those of adults.

Another valuable source of eighteenth-century children's clothing is the fashion album of Barbara Johnson, edited by Natalie Rothstein. Barbara Johnson, born in 1738, kept a meticulous record of her clothing throughout her life, keeping swatches of fabrics and noting prices and lengths of outfits. The earliest entries are dated 1746, when Barbara would have been eight years old. Madeline Ginsburg comments that 'even in early youth, she [Barbara] was fashionably dressed', in a 'flower'd Calicoe long sack' and a 'Blue damask Coat' (see Figure 15).[39] The prevalence of coats and 'Robe-Coat[s]' might suggest that Barbara's mother 'permitted the less restrictive adult styles' on her young daughter, giving us an insight into the range and variety of parental attitudes to children's dress.[40] Barbara's childhood garments were bright and patterned, and suggest a varied and beautiful wardrobe for a young girl.

[38] *Ibid.*
[39] M. Ginsburg, 'Barbara Johnson and Fashion' in N. Rothstein, ed. *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1987) pp. 18-29, p. 20; N. Rothstein, ed. *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics*, p. 51.
[40] M. Ginsburg, 'Barbara Johnson and Fashion', p. 20.


*Figure 15: Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics, 1746 - 1823. V&A Collections, T219-1973*

There are similarities between the approach of Barbara's mother, Jane Johnson, and the earlier example of Edmund Verney in the seventeenth century. 'Barbara's childhood sacks were made from washable materials': linen, calico, cotton and stuff, as opposed to more adult silk, just as Mary Verney was only permitted to wear linen as a child.[41] Although Barbara had silk coats, her 'sacks', or sack-back gowns, were made from more durable fabrics, presumably to allow for washing, as Ginsburg surmises, but also to avoid the cost of re-making entire gowns in silk as Barbara grew. Again, we can see the practicalities that seem to have dictated many adult decisions with regards to children's clothes, even if the children themselves would rather have worn something more luxurious.

We can see, then, that children's clothing during this period began as the protective, yet restrictive, swaddling bands and head caps, and progressed to back fastening bodices with leading strings and full skirts. At the very end of this period, the shape and fabric of children's dresses underwent significant change, reflecting the new popularity of cotton in English dress, and the short torsos of Regency dress. What is clear, however, is that whilst children's clothing does take on a similar style to adult dress, there are features that clearly identify the wearers as being children, rather than simply miniature adults.

These clothes were used by children and their adult guardians to express familial social position, awareness of fashionable trends and to cater to the specific physical requirements of children. These young girls would have begun gathering knowledge about the construction and fabric of garments, learnt from their mothers, female relatives, or maids, and were given the opportunity to voice their desires about what they would be wearing, with varying degrees of success. Parents and guardians appear to reach compromises between the needs of young girls and financial cost and practicalities, attempting to guide and advise their clothing choices; although some fathers were not above admitting that their own knowledge of this topic was lacking. This first stage of the life cycle was a formative one; girls had the least amount of direct agency over their outward appearance, but their exposure to clothing, fashionable ideals and the beginnings of a material education

[41] M. Ginsburg, 'Barbara Johnson and Fashion', p. 21.

laid a foundation from which they could develop their own tastes and styles as they reached adolescence.

## Chapter Two

*'I beg that I may have a tipit bought me': Dressing Adolescents*

Adolescence in the early modern period was a time of transitions, characterised by the 'tension…felt by a young woman living in a changing body'.[42] This stage of the life cycle was marked by a sense of moving towards adulthood, and being allowed somewhat more access to adult society. Peter Borsay describes adolescents as being 'on the threshold of entry into the adult world', and this is reflected in their increased presence in public social spaces, increased familial responsibility and styles of dress.[43] Anne Buck identifies a crucial moment in girls' dress: 'when she left off the back fastening bodice for a gown in the current style, a girl became a young woman', highlighting this sartorial choice as a key social indicator that the stage of childhood was over, and that adulthood would be fast approaching.[44]

During this stage of the life cycle, adolescent girls experienced a growing level of agency over their appearance in comparison to their childhood years; there was more scope for girls to articulate their wants and needs, as well as request the money needed to purchase items of clothing. During this stage, adolescent girls would increase their material literacy, and become more proficient in knowing how to select fabrics and styles, as well as making and mending clothes. There was still a financial barrier; adolescent girls of the middling and upper classes would have stayed at home, under paternal control and financially dependent, until they were of marrying age; but this barrier could be negotiated with their guardians, considering their growing bodies and new access to social spaces that required appropriate forms of dress.

It has been argued that during this period of European history 'the prolongation of childhood [adolescence] began', challenging the views of traditional historians of childhood such as Philippe Ariès, who argued that middling and upper class girls in early modern Europe were frequently mistaken for adult women based

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[42] S. Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013) p. 54.
[43] P. Borsay, 'Children, Adolescents and Fashionable Urban Society', p. 58.
[44] A. Buck, *Clothes and the Child*, p. 187.

on their appearance and behaviour.[45] It is clear from our sources that there is a stage between that of the childhood 'girl' and 'young woman' described by Buck; that there is not an immediate jump to adulthood, but a more measured transition through adolescence, allowing 'access [to] the world of adulthood at the earliest possible opportunity' but retaining the safety of parental guardianship and care.[46] This stage of the life cycle was one of safe, controlled experimentation with clothing and identity, with adolescent girls able to work out how they wanted to look, and what colours, styles and fabrics they preferred within the confines of adult control.

*Adolescence in Portraiture*

We can observe this gradual movement towards adulthood in the portrait *Colonel Andrew Bissett and his Family* by E. Seeman, painted around 1708 (see Figure 16). In the painting, the family are gathered together, with Bissett wearing his military uniform and a formal wig. His wife, Constance, is seated with their infant daughter, who is hidden behind her mother's silk skirts. There is a shadowed figure of a boy in the background, which may have been added to represent their son Andrew, who died six years before the painting was made. Next to Constance is a young girl, in her teens: Andrew Bissett's niece, Marjorie Winram.

There is a distinction between the dresses of the General's wife and adolescent niece Marjorie: whilst Marjorie is no longer wearing the back-fastening gowns of childhood, and has instead a mantua with a structured stomacher, her dress is made of a block yellow silk.[47] In contrast, her aunt's mantua is floral damask silk, with larger lace sleeve ruffles than Marjorie's, as well as a contrasting petticoat: arguably a more formal and mature dress. Both have the typical low necklines that display the decolletage and upswept hair, kept away from the face, and Marjorie's dress appears to have gathered fabrics in the back to create a ruffle and train, as well as having her hold the skirts up to display the point of her shoe. The painting suggests that

[45] I. K. Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, p. 4; Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1962) p. 61.
[46] P. Borsay, 'Children, Adolescents and Fashionable Urban Society', p. 62.
[47] There is no recorded date of birth for Marjorie Winram, but we know that she married in 1734 and died in 1765. She appears to be an adolescent in the painting.

*Figure 16: Colonel Andrew Bissett and his Family, E. Seeman, 1708. Private collection.*

Constance is clearly the matriarchal figure in the scene, seated and holding the hand of her infant child; in contrast, Marjorie is presented as an upright figure of a girl approaching womanhood, and being dressed in an attractive, fashionable garment that could be worn in elite social spaces. Marjorie is old enough to be wearing some fashionable adult styles, but the fabrics and accessories are carefully edited to make it age appropriate.

An interesting depiction of young women at a variety of ages can be found in Johan Zoffany's painting, *Three Daughters of John, 3rd Earl of Bute*, dated between 1763-4 (see Figure 17). The three girls, from left to right, are the youngest, Lady Louisa Stuart (born in 1757) aged seven; the eldest daughter, Lady Anne Stuart (born 1746) aged eighteen; and the middle daughter, Lady Caroline Stuart (born 1750) aged fourteen. The three girls are depicted in the grounds of Lutton Hoo playing with pet squirrels, suggesting that even Anne, who would have been rapidly approaching adulthood, retained a sense of 'the playful and slightly mischievous aspect of childhood' and shared this with her sisters.[48] The painting also illustrates their close relationships and the didactic role that could be taken on by Anne and Caroline; once Louisa was old enough to transition into the same colourful silk dresses owned by her sisters, she could draw upon their knowledge and experience, perhaps being given their old dresses to have tailored to her shape.

Anne and Caroline's outfits are distinctly different from their younger sister Louisa's: she is dressed in a modest white bodice and skirt, which seems to be fastened at the back, although this is not made entirely clear in the image. The adolescent girls, in contrast, are clearly depicted in vibrantly coloured silk gowns with matching petticoats, lace sleeves and very fine lace or muslin aprons, marking them as older and at a different stage of the life cycle to Louisa. Buck states that 'fabrics of new clothes meant change for the child, and signified movement towards the next stage of growing up'.[49] Zoffany's depiction of these young ladies' dress is

[48] D. Perkins, 'Johan Zoffany, *Three Daughters of John, 3rd Earl of Bute*' (Nov 2003) [http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/zoffany-three-daughters-of-john-3rd-earl-of-bute-t07864] <accessed 22/02/18>
[49] A. Buck, *Clothes and the Child*, p. 100.


*Figure 17: Three Daughters of John, 3rd Earl of Bute, J. Zoffany, c. 1763-4. Tate Collections, T07864*

undoubtedly symbolic, but also suggests a practicality in early modern dress; the adolescent girls are trusted to wear more expensive and elaborate outfits and not dirty or damage them, whilst Louisa is kept in what appears to be a washable fabric, most likely linen. Silks, fine muslins and more tailored gowns were the remit of older girls, and something for Louisa to look forward to as she aged. The elder girls' hair is coiffed and styled, implying that as girls progressed through adolescence, a greater amount of time was devoted to dressing and adapting their physical appearance; a result of what Anthony Fletcher has described as an 'insistent preoccupation' with the construction of femininity and preparation for marriage.[50] Of course, this painting, the pair to a commissioned portrait of the Earl of Bute's sons, sought to present his children in their ideal forms: joyful, elegant and attractive, reflecting their individual charms, but also demonstrating the wealth and status of their father, and highlighting the girls as highly eligible marriage material.

Another eighteenth-century portrait that provides us with a visual distinction between adolescent girls and children is the *Portrait of Sir Edward Walpole's Children*, painted in 1747 by Stephen Slaughter (see Figure 18).[51] In this depiction of Edward's four children, we see the three daughters, Laura, Maria and Charlotte with their brother Edward, in various stages of the life cycle. Laura, born in approximately 1734, was thirteen in the portrait. Maria, the middle daughter, was born in 1736, making her eleven. The youngest daughter, Charlotte was born in 1738, and was eight at the time the portrait was painted. Aileen Ribeiro describes how the 'eldest sister is dressed in a gown of brocaded silk in a delicate floral pattern, the fine corded stomacher being trimmed with ribbon bows…[the] younger girls are still in their childish back-fastening stiffened bodices, and skirts; their plain linen chemises contrast with the lace-trimmed shift assumed by their elder sister who has entered the world of adult dress.'[52]

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[50] A. Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, p. 23.
[51] S. Slaughter, *Portrait of Sir Edward Walpole's Children*, 1747 (Minneapolis Institute of Art) [https://useum.org/artwork/Portrait-of-Sir-Edward-Walpole-s-Children-Stephen-Slaughter-1747] <accessed 28/02/18>
[52] A. Ribeiro, *A Visual History of Costume: The Eighteenth Century* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1983) p. 58.

*Figure 18: Portrait of Sir Edward Walpole's Children, S. Slaughter, 1747. Minneapolis Institute of Art, 31.106*

The difference in adolescent and young girls' clothing is clear in this portrait: Laura's outfit is made from finer, more expensive fabric and is decorated with bows, lace cuffs and an apron. Her sisters' bodices and skirts are plain and simple, although they share the fashionable scooped neckline. Similarly, the younger Maria and Charlotte wear full caps on their heads, whilst Laura seems to have a decorative lace headpiece that is more for appearance than practicality. All of these are clear indicators that Laura is older, and closer to adulthood.

The depiction of her body mirrors the ideals of fashionable feminine beauty in the eighteenth century, as described by Fletcher: a 'notion of fragility and delicacy, with a stress on uprightness of posture and a languid air'; Laura is held upright by her stays and stomacher, with her body moulded into a typically feminine conical shape that is more clearly defined than in her sisters' outfits. [53] Laura's hand on her younger brother's shoulder is reminiscent of a mother's pose; Slaughter has placed her in a more mature and responsible posture to emphasise her place as the eldest of her siblings. She also carries a basket of fruit, perhaps a nod to her future role as a mother and head of a household that will provide for her own children.

*Negotiating Fashions: Mary Verney's Letters*

In the memoirs of the Verney family, we find descriptions of an adolescent Mary Verney, often referred to as Moll or Molly, born in 1675. In Chapter One, we saw an example of Mary at the age of five, requiring coats and skirts. When Mary was thirteen, an account of her wardrobe was given by Lady Cary Gardiner, Mary's great-aunt. The position of great-aunt as one of providing advice and care for young girls was well entrenched in societal thought since at least the seventeenth century; Mary Delany's role, discussed in the previous chapter, is evidence that this practice survived well into the eighteenth. Lady Gardiner writes here about the thirteen year old Mary's mourning wardrobe for her father, Edmund, who died in 1688:

> She is forst to ware her blak coat under her whit fustion, & tis a ridiculous sit to see her whit coat next her cloth crape coat for A father; she must have stoff

[53] A. Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, p. 261.

> to make her a petycoat to her night gownd, her old callowco petycoat I shall leve as far as it will goo & she must have 5 or 7 of the narrow lases whc Bell has on hers & blk silke to make it up; she must have 3 yds of any blk cloth crape to peas out her crape coat whc is to short to ware for shee is much growne. Bell must bespeak a pare of blak leather shus for her & charge the woman to make them strong, the very sols of her shus is worn off, she wd have them hansome as well as strong. She rons much A bout, & tis better to ware out her cloths then be sickly; she wants 2 blk top knots of tafety, a pare of blk leather glovs & some blk pins - wch things if she could be without them I wod not rit for them.[54]

It is likely that Lady Gardiner is writing to her brother, Mary's grandfather, Sir Ralph Verney, to request more items of clothing for the adolescent girl. Lady Gardiner presents an image of Mary as being sorely lacking in appropriate mourning clothes for her father: 'tis a ridiculous sit to see her whit coat next her cloth crape coat for A father'. Lady Gardiner requests black silk, black cloth, black gloves and black shoes, suggesting that Mary was required to wear full mourning wear for her father, rather than a white and black outfit, such as those in the portrait *The second Duchess of Bedford and her Children*; as she was no longer a child, and her father's death had happened very recently, she would have to follow the strictest adherence to first mourning.[55] We see evidence of Lady Gardiner looking to adjust or mend Mary's clothing: 'her old callowco petycoat I shall leve as far as it will goo', 'have 3 yds of any blk cloth crape to peas out her crape coat whc is to short to ware for shee is much growne', drawing attention to the difficulty and expense of dressing a growing girl.

Lady Gardiner's attitude to Mary's shoes, and the general wearing of adolescent clothes is interesting. She writes: 'the very sols of her shus is worn off, she wd have them hansome as well as strong. She rons much A bout, & tis better to ware out her cloths then be sickly', suggesting that, at least for Lady Gardiner, there was an awareness and acceptance that young girls would be active and energetic at the expense of their wardrobe. This perhaps challenges widely held notions that, during the seventeenth century, children and adolescents were believed to require 'physical restraint' for their own good; Lady Gardiner suggests that if Mary were to remain still to preserve her clothes, she would have a greater chance of being 'sickly'.[56] Despite

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[54] M. Verney, ed. F. P. Verney, Memoirs of the Verney Family, p. 443.
[55] A more detailed exploration of mourning dress can be found in Chapter Eight.
[56] C. Rose, *Children's Clothes Since 1750*, p. 11.

acknowledging that the wearing out of clothing is a casualty of youth, Mary's great-aunt insists that she must have certain accessories: 'wch things if she could be without them I wod not rit for them.', suggesting that there were social expectations of appearance that were imperative for an upper class adolescent girl like Mary, particularly for the very public occasion of mourning. We can see in this letter the emphasis which Lady Gardiner places on Mary's wardrobe as a sign of her propriety, social status and even respect for her deceased father; it is entirely possible that Mary's perception of herself and the way she sought to construct her outward image was very much influenced by her great-aunt.

A year later, the now fourteen year old Mary wrote to her brother Edmund:

> [Mary] is anxious to join him in London for 'the Crownenasion, and I want clothes so mitily that I doe not know what to do, they will scarse hang on my back.' A tailor's bill for 'a close fitting Taby jacket' seems to prove that Molly had her wish.[57]

Here we see Molly expressing a pressing need for clothes, as the ones she currently owned no longer fit her: 'they will scarse hang on my back', particularly if she was to be seen at the coronation of William III and Mary II. J. Martin suggests that when a girl 'was presented at Court –[this was] the formal recognition that she was now an adult'; although this comment was made about girls in the eighteenth century, we can see the importance and emphasis that Mary placed on her appearance for the occasion. Whilst she was not going to Court specifically, Mary's anxiety to accompany her brother to the 'Crownenasion', and being seen in the presence of royalty, is perhaps suggestive of a desire to appear mature and experienced, and to be seen by other members of the gentry as a fashionable young lady.[58] It is interesting that it was 'a close fitting Taby jacket' that was billed at Mary's request; presumably she would grow out of this garment faster than something less tailored to her young body. However, it would appear than on this occasion, Mary was permitted to pursue fashion over practicality.

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[57] M. Verney, ed. F. P. Verney, Memoirs of the Verney Family, p. 448.
[58] J. Martin, *Wives and Daughters: Women and Children in the Georgian Country House* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2004) p. 60.

This awareness of fashionable dress only developed as Mary aged, and became a confident and assertive fifteen-year-old, who wrote her own letters to Sir Ralph Verney:

> I know my mourning will cost a good deall of mony, but I believe you wod have me morn hansomly for so deare a brother, and since ther is none left but myself to morn for him, and I beg that I may have a tipit bought me, since every gentellwoman has one as makes any show in the world, it will cost £5 at least and my lady Gardiner is unwilling to by it till she has orders from you, but I hope if I do gett one you will not be angery.[59]

In this letter, Mary writes to her only surviving male family member, her grandfather Sir Ralph Verney, protesting his decision to spend as little as possible on her new mourning dress after the death of her brother, Edmund. We see Ralph Verney's concerns with the practicalities of adolescent dress: he is reluctant to spend excessive money on clothing for Mary 'seeing she grows apace', and had required mourning-wear on two other occasions, that of her father, Edmund, and her brother, Ralph, in the past four years. Mary equates her need for fine mourning clothes with her desire to remember her brother, and to properly present herself as a grieving sister: 'I believe you wod have me morn hansomly for so deare a brother, and since ther is none left but myself to morn for him'. Mary not only reminds her grandfather of the social importance of being seen to mourn appropriately, she also emphasises her position as Sir Ralph's only remaining grandchild from his deceased son, Edmund. Mary depicts herself as taking on the sole responsibility for mourning her brother, whether to display her awareness of the familial legacy that now rests on her, or, perhaps more cynically, to arouse sympathy from her grandfather that might result in her much desired tippet.

Here, Mary asserts her sense of self-identity, claiming that 'every gentellwoman has one [a tippet] as makes any show in the world', and implying that she perceives herself as one of these gentlewomen, and thus must dress accordingly. The tippet was a type of neck or shoulder covering that was often, for elite women, made of fur and accessorised with jewellery and buckles; an example of a fur tippet in the later half of the seventeenth century can be seen in the portrait of Mary Hill, Lady Killigrew. (see Figure 19)[60] Although it is unclear whether Mary was asking for a fur

[59] M. Verney, ed. F. P. Verney, *Memoirs of the Verney Family*, p. 460.
[60] A. Van Dyke, *Mary Hill, Lady Killigrew,* Belton House, National Trust, NT436019.

tippet, or one made of a lighter fabric that would drape more similarly to a scarf, she has clearly seen them being worn by other women and wishes to emulate this herself.

There is another suggestion of Mary's responsibility to represent her family; she will make a 'show in the world', and this will reflect her family's social position. This is something that is touched upon by Borsay, when he describes the ways in which 'youth became a more public phenomenon, part of the expanding public sphere', although here we see an example of this public adolescence in the seventeenth century, rather than the eighteenth.[61] It is telling that, despite her 'lady Gardiner' being the one who will actually purchase Mary's tippet, she still feels obliged to inform Sir Ralph of her intentions, and if not ask for permission, then at least for forgiveness: 'I hope if I do gett one you will not be angery'. This supports the social hierarchy described by Fletcher, that 'a girl's prime obligation was always obedience to her parents and principally to her father'; Mary, having lost her father and maintaining minimal contact with her unwell mother, defers to the authority of her grandfather; but not without the implication that she is performing a social formality and may well be able to have a tippet anyway.[62] Here we see an adolescent girl clearly establishing her own sense of identity and depicting where she feels she fits into the social hierarchy, displaying her knowledge of popular fashions and expected norms. Mary adheres to performative familial structures, but also alludes to her willingness to circumnavigate these in order to acquire particular garments and fully represent herself through dress.

[61] P. Borsay, 'Children, Adolescents and Fashionable Urban Society', p. 58.
[62] A. Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, p. 23.

*Figure 19: Mary Hill, Lady Killigrew, after A. Van Dyck, 1670 - 1699. Belton House, NT436019. Lady Killigrew wears a fur tippet draped over her shoulder.*

*An Adolescent Wardrobe: Barbara Johnson*

An eighteenth-century example of an adolescent girl's wardrobe can be found in the fashion album of Barbara Johnson. When she was thirteen, Barbara was given two gowns, a 'Grey poplin long sack' and a 'black stuff Gown' to wear in mourning for the Prince of Wales, beginning a long trend in acquiring mourning wear that spanned her entire life, and is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Eight.[63] That Barbara and her family wore mourning for the royalty gives us a sense of their fairly sizeable social standing and wealth; from her adolescence to her adulthood, Barbara receives a number of expensive and fashionable outfits. Two years later, in 1753, Barbara was given another mourning outfit, 'a Grey figurd Stuff long Sack', for the second mourning of her grandmother.[64] This sack required eighteen yards of fabric at half a crown per yard, or £2 in total. There is a suggestion that Barbara Johnson did not encounter the same resistance to the purchase of new mourning wear that was experienced by Mary Verney, perhaps implying some level of changing attitudes to adolescent clothing over time, or simply illustrating that the Johnson's were more willing to buy clothing for their daughter than Sir Ralph. Barbara's wardrobe did not entirely consist of mourning-wear; at fifteen years old she received her first riding habit: 'a dark blue Cambles Riding dress'.[65] Madeline Ginsburg has described riding wear as 'Essentially dress for an active sport…increasingly worn also for travelling and informal outdoor leisure wear. Made by tailors, they were expensive to make and trim', suggesting that at fifteen, Barbara was experiencing an increased freedom through her outdoor pursuits and was able to dress accordingly.[66]

At the age of seventeen, we can see that Barbara had in her possession multiple silk dresses: she describes a 'flower'd silk negligee 1755. sixteen yards 4s a yard' and 'Two flower'd-silk Coats the same Silk 12s a yard' (see Figure 20).[67] Both swatches suggest beautifully embroidered silks that would have been highly fashionable in the mid-eighteenth century; the yardages provided imply that Barbara was also adhering to fashionable draping and wide silhouettes.

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[63] N. Rothstein, ed. *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics*, p. 52.
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] *Ibid.*
[66] M. Ginsburg, 'Barbara Johnson and Fashion', p. 21.
[67] N. Rothstein, ed. *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics*, p. 52.


*Figure 20: Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics, 1746 - 1823. V&A Collections, T219-1973*

We might question whether it was at this point that the adolescent Barbara was beginning to venture into public social circles, in what Borsay has described as the 'new world of urban leisure', preparing her for 'the launching of a teenager on society and the marriage market'.[68] Whilst Barbara did not marry, it is highly probable that both she and her guardians would have prepared for this outcome, with the assistance of an expensive and fashionable wardrobe.

It is curious that Barbara had two coats made of the same silk; perhaps it was a pattern that she particularly liked, or there was an excess of fabric that could be fashioned into another outfit. It might even have been the case that one coat was made slightly larger in anticipation of her growth. Although there are no records to tell us precisely the reason behind these two matching outfits, it is certainly charming to think of an adolescent Barbara, enamoured with this patterned silk, requesting to have a duplicate made so she might wear it all the more. Dyer has suggested that some of the garments act as book-ends to Barbara's adolescence: 'At 8 years old, the sack gowns were probably Johnson's first adult-style dresses; at 16, the coats were her final children's garments'.[69] Across these eight years, Barbara would have developed a wardrobe that combined children's dress and adult garments, allowing for a steady, measured transition into the full dress of womanhood.

Another way of gaining insight into the wardrobes of adolescent girls is through the construction of fashion dolls, a practice that was encouraged as a way for young girls to develop their sewing skills. Laetitia Powell, who made an impressive collection of fashion dolls between 1754 and 1801, from the age of thirteen to sixty, provides us with an insight into adolescent fashion with the first doll in the collection. The doll is dressed in a replica of a gown that may have been worn in her teens, or that Laetitia wanted to wear as an adolescent (see Figure 21). The doll wears a mantua of white silk, worn over a wide hoop, woven with small pink rosebuds. There is a blue stomacher, and silver braid used to trim the dress, as well as a glazed cotton petticoat and a stiff brown paper petticoat to support the wide skirts. According to the item description in the V&A Collections, the doll also had leading strings that could be pinned to its dress, suggesting that it was an adolescent outfit

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[68] P. Borsay, 'Children, Adolescents and Fashionable Urban Society', p. 55; A. Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, p. 259.
[69] S. Dyer, *Material Lives: Women Makers and Consumer Culture in the 18th Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021) p. 33.

representing the transition between childhood and adulthood.[70] Clare Rose has suggested that the presence of leading strings on the garments of adolescent girls 'symbolise dependence on parental guidance'; their practical use as an aid for walking is obviously no longer needed, but the strings signify an adolescent girl's continued reliance on her parents or guardians.[71]

Serena Dyer, in her book *Material Lives: Women Makers and Consumer Culture in the 18th Century*, extensively examines Laetitia Powell's doll collection, and has described the dolls made during her teen years as wearing an 'amalgam of adult's and child's clothing', acting 'simultaneously as miniature versions of the adult she [Laetitia] would become, and a temporary substitute for the child she would mother in the future'.[72] The doll's outfit represents Laetitia's adolescence in its combination of childish and adult elements, reflecting the duel identities that could be experienced at this stage of the life cycle and how these might be navigated by teenage girls as they continued to move away from childhood and into adulthood. Laetitia could use the dolls as a way of expressing the types of garments she wanted to wear, as well as emulating those she had seen on other women, all whilst cultivating her skills as a seamstress.

Fashion in adolescence was not necessarily limited to the wealthy or elite; John Styles has identified in his studies of the Latham family that their financial expenditure on clothing increased dramatically once their daughters reached adolescence. Styles describes the phenomenon of the family life cycle: the progression of a family group from new parents with infant children to older parents with adolescent children, who 'did not have to look after infants [and so] could provide an increasing contribution to family income'.[73]

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[70] 'Fashionable Full Dress for Young Lady', V&A Collections, W.183-1919 [https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O141790/fashionable-full-dress-for-young-doll-in-mantua-the-powell-family] <accessed 19/02/18>
[71] C. Rose, *Children's Clothes Since 1750* (London: B. T. Batsford Limited, 1989) p. 34.
[72] S. Dyer, *Material Lives: Women Makers and Consumer Culture in the 18th Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021) p. 166.
[73] J. Styles, 'Custom or Consumption? Plebian Fashion in Eighteenth Century England', p. 182.

*Figure 21: Fashion doll wearing a mantua, made by Laetitia Powell, 1754. V&A Collections, W.183-1919*

This would come with a trade off: the extra money that adolescent daughters might bring into the household finances would then have to be spent on items of clothing. The records of the Latham family show that 'as each of the daughters reached their mid-teens, gowns began to be bought', with the eldest daughter acquiring four separate dresses between 1742 and 1749.[74] This undoubtedly coincides with her age and stage of the life cycle, and the prospect of entering the marriage market. The four dresses would also most likely be reused and repurposed for her younger sisters, ensuring that the family could get the most value out of the garments. Styles notes that the Latham sisters began to purchase accessories with their own money, and that these purchases 'embraced luxury' and 'reflected, albeit in a muted, limited manner, the broad trends of high fashion'; the girls had knowledge of what was considered fashionable and edited this to suit their own budgets and lifestyles.[75] The purchasing of their own items would perhaps also carry significance; a sign that they were moving away from dependence on their parents and could have agency over how they spent the money they earnt. This example suggests that adolescent girls within a broad class range were aware of the importance of their dress, and saw clothing as a way of representing their own identity and displaying their movement towards adulthood. It is possible that working class girls, who might be expected to hold jobs in order to contribute to family income, would have more experience with purchasing their own items, particularly if they were able to keep some money aside for their own use. Those girls from elite or middling class families would be more likely to have clothing provided on their behalf for a longer period of time, and may have had to defer to their older relatives who controlled the family purse.

Adolescence was clearly a distinct part of a young girl's life cycle, a transitional phase that allowed the characteristics, and garments, of childhood to be slowly shed, in favour of adult styles and attitudes. Adolescence can be visually identified in girls across the seventeenth and eighteenth century; it was regarded by them, and by those who provided them with clothing, as a stage separate from childhood, but more restrained and restricted than adulthood. We have seen examples of girls asserting their position as being more than children, and therefore requiring new garments,

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[74] J. Styles, 'Custom or Consumption? Plebian Fashion in Eighteenth Century England', p. 184.
[75] J. Styles, 'Custom or Consumption? Plebian Fashion in Eighteenth Century England', p. 186.

and the difference between adolescent girls and their siblings, with their identity as an adolescent being made more pronounced by their appearance in comparison to children. The wardrobe of a girl in this stage of their life might combine some of the dresses from their childhood with more aspirational, adult styles, and they might take their fashion cues from older siblings, or adult women in their new social circles. There was undoubtedly more agency and independence over dress in this stage of the life cycle than during childhood, but parental influence still held a considerable weight. For adolescent girls, the 'focus was soon decisively shifted to preparation for the launching of a teenager on society and the marriage market', and it is during the period of courtship and preparation for their first marriage that young women were encouraged to wear some of their finest clothes.[76]

[76] A. Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, p. 259.

## Chapter Three

*'You never saw a more elegant creature than she look'd': Clothing for Courtship and Marriage*

Marriage was, for many women, a significant and central part of the life cycle throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, symbolising a woman's movement into adulthood and establishing the beginnings of a new family unit. David Cressy has argued that 'the most momentous event in anyone's life, apart from parturition and dying, was entry into marriage', emphasising the social gravity of marital status, and the importance of examining a woman's first marriage, along with the associated period of courtship, as a separate stage of the life cycle.[77] Anne Laurence simply states that 'Marriage was crucial to a woman's identity', a key part of the life cycle that influenced how women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries regarded themselves and their peers.[78] A key chronological shift in attitudes to marriage was the decline in large, public weddings in favour of smaller, private, indoor ceremonies; in this chapter, we shall see the contrast between royal marriages, which remained public by nature, and the more contained weddings of upper and middling class women in the later eighteenth century.

Amongst upper or middling class young women marriage was still regarded by most as a necessity, a crucial part of transitioning to adulthood, as well the means of ensuring 'property transmission and…providing security for daughters', developing political alliances between dynastic groups, or for producing legitimate children for the purpose of inheritance.[79] This stage of the life cycle represents a peak of importance in the life of a young middling or upper class woman, based on the social obligation for these women to either marry, or be seen actively looking for marriage. The gradual development of identity through dress that was experienced throughout childhood and adolescence culminated during this stage in being viewed as an attractive, competent young woman who had the potential to secure a good marriage;

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[77] D. Cressy, Birth, Marriage & Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 6.
[78] A. Laurence, *Women in England, 1500 – 1760: A Social History* (London: Phoenix, 1999) p. 41.
[79] R. O'Day, *The Family and Family Relationships, 1500-1900* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994) p. 148.

a young woman could effectively negotiate for, and discuss with her friends and relatives, the most appropriate and aesthetically pleasing outfits.

Cressy describes marriage at the beginning of the seventeenth century as 'not just a ritual of the church but also a complex social and emotional passage', and this is something which arguably held true beyond the end of that century and well into the eighteenth.[80] Whilst second or third marriages could be occur during this period, this chapter will focus on the significance of the first wedding and the physical, emotional and social changes that accompanied the transition from young woman to prospective wife and how these were reflected and communicated through dress. Cressy's work has been highly influential with regards to the importance of social rituals in the early modern life cycle, emphasising that marriage, and specifically weddings, were a transitional point in women's identity. He argues that marriage 'redefined social and sexual roles, rearranged patriarchal obligations, and conferred new duties of status, authority and dependency' upon women; whilst not all of these changes were immediately felt after the wedding day, it is clear that most women felt a distinct shift in their identities as a result of marriage.[81]

Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford describe the process of women marrying as a 'metamorphosis of identity and status', a 'critical turning point' in a woman's life cycle. [82] However, they also write that 'marriage turned women into a non-person, her husband's dependent with no real will of her own', reflecting the nature of female coverture and the reduced legal status after marriage; that married women passed their legal ownership of property, lands and good over to their husbands, and were not represented as independent legal entities. [83] The implications of coverture are discussed more fully in Chapter Four. It is possible to view marriage during this period as a process of losing individual legal rights, but this does not mean that women were wholly dehumanised, or lost all sense of their own individuality; rather, the identity of a wife was one that existed alongside, and developed in conjunction with, other facets of the self that were experienced by

[80] D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death* p. 292.
[81] D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death* p. 287.
[82] S. Mendelson & P. Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) pp. 126, 129.
[83] S. Mendelson & P. Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550 – 1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 124.

seventeenth- and eighteenth-century women. These women were not wholly consumed by the process of marriage, as passive participants in a social exchange. With regards to reputation, legal status, financial stability and the expectation of bearing a family, marriage could certainly be a catalyst for development and change in the way women perceived themselves.

Mendelson and Crawford write that marriage was 'far more momentous for women', a potentially traumatising 'metamorphosis' of the self that was experienced as a 'violent discontinuity' from prior experience, emphasising its centrality to the formation of women's identity.[84] This depiction of early modern marriage is one that assumes the removal of women's agency and control over the transition into a new stage of the life cycle, overlooking the ways in which woman could continue to express themselves during this time, and use dress, along with other forms of material culture, to explore and visualise their identities. Drawing upon women's personal writings, we can see that whilst marriage might be a new experience, it was certainly not an alien concept to middling and upper class women, and for many, was eagerly awaited; the discontinuity that is described by Mendelson and Crawford seems to be at odds with the experiences of women that had spent their youth preparing for marriage.

The loss of the bride's family name may have impacted the self-identity of a woman as she assumed the name of her husband; although women with connections to the gentry or peerage might choose to hyphenate their names. One example of a man taking the name of his wife comes from Scotland, and the marriage of the Anne Hamilton, the 3rd Duchess of Hamilton, to her husband, Lord William Douglas in 1656: in 1660, her husband officially took her surname and became William Douglas-Hamilton, adopting her peerage status and the social weight associated with her family name. This was undoubtedly linked to increased social mobility and the desire to pass the Hamilton name on to any children, although may have also had implications on the way Duchess of Hamilton perceived her familial connections and her links to her husband's family.

The age at which first marriage took place for early modern women was varied. In the seventeenth century, accounts from the Verney memoirs describe the

[84] S. Mendelson & P. Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, p. 126, p. 129.

wedding between John Verney and the adolescent Elizabeth Palmer in May of 1680 that 'sounds a very tiring programme for the poor little bride - who had not quite completed her sixteenth year - to be driven about all day from the early morning', suggesting that marriage could certainly still occur during a girl's mid-teens, although according to statistical evidence, this was unusual.[85] Based on Wrigley and Schofield's work on population demographics, the average age of first marriage for women throughout this period ranged from 24 to 34 years old, meaning that Elizabeth Palmer was considerably younger than the majority of women who married in this period.[86] The language used to describe this young woman, the 'poor little' thing, serves to infantilise the bride and increase the significance of the age gap between her and her new husband. Perhaps this phrasing was intended as a way of preventing the young woman from appearing to fully transition into the stage of wifedom; by describing her as a child, Frances Parthenope Verney, who compiled the memoirs, forces her into a liminal stage between childhood and marriage and emphasises her situation as questionable or ill-advised. This raises the question of whether a wifely identity was only acceptable at an appropriate age, as well as reminding us of Frances Verney's 19th century biases towards her family memoirs.[87]

Mary Delany sadly recalls her first marriage in 1717, at the age of seventeen, to the sixty-year-old Alexander Pendarves: 'I was married with *great pomp*. Never was woe drest out in gayer colours'.[88] After Mary was not given a position as a lady-in-waiting for Queen Anne, despite the high expectations of her family, she was married to the wealthy Pendarves; a match orchestrated by her uncle, George Granville, Lord Lansdowne. Pendarves was the Member of Parliament for Launceston and was regarded as a financially and politically beneficial match for the Granvilles. Here we can see that the practice of marrying young women to much older men was not abandoned in the eighteenth century, although this match would have almost

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[85] M. Verney, ed. F. P. Verney, Memoirs of the Verney Family, vol. IV, From the Restoration to the Revolution 1660 to 1696 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1899) p. 249.
[86] E. A. Wrigley & R. S. Schofield, 'English Population History from Family Reconstitution: Summary Results 1600 – 1799', *Population Studies*, 37 (1983) pp. 157 – 184, pp. 162, 166.
[87] Prior to their marriage, John Verney had been removed from the Palmer household after a disagreement with Elizabeth's father; in an ill-fated attempt to cheer him in the face of rejection, his cousin Nancy Nicholas described the young recipient of his affections as having 'ferret eyes, and a thousand pimples'. As a sixteen-year-old it was perfectly reasonable for Elizabeth Palmer to have had some blemishes, and John Verney angrily jumped to her defence.
[88] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover,The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol I (London: Richard Bentley, 1886), p. 29.

certainly been a result of parental influence and desire for financial, political and social stability for the family. Mary recalls her first marriage bitterly, falsely dressed in vivid colours and 'pomp' that failed to reflect her reluctance to marry Mr Pendarves. We might question how Mary would have chosen to dress herself for such an occasion; it would seem that her own happiness and sense of self was lost underneath her family's desire for a prosperous marriage. As an adolescent, Mary's agency would have already been limited compared to an adult woman; her second marriage, much later in her life, was undoubtedly a happier occasion that better reflected her own wishes.

It was certainly not the case that all young women were reluctant to marry. Sarah Hurst, a tailor's daughter from Horsham, records her thoughts on marriage in her diary in 1760 at the age of twenty four:

> My father seems to not approve entirely of my marrying but why, is it because I carry on all his business & he would find it difficult to do without me? I will if possible perform my duty, but must not regard his interest when it stands in competition with my own happiness, that wou'd be too great a sacrifice.[89]

Here, we see a woman of twenty-four actively pursuing the marriage of her sweetheart, Captain Henry Smith, despite the misgivings of her father. Sarah, rather shrewdly, recognises that as a married woman she would no longer be under the social and economical influence of her father, and that the prospect of losing Sarah's labour at his tailor's shop troubles him. Despite this, Sarah firmly asserts that 'my own happiness' is her main motivation, providing us with an image of a young woman in the eighteenth century who is pursuing marriage for herself, actively seeking to transition from young single woman to wife and to adopt this new identity.

In November 1760, Sarah received 'a muff & tippit from London made of the marten skins my Dear Harry gave me; the person who dress'd them writes me word they are worth six guineas'.[90] Then, in May, 1761, Henry 'makes me [Sarah] a present of a piece of India Muslin for a Negligee & petticoat, & another for aprons & ruffles'.[91] Sarah herself spends a day in the summer of 1759 making a pair of ruffles to send to her captain as a gift. Prior to their marriage, Sarah and Henry exchanged gifts of

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[89] B. Hurst, & S. C. Djabri,, *The Diaries of Sarah Hurst 1759-1762: Life and Love in 18th Century Horsham* (Stroud: Gloucestershire, 2009) p. 145.
[90] B. Hurst & S. C. Djabri, *The Diaries of Sarah Hurst*, p. 173.
[91] B. Hurst & S. C. Djabri, *The Diaries of Sarah Hurst*, p. 205.

clothing and fabrics, suggesting that the shared consumption of dress was some an integral and intimate part of their relationship. Vickery notes the 'talismanic properties of material things…[and the] personal significance of inconspicuous consumption' that could be expressed by women in the eighteenth century, and it seems likely that Sarah viewed these gifts as objects that quietly tied her to her husband-to-be whilst he was away at sea.[92]

Obviously there were economical gains to be had from this exchange of items, with Sarah receiving a costly set of marten skins, as well as enough muslin for an outfit and accessories, and it is likely that Henry procured fabrics for Sarah when he was abroad as a way of giving her better access to exotic and expensive pieces, as well as to express his feelings for her. There is clearly an emotional element to their exchange; their gifts acted as a reminder that the other was not far from their thoughts. The year before their marriage, Henry 'makes [Sarah] a present of a piece of India Muslin for a Negligee & petticoat, & another for aprons & ruffles' which were promptly made up and worn the following month: 'Wear a new Gown made of the India Muslin Captain Smith gave me, which is prodigiously admir'd'.[93] By wearing clothes gifted to her by Henry, Sarah is able to visually display the importance of their relationship, and its centrality to her identity.

In Barbara Johnson's fashion album, we can see evidence of her dress reflecting her position as a young, sociable woman, with the potential to engage in courtship with eligible men. At the age twenty-five, in 1763, Barbara records a 'white sattin negligee and puckered petticoat', of which twenty-five yards of fabric was required (see Figure 22).[94] The puckered petticoat and negligee would have been elaborately braided, requiring 'four and a half dozen' lengths of braid, or 162ft. An outfit of this expense and quality might suggest that, in her mid-twenties, Barbara was considering the possibility of marriage, or at least dressing in a way that evoked the image of a bride. We know that Barbara never married, but her fashion album implies that the possibility was open to her in her twenties; she certainly dressed with enough style and expense to potentially attract a husband at this stage of her life cycle.

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[92] A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 185.
[93] B. Hurst, & S. C. Djabri, *The Diaries of Sarah Hurst* pp. 205, 211.
[94] N. Rothstein, ed. *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics*, p. 58; see Figure 17.

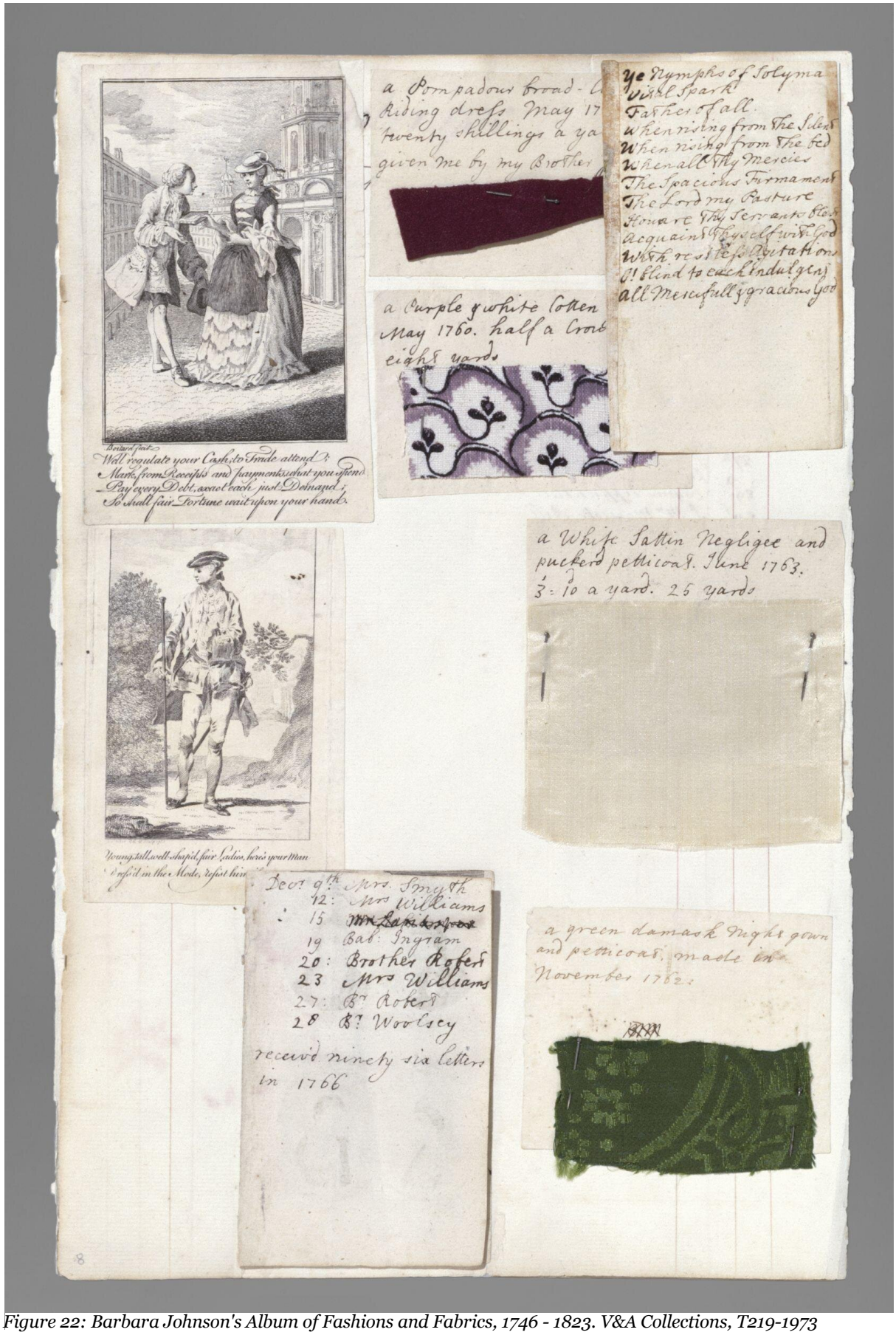


*Figure 22: Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics, 1746 - 1823. V&A Collections, T219-1973*


*Figure 23: Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics, 1746 - 1823. V&A Collections, T219-1973*

Barbara had a colourfully trimmed dress made specifically for the Stamford Races in 1767: 'a Laylock figur'd Ducape Negligee, twenty-two yards half ell wide. Five and ninepence a yard. Four dozen and a half of trimming, 5 shilling 6 pence a dozen.' (see Figure 23).[95] The races would have been an ideal social outing for Barbara to display her new outfit, and to emphasise her identity as a fashionable, eligible young woman. Ginsburg notes that the 'Dress conventions…were unusually strict' during this stage of Barbara's life, meaning that all the women in attendance were expected to present themselves as befitted their status, observing fashionable conventions.[96] Barbara's outfits were chosen for their economic availability, their reflection of her own likes and preferences, but also their social propriety and adherence to particular codes of dress.

The observations of other elite women also focussed on the social and sartorial expectations of marriage, and particularly the wedding day itself. The diary and letters of Mary Delany contain commentary on the wedding of Princess Anne in 1734. She writes to her sister that the Princess' outfit was 'the prettiest thing that ever was seen' and a 'most becoming dress', illustrating the centrality of dress as a conversation topic, weaved into descriptions of political events, in the correspondences between women.[97] Discussions of fashion and descriptions of clothing were a key part of women's communication during this period, and a way for these women to highlight their knowledge and expertise of this topic. The bride was judged, and the success of the event arguably based on, the appropriate use of dress. Similarly, after the marriage of Georgina Carolina Carteret to John Spencer in 1734, Mary took the time to describe the outfits in great detail to her sister, Anne, in a letter:

> Her clothes were white satin embroidered with silver, very fine lace; and the jewels the Duchess of Marlborough gave…The rest of her clothes are a pink and silver, a flowered silk, white ground, a blue damask nightgown, and a white damask the robing and facings embroidered with gold and colours; a pink plain poudesoy, a flowerd silk, green ground, her laces and linens very fine. Everybody at the wedding was magnificent. Lady Dysart, white and purple and silver, Lady Weymouth, blue and silver. Their clothes are now laid by for the royal wedding, which will be about three weeks hence, 'tis thought. I

[95] N. Rothstein, ed. *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics*, p. 61; see Figure 18.
[96] M. Ginsburg, in N. Rothstein, ed. *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics*, p. 24.
[97] George Paston, *Mrs. Delany (Mary Granville): A Memoir, 1700–1788* (London: Grant Richards, 1900), p. 83 in Chrisman-Campbell, K., 'Diagnosing the Dress of the Queen's Train-Bearers at the Coronation of George III', Costume, 47 (2013) pp. 145 – 160, p. 145.

> have got my wedding garment ready, 'tis a brocaded lutestring, white ground with great ramping flowers in shades of purples, reds and greens. I gave thirteen shillings a yard; it looks better than it describes, and will make a show: I shall wear with them dark purple and gold ribbon, and a black hood for decency's sake.[98]

In Mary's description, we can see how the occasion of a new marriage amongst the upper classes was not only an opportunity for the bride to display her identity and prosperity through her clothes; the guests at the wedding were also elaborately dressed for the very public occasion. Mary mentions her 'wedding garment' that had been prepared for the royal wedding of Princess Anne and William, Prince of Orange: made of brocaded silk, lightweight and with a shimmer, in purples, reds and greens, that would ensure attention from her friends and acquaintances, and mark her out as a fashionable and financially prosperous woman.

The royal wedding was captured in an engraving, after William Kent, that details the elaborate event: the room is lined with guests, the upper balcony boxes filled with well-dressed women fluttering their fans as they watch both the proceedings and each other (see Figure 24). Princess Anne is clearly visible in the centre of the engraving, her lengthy train held behind her by her ladies. This event would have been an ideal social arena in which to display wealth, influence and taste, but one at which women would have to adhere to strict rules of fashion. Grace Evans describes how eighteenth-century elite clothing was 'strictly codified according to social position, with appropriate manners of dressing and choices of fabrics being consciously adhered to', and this notion would have been immediately apparent to other fashionable, upper-class women, such as those socialising in the same circles as Mary Delany.[99] It is clear that it was not just men who encouraged and perpetuated ideas of appropriate women's dress; other women also contributed to a system of worth that was based around clothing and physical appearance.

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[98] M. Granville, *The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville*, VoI, pp. 427-428.
[99] G. Evans, 'Marriage à la Mode, An Eighteenth-Century Wedding Dress, Hat and Shoes Set From the Olive Matthews Collection, Chertsey Museum', *Costume*, 42 (2008) pp. 50-65, p. 61.


*Figure 24: After William Kent, 'Marriage of Princess Anne and William, Prince of Orange, 1734, Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 750381*

The wedding of George III and Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz in 1761 was a similarly extravagant royal affair, described in the writings of a number of notable individuals. Particular focus was given to the princess' dress, emphasising its unsurpassed expense and visual impact. The Duchess of Northumberland described the wedding outfit in her diary:

> The Bride was dressed in a silver Tissue stiffen body'd Gown, embroidered and trimmed with Silver, on her Head a little cap of purple Velvet quite covered with Diamonds, a Diamond Aigrette in Form of a Crown, 3 dropt Diamond Ear Rings, Diamond Necklace, Diamond Sprigs of Flowers on her Sleeves and to clasp back her Robe a Diamond Stomacher, her purple Velvet Mantle was laced with Gold and lined with Ermine.[100]

It is possible to imagine Princess Charlotte sparkling down the aisle with the volume of diamonds adorning her dress. This was a level of royal indulgence that apparently impressed the onlookers: Horace Walpole described the newly appointed Queen and gave an estimation of the cost of her diamond studded stomacher:

> The Queen was in white and silver, an endless mantle of violet coloured velvet, lined with ermine, and attempted to be fastened on her shoulder by a bunch of large pearls, dragged itself and almost the rest of her clothes halfway down her waist … a stomacher of diamonds, worth three score thousand pounds, which she is to wear at the coronation too.[101]

It is likely that this deliberate flaunting of wealth was intended to support Charlotte's new position as Queen of England, having come from a politically minor German duchy. Walpole's description of the princess' dress suggests that she was almost overwhelmed by the quantity and weight of the fabric and jewellery, and that there was real potential for a royal wardrobe malfunction; however, the intention behind the outfit is clear. Royal splendour, visual excess and extreme wealth combined in one outfit to communicate to onlookers that Princess Charlotte would be a prosperous, successful Queen.

The mantua and petticoat of Isabella Courtenay (see Figure 25) has been associated with her 1744 wedding to Dr John Andrew at Exeter Cathedral, and her

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[100] *The Diaries of a Duchess 1716-1776*, ed. by James Grieg (New York, George H. Doran Company, 1927, in P. Cunnington & C. Lucas, *Costume for Births, Marriages and Deaths* (London: A&C Black, 1972) p. 100.
[101] L. B. Seeley, ed. *Horace Walpole and his World: Select Passages from his Letters* (New York: Scribner and Welford, 1900) p. 73.

subsequent presentation at court. The gown is made of ivory silk, elaborately embroidered with 'Leafy scrolls, latticed arcades and tassels…as well a profusion of realistically rendered flowers, including jasmine, morning glory and honeysuckle, peonies, roses, poppies, anemones, auriculas, hyacinths, carnations, cornflowers, tulips and daffodils'; the detail, extreme silhouette, and luxurious fabric are clear indications of both wealth and social status.[102] That the dress was probably intended for court wear is further evidence of its aristocratic symbolism, as well as more practical decision-making: reusing the dress for both the wedding and subsequent presentation at court would help to justify its expense. The court style is perhaps more exaggerated and dated than the most popular fashion in the 1740s; court fashion tended to move less rapidly, and was comparatively unburdened by notions of practicality. This dress was designed to be eye-catching and space consuming, ensuring that maximum attention would be given to the bride, and that she would represent the wealth and good status of her family. It also served to symbolise her transition into the next stage of her life cycle and her new position as a wife, as well as the standing and reputation of her new husband.

Appearing at court in an appropriate outfit may have been even more crucial for a woman like Isabella Courtenay; her family's lack of title, but apparent wealth meant that they were most likely prosperous members of the ever growing middling classes of the eighteenth century, looking for the potential for upward social mobility that might occur as a result of Isabella's successful marriage and subsequent presentation at court. That her dress was kept rather than recycled might suggest that it became emotionally significant for the family: perhaps a symbol of their newfound status.

[102] Isabella Courtenay's Mantua – V&A collections, Item T.260&A-1969.

*Figure 25: Isabella Courtenay's Mantua, front and back, V&A Collections, Item T.260&A-1969.*

The middle of the eighteenth century, around the time of Princess Anne's wedding in 1734, saw an increased popularity in botanical fabric patterns: 'the newest-fashioned silks were white paduasoys with large flowers of tulips, peonies, emmonies, carnations & etc in their proper colours, some wove in the silk and some embroidered'.[103] This interest in the natural world was linked to developments in science and the increase in botanical drawings and artwork. There are also clear symbolic links between the botanical world and the idealised fertility of women that could be utilised to great effect in dress: the bride's body is blooming, abundant with natural life that promises a fruitful marriage. Dresses like the one attributed to Isabella Courtenay were intended as symbols of social status and position, evidence of membership to an exclusive group of fashionable and wealthy individuals who perpetuated the notion of marriage as a necessary part of a woman's life cycle and a key facet of women's identity.

In 1778, Mary Curzon, who was eighteen, described her sister's wedding in a letter to her friend, Mary Heber:

> Sir George and my sister look'd beautiful. She was dress'd in a white figured Sattin gown, a fring'd silk petticoat, white silk fring'd slippers, a beautiful white hat trimm'd with blond, a long figur'd white sattin cloak trimm'd with fur, and arm-holes, and really you never saw a more elegant creature than she look'd.' ... 'I had on the same sattin as my sister's, an Italian nightgown that train'd a yard on the ground, a little hoop, laylock slippers - straw colour'd heels and roses, a white chip hat - one row of ribbons, pink satin Cloak trimm'd with fur, a short lac'd net apron.[104]

This account of wedding outfits is lavish, and gives the impression of considerable wealth. Both dresses are made from white satin silk, a delicate and easily spoiled fabric, and worn with silk cloaks lined with fur. The bride, and Mary, are presented as both beautiful and valuable, their elaborately adorned bodies representing the wealth of their family, as well as symbolising their own importance. Laura Gowing describes how the 'economic significance of marriage shaped a wife's sense of her body', with a woman's body becoming a commodity of her husband in return for

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[103] N. Rothstein, 'God Bless This Choye', *Costume*, 1977, 11, p. 67 in J. Ashelford, *The Art of Dress: Clothes and Society, 1500 – 1914* (London: National Trust Enterprises Ltd., 1996) p. 128.
[104] Letter 9 in *Dear Miss Heber, an Eighteenth Century Correspondence* ed. Francis Bamford in P. Cunnington & C. Lucas, *Costume for Births, Marriages and Deaths* (London: A&C Black, 1972) p. 102.

economic, social and political security.[105] It is likely that Mary Curzon's sister was aware of the importance of her body and its costly adornments as a representation of her new relationship with her husband, and intended to display this fully. This outfit did not only symbolise the marital relationship, however. The sisters' matching silk creates a visual link between them, reinforcing their enduring bond despite one of them embarking on the next stage of her life cycle and becoming a wife. Dress could be used to represent a variety of intimate relationships at a wedding, not only that of husband and wife.

One of Laetitia Powell's fashion dolls (see Figure 26), made in 1761, was used to commemorate the occasion of her wedding, replicating her outfit, and her memories of the event, in miniature. The doll wears a recreation of Mrs Powell's wedding dress, preserving the emotions and sense of self that could be woven into a bride's dress.[106] Dyer has suggested that the doll was 'constructed from the offcuts of her actual wedding gown', making it a replica of not only the memory of the wedding, but of the material goods that were used during it.[107] The wedding outfit is symbolic of the movement of Laetitia Powell through her life cycle, and the point at which she reached the socially critical moment of marriage: recreating it in miniature shows a desire to preserve a material representation of the event, acknowledging its emotional significance, and even to pass it on to her children as an heirloom or symbol of her younger self.

Wedding dresses had the potential to hold more social and cultural significance than other garments for wealthy women at this stage of their life cycle; contemporary descriptions of weddings regularly devoted space to recording examples of expensive silk wedding dresses in a variety of colours, including white.

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[105] L. Gowling, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth Century England* (London: Yale University Press, 2003) p. 4.
[106] Mrs Powell's Wedding Dress Doll – V&A collections, Item W.183:7-1919.
[107] S. Dyer, *Material Lives*, p. 170.

*Figure 26: Mrs Powell's Wedding Suit, 1761, V&A Collections, W.183:7-1919*

Ann Vannam Somerville, who married Thomas Fownes in 1764, is depicted in her wedding dress in a portrait by Thomas Gainsborough: the dress is a shimmering white silk, decorated with lace, pink bows and a sprig of greenery (see Figure 27). The depiction of the white silk, along with her pearl jewellery, conveys a sense of the outfit's expense, and the choice of white, which has already been established as a delicate and challenging colour to maintain, adds to the implication that this would not necessarily be a heavily used dress. Avril Hart and Susan North have suggested that the 'white and silver combination conveys bridal purity and the silver elements were introduced to glint in the light as the bride moved about', emphasising that white, ivory or silver wedding dresses would be chosen for both aesthetic and symbolic reasons.[108]

Another white silk satin ensemble, consisting of a sack-back and petticoat, has been associated with a wedding ceremony by the V&A Museum: this dress was designed to be worn with a wide hoop, and has decorative ruchings adorning the front (see Figure 28).[109] The silhouette of the dress reveals its formal nature, as well as the potentially challenging task of wearing it for a long period of time. A pink wedding outfit from approximately 1742-1743 survives in Manchester Art Gallery's collections, consisting of a dress, stomacher, petticoat and necklet (see Figure 29).[110] We can see from this example how wedding outfits might overwhelm the body of the bride as a result of their complex and excessive design; it is difficult to conceptualise the actual shape of the woman beneath the heavy fabric, figure-altering hoop, sleeve ruffles and necklet.

[108] A. Hart & S. North, *Historical Fashion in Detail: the 17th and 18th Centuries (London: V&A Publications, 1998)* p. 130.
[109] Sack back wedding ensemble – V&A collections, Item T.2-1947.
[110] Wedding ensemble – Manchester Art Gallery, Item 1951.281.

*Figure 27: A portrait of Lady Ann Fownes on her wedding day, Thomas Gainsborough, 1764. On display at Dunster Castle, National Trust.*

*Figure 28: Sack back wedding ensemble, 1775, V&A collections, Item T.2-1947*

*Figure 29: Wedding ensemble, 1742, Manchester Art Gallery, Item 1951.281*

*Figure 30: Pink silk wedding dress - National Trust collections, Item 1364951.1*

Other instances of pink wedding dresses can be seen in Figures 30 and 31, whilst an example of blue wedding dress fabric can be seen in Figure 32. The varieties of colours seen here indicate the scope of design for fashionable wedding dresses and the wide choice of fabrics available to upper and middling class women, providing them with the ability to personalise their dresses based on individual preference, prevailing popular styles and local fabric availability. A further example of an extant wedding dress can be found in the collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, dating from around 1760 and associated with an English wedding (see Figure 33).[111] This dress has a closed front, but is elaborately embroidered, again with the floral designs that were so popular during this period. This dress, whilst beautiful and undoubtedly suitable for a wedding, would also be appropriate to wear to other elite public events; the wearer may well have used this dress more than once, in the same manner as Isabella Courtenay.

Susan Vincent has emphasised the importance of clothing to social hierarchies, particularly in navigating the narrow distinctions that occurred amongst the elite. She argues that clothing 'gives form to a society's ideas about the sacred and secular, about exclusion and inclusion, about age, beauty, sexuality and status', all of which were themes of central importance to the wedding ceremony.[112]

During this period, when 'clothing was also used to mark transitions, or to ease and facilitate the body in its passage from one state to another', it is unsurprising that the clothes associated with courtship and marriage, and the movement between distinct phases of the female life cycle, could be some of the most important and extravagant pieces that a woman owned.[113] Women could utilise dress as part of their arsenal when looking for a husband, or to materially embody their existing relationships, in the same way that Sarah Hurst wore her sweetheart's gifts. In the period of courtship, or prior to marriage, a woman would be expected to use dress to visually display her 'beauty, sexuality and status' as part of the socially encouraged behaviour of young, wealthy women.[114]

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[111] Wedding dress – Metropolitan Museum of Art, Item 40.136.1a, b.
[112] S. Vincent, *Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Berg, 2003) p. 2.
[113] S. Vincent, *Dressing the Elite,* p. 56.
[114] S. Vincent, *Dressing the Elite*, p. 2.

*Figure 31: Mary Jago's pink silk wedding dress - Fashion Museum Bath Collections, BATMC I.09.1386*

*Figure 32: Blue silk fabric from a wedding gown, Manchester Gallery of Costume, 1949.137*

*Figure 33: Wedding dress, 1760, The Metropolitan Museum of Art collections, 40.136.1a, b*

Even those women who did not marry, such as Barbara Johnson, might use this period of their life to experiment with fine dresses and to bask in the beauty that was inextricably tied to their youth.

An elite wedding dress was evidently an exercise in wealth, time, craftsmanship and bodily discipline, designed to visually symbolise the social status, value and outward identity of the bride. K. Chrisman-Campbell has described how the Duchess of Northumberland 'rose at half past four to dress' for the coronation of Queen Charlotte, and we might assume that other elite, and royal, weddings were a similarly laborious affair.[115] These dresses turned the bride into a visual display of the wealth, influence and fashionable taste of her family and her new husband; there is a sense that these women were aware of the symbolism in their garments, and of the potential to use a wedding dress as an indication of their identity, preserving it through portraiture or miniature as a reminder of themselves at this point in their lives. Dyer has described the traditional act of gathering garments into a wardrobe which the bride could take to her new household: 'The transition from daughter to wife was a key moment of material transformation, best exemplified by the wedding trousseau'; for these women, their wedding trousseau, including the wedding dress, contained the clothes that would allow them to explore their new identity as a wife.[116] As well as being a moment of material transformation, this moment was also a transformation of identity, visualised by the clothes worn by the bride.

This stage of the life cycle was one of the most important, drawing upon all previous experience and education surrounding dress, fashion, material literacy and identity, culminating in a single day that had far reaching implications for a woman's transition into adulthood. Whilst the wedding day itself was short, it represented the crossing over from youth to adulthood, and the outward presentation of successful womanhood that had been slowly built over the previous stages of the life cycle, and influenced by the input of family and friends. For women that didn't marry, this stage might instead be marked by them leaving their familial home and demonstrating their independence, style and financial stability; they could use this period of time to dress according to their personal tastes under the guise of seeking a

[115] K. Chrisman-Campbell, 'Diagnosing the Dress of the Queen's Train-Bearers', p. 151.
[116] Dyer, *Material Lives*, p. 170.

marriage, as well as being youthful and at the peak of socially recognised physical attractiveness

## Section Two: Adulthood

This section will encompass three of the most socially and culturally prominent stages of a woman's life cycle: the role of a wife, the experience of pregnancy, and motherhood. Whilst it is evident that not all women between 1660 and 1780 experienced these phases, either through choice or circumstance, they remained a central part of the social expectations placed on adult women. Those women who did not experience marriage or motherhood, or one without the other, might still find their identities shaped by these stages, having their position regarded as socially atypical, or in extreme cases, deviant. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many women found themselves identifying with the roles of wife and mother, with a focus on the domestic household amongst upper and middling class women.[1]

Vickery echoes this in her work on gentry women, stressing that 'Ladies lives resembled a stately progress through recognized stations – maid, wife, mother and, if she was lucky, widow'. [2] Vickery has argued that, across the long eighteenth century, 'female experience is carved up by the multiple roles they played', with marriage, pregnancy and motherhood at the forefront of social expectations for women.[3] Whilst it might be argued that this depiction of early modern women all following the same pattern throughout life is simplistic, these distinct life stages lay important frameworks within which we are able to examine the identity and experiences of individual women. Sara Read has explored this idea thoroughly in her book, *Maids, Wives, Widows: Exploring Early Modern Women's Lives, 1540 – 1740*, in which she argues that the 'legal definition of women according to their marital status is a useful starting point' but that by looking at women individually, we can better appreciate 'how varied, rich, joyous and sociable early modern women's lives were', and highlight the unique personalities of women during this period.[4]

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[1] N. H. Keeble, *The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth Century Women: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1994) p. 209.
[2] A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 8.
[3] A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 11.
[4] S. Read, *Maids, Wives, Widows: Exploring Early Modern Women's Lives, 1540 – 1740* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword History, 2015) pp. xiii, xiv.

Every woman's experience of adulthood was indeed distinct and individual, but there are still patterns which emerge; one of which is the social expectation that these women would move seamlessly from young woman, to wife, to mother. It has been argued that around two thirds of women in urban areas were married during the long eighteenth century; the average age of first marriage for women throughout this period ranged from 24 to 34 years old.[5] Available population data suggests that the national birth rate increased by roughly 8% between 1680 and 1800, suggesting that the majority of women married and had more children, and less stillbirths, than prior to this period.[6] Many women evidently did experience these specific phases of the life cycle, and in doing so, they had to navigate changing identities and anxieties around their sense of self. One of the ways in which these women could solidify and visually express their identities during their adulthood was through dress.

Sarah Hurst, Elizabeth Pepys, Barbara Johnson, Elizabeth Shackleton, Mary Verney and Mary Wortley Montagu feature prominently throughout this section, each detailing their own experiences with adulthood. Sarah Hurst was a recently married woman when writing her diary; Elizabeth Pepys had to contend with her husband's tight hold upon their marital coin purse; Barbara Johnson remained unmarried and childless whilst maintaining a thriving and fulfilling social circle; Elizabeth Shackleton married twice and had three sons who she watched grow to adulthood themselves; Mary Verney had specific items of dress made for her multiple pregnancies and births; and Mary Wortley Montagu navigated the different cultures of multiple European courts as a new mother. Each of these women allows us a unique insight into their experiences of adulthood as a woman in the long eighteenth century, and how they used their garments to communicate their position in the life cycle, as well as allowing us to consider the continued importance of these stages across the entirety of the long eighteenth century. As in Section One, the writings of these women are supplemented with examples of material objects, portraits and smaller, more fragmented accounts of other women to provide us with object-based evidence of the styles of garments worn by women during this stage of their life cycle,

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[5] E. A. Wrigley & R. S. Schofield, 'English Population History from Family Reconstitution: Summary Results 1600 – 1799', *Population Studies*, 37 (1983) pp. 157 – 184, pp. 162, 166.
[6] A. M. Froide *Never Married: Single Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 3; E. A. Wrigley, 'Explaining the Rise in Marital Fertility in England in the 'Long' Eighteenth Century', *The Economic History Review*, 51 (1998) pp. 435 – 464, p. 461.

as well as to provide additional evidence of early modern women's experiences of being wives, falling pregnant and motherhood.

This section will examine how women constructed their identities during adulthood, often grappling with the fashionable advice and opinions of others, and how they communicated this through their dress, as well as considering the importance of these adult women as consumers of material culture throughout this period. There is also a consideration of the ways in which women negotiated their choices of dress with their husbands, siblings, friends, and relatives, who might often look to influence their outward appearance. Alongside the stages of marriage, pregnancy and motherhood, which could occur simultaneously, was a sense of incessant ageing; this section will also touch upon the ways in which women might begin to regard themselves as too old for certain styles and items of dress, and at such a point, regarded themselves as having reached old age.

## Chapter Four

*'t'is best to appear tolerably well': A Wife's Wardrobe*

For many women between 1660 and 1780, the prospect of becoming a wife was a generally accepted one, encouraged by friends and family as a natural stage in a woman's life cycle. Mary Abbot argues that 'marriage remained the preferred career' of women throughout the early modern period in England, even amongst those who also worked for a living; marriage was regarded as a legitimate way to ensure financial security, and the running of a familial household could become a demanding job for these women.[7] In Chapter Three, we examined the importance of the clothing and appearance of young women who were of a marrying age, and the emphasis that was placed upon their social worth as potential wives by their families; it is clear from this that becoming a wife was regarded by most as one of the central stages of identity for women in this period. Wifehood was an extended state of identity, one which began after the wedding but existed as a continual undercurrent throughout the rest of a married woman's life. This is different to the wedding day itself: rather than being a high impact moment that took up a single day, wifehood was a broad identity that developed over a number of years, and existed alongside other subsequent life stages.

Margaret Sommerville has written that 'marriage was essential to children's welfare and to the proper functioning of society', claiming that the role of a wife was a necessary precursor to the most important position of a woman: motherhood.[8] Although motherhood was undeniably a significant life stage, and the changes in identity that accompanied motherhood will be discussed throughout Chapter Five and Six, it is perhaps unhelpful to consider the role of a wife only as a stepping-stone between that of daughter and mother. Being a wife was not a guarantee of future children and brought with it its own social distinctions and implications that influenced the way women saw themselves.

Amy Froide has written extensively about the role of single women in early modern England, arguing that it is 'too readily assumed that a woman's life was of

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[7] M. Abbot, *Family Ties: English Families, 1540-1920* (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 114.
[8] M. Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection: Attitudes to Women in Early Modern Society* (London: Arnold, 1995) p. 122.

little importance until she married', reminding us of the significance of single women during this period.[9] Whilst this is an important thing to keep in mind when considering the lives of women throughout this period, it is also equally important to explore the different ways in which the women who were married perceived themselves as wives, and how this was expressed bodily, through their dress. We might also argue that those women who didn't marry, 'at least one-third of urban women' by the eighteenth century, perhaps still defined themselves by their relationship with this stage of the life cycle.

*Women as Consumers: Elizabeth Pepys and Shopping*

The status of women's possessions in early modern England was a complex one. Once a woman married, her belongings, including any land and money, passed to the ownership of her husband and she became what was known in legal treatises as a *feme-covert*, with no legal independence from her husband.[10] Socially and culturally, however, this distinction was less straightforward; women were still relied upon to purchase goods, and continued to emotionally and economically invest in material objects after they were married. Joanne Bailey suggests that women between 1660 and 1800 had an 'instinctive sense of possession over some goods', particularly those associated with the running of a household, such as linens, furniture and clothing.[11] Upon marriage, some women undertook legal settlements to protect their dower or jointure, as well as any capital they might bring to a partnership, establishing a way of providing for her, should her husband die.[12] Susan Staves outlines how jointure settlements might have 'also provided for separate income for the wife during the

[9] A. Froide, *Never Married: Single Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 3.
[10] J. Bailey, 'Favoured or Oppressed? Married Women, Property and Coverture in England, 1660 – 1800', *Continuity and Change*, 17 (2002) pp. 351 – 372, pp. 351 – 352. The treatises referenced by Bailey include Anon., *Baron and feme, a treatise of the common law concerning husbands and wives* (London, 1700); Anon., *A treatise of feme coverts: or, the lady's law containing all the laws and statutes relating to women* (London, 1732); Anon., *The laws respecting women, as they regard their natural rights, or their connections and conduct* (London, 1777).
[11] J. Bailey, 'Favoured or Oppressed? p. 351.
[12] Dower is understood to be the pre-marital agreement for the provision of one third of her husband's estates should she become a widow; this could be overridden by an agreement of jointure, which would provide a widow with ownership of a pre-agreed amount of her husband's estate should he die first, which replaced the need for a dower. The estate that made up the dower was usually looked after by male relatives of the wife, whilst the estate under jointure remained under the husband's control until his death.

marriage itself', and how this 'pin money', given by husbands, was 'spent on clothes, amusements, charities, and such other out-of-pocket expenses as a wife incurred'.[13] Pin money was clearly one way in which wives could continue to purchase goods for themselves, maintaining this development of self-identity and continuing to cultivate 'distinctive emotional and familial meanings from their possessions'.[14] By having sums of money that were entirely under their own control, even though it ultimately came from their husbands, as well as keeping their own separate household accounts, these middling and upper class women were able to exert some independence and choice over their material possessions.

Wives would also be able to make purchases under the law of agency, which 'allowed a woman to act as her husband's economic agent in the domestic and business spheres', essentially using her husband's name as credit, on the understanding that she would buy those things which were 'necessities…according to his rank and wealth'.[15] Whilst married women, from a legal perspective, did not technically own these goods, these women were entrusted with considerable economic agency, making purchases for themselves, their husbands and their households. Bailey also suggests that many of these women would have built their own economic reputation amongst tradesmen and shopkeepers, perhaps continuing to visit the same establishments they had before their marriage. Wives also had the potential to bankrupt their husbands, running up large debts in his name before he could deny them credit and spread word to the shops. We see this concern for overspending frequently in Samuel Pepys' diary, five years into his marriage to Elizabeth Pepys, who was then twenty years old. On Saturday 18th August, 1660, Pepys writes:

> This morning I took my wife towards Westminster by water, and landed her at Whitefriars, with 5*l.* to buy her a petticoat, and I to the Privy Seal. By and by comes my wife to tell me that my father has persuaded her to buy a most fine cloth of 26*s.* a yard, and a rich lace, that the petticoat will come to 5*l.*, at which I was somewhat troubled, but she doing it very innocently, I could not be angry. I did give her more money, and sent her away.[16]

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[13] S. Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property in England, 1660 – 1833* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1990) p. 132.
[14] J. Bailey, 'Favoured or Oppressed?', p. 354.
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] S. Pepys, H. B. Wheatley ed., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys Vol. I* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1904) p. 207

Here we see that Elizabeth Pepys was left to her own devices whilst shopping, and that her husband did not feel the need to accompany her, though he appears concerned about her choice of costly fabric after the purchase. Pepys' father, John, was a tailor in London and therefore perhaps trusted by the young Elizabeth to give good advice on fabric and clothing, to the detriment of her husband's purse. Samuel comments on the purchase the next day: 'my wife had on her new petticoat that she bought yesterday, which indeed is a very fine cloth and a fine lace; but that being of a light colour, and the lace all silver, it makes no great show'. As the financier for this garment, Samuel seems to express some disappointment that the petticoat is not more striking for the price that he paid. We must assume that Elizabeth, however, did like her new petticoat, as she chose the fabrics herself and started wearing it almost immediately.

Five years later, the couple continued to argue about the expense and outlay of purchasing new clothes for Elizabeth. Samuel recounts his promise of money, and describes his reluctance to make good on his wife's request:

> Up, and this day being the day that, by a promise, a great while ago, made to my wife, I was to give her 20*l*. to lay out in clothes against Easter, she did, notwithstanding last night's falling out, come to peace with me, and I with her, but did boggle mightily at the parting with my money, but at last did give it to her, and then she abroad to buy her things.[17]

The disagreement from the previous night was also about Elizabeth Pepys' spending: her monthly kitchen accounts had been seven shillings out, which provoked a heated argument between the couple. Samuel recounts calling Elizabeth a 'beggar' and insulting her friends, as well as criticising her household management skills. Vickery describes how 'the practice of housekeeping provided…an esteemed role' in a polite household for a wife, and Bailey further emphasises that 'household management gave married women a sense of self-identity and public work': by angrily criticising Elizabeth's management of household accounts, Samuel was directly attacking her identity as a wife, and her ability to contribute to their marriage.[18] The word 'beggar' was particularly harsh, and perhaps intended to remind Elizabeth of her reliance upon her husband for money, and to express his resentment at paying out of pocket

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[17] S. Pepys, H. B. Wheatley ed., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys Vol. IV* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1904) p. 350

[18] A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (London: Yale University Press, 1998) p. 183; . Bailey, 'Favoured or Oppressed?', p. 357.

for her administrative mistakes. We might question whether Elizabeth's demand of payment the following day was partly to prove how expensive a wife could be, or perhaps a timely reminder of Samuel's husbandly duties to provide her with pin money and pay the debts accrued in his name. It is certainly tempting to view the exchange as a triumph for Elizabeth: using her wit to retort to Samuel's barbs the previous night, then leaving with a considerable amount of money in her pocket to buy new clothes, whilst her husband remained at the house to 'boggle mightily' at the exchange. That Elizabeth secured the promise of money 'a great while ago' suggests that she had been planning ahead to purchase clothes for Easter; the religious occasion would certainly merit a new outfit, perhaps for both of them, to wear to church. Attending church, particularly at Easter, meant venturing into a highly public space, where they and the key members of their household would be visible; dressing well for the event would have been essential for the Pepys.

Again, Elizabeth Pepys leaves to shop independently, but Samuel notes that she returns empty-handed and has to shop again the following day: 'my wife being gone again to-day to buy things, having bought nothing yesterday for lack of Mrs Pierces company'. Mrs Pierce was a close family friend, and clearly a trusted source of fashionable advice for Elizabeth, who was unwilling to make such large purchases without a second, female, input. This emphasises Vickery's assertion that 'fashion had far more significance for a woman's relationship with other women than for her relationship with men', suggesting that the discussion of dress, exchange of fashion advice and information, and the act of shopping itself were all things that helped to cultivate female relationships, rather than the relationship between husband and wife.[19] Certainly in the case of Samuel and Elizabeth Pepys, fashion and dress was something that could evidently cause some strain on marital relations, particularly when it was Elizabeth's expenditure in question.

### *Sarah Hurst and Dressing as a Wife*

One motivation for wives to participate in consumer activity stemmed from the desire to accurately reflect the couple's social standing; a wife might be held

[19] A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter,* p. 183.

accountable as a reflection of her husband's position whilst out in public, and therefore needed to dress herself accordingly. The construction of a wifely identity was, as a result, influenced by the social and economic status of the husband. One clear example of the attitudes of women towards their dress and identity can be found in the diary of Sarah Hurst, who was discussed in Chapter Three. Sarah describes her experience of marrying secretly at the age of twenty six, and hiding her new status as a wife from her family and friends for several months afterwards. As she worked in her father's tailor shop prior to her marriage, Sarah had a good knowledge of fashion, and felt that her dress should reflect her marital status, despite the wedding remaining a secret:

> Write to London unknown to my father for a Silk Negligee…& petticoat against I go to Bourne. I believe this is not quite right, but as I am married & it will some when be known I was at this time, I think t'is best to appear tolerably well & not discredit my dearest Harry.[20]

Sarah's concerns were with her own perception of herself, as well as her visual, public identity. She bought herself a new, silk outfit without consulting her father, presumably to not arouse his suspicions concerning her change in marital status. Sarah acknowledges that 'it will some when be known I was [married] at this time'; one of her worries is that once her marriage is made public, her conduct and appearance during this period of secrecy will be scrutinised. The consequence of failing to 'appear tolerably well' would be to 'discredit' the public reputation of her husband, something Sarah is obviously keen to avoid, but would also potentially conflict with her new perception of herself as a wife. This new gown helps to confirm in Sarah's own mind that she has moved beyond her position as a young, unmarried woman and has progressed to the next stage of her life cycle.

Sarah and her husband had known each other for a decade, and she had written of her desire to get married frequently in the diary; in 1756, she muses that she has 'now enter'd my twentieth year, & consequently had more serious thoughts in regard to my affair with Captain Smith'.[21] After six years of these serious thoughts, Sarah was able to fulfil her wish to be married, having had a considerable amount of time to prepare herself for a new, wifely identity. It is unsurprising then, after years

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[20] B. Hurst & S. C. Djabri, *The Diaries of Sarah Hurst 1759-1762: Life and Love in 18th Century Horsham* (Stroud: Gloucestershire, 2009), p. 258.
[21] B. Hurst & S. C. Djabri, *The Diaries of Sarah Hurst*, p. 63.

of courtship, that Sarah would want to fully embrace her new, albeit secret, status, which would include the updating of her wardrobe. Sarah clearly wanted her appearance to be a source of pride for both herself and her husband, and working in the tailor's shop had given her ample opportunity to develop her knowledge of middling class fashions. By undertaking their marriage secretly, Sarah lost the opportunity to have a wedding trousseau collated with contributions from her family, perhaps making the new silk negligee all the more important as her first wifely outfit. Sarah Hurst's diary only spans a three-year period in her mid-twenties, so it is unclear as to whether the regular purchasing of garments and gifts of clothing continued throughout her marriage, and the extent to which she adapted her wardrobe as she aged, but her background in tailoring and seamstressing might suggest that she was more than capable of keeping her wardrobe up to date and in line with social expectations, expanding her wardrobe as a married woman and later a mother and grandmother.

Sarah Hurst's new negligee, or open fronted gown, may have been similar to the one depicted in Francis Hayman's painting, *The Sculptor Joseph Wilton with his Wife and Daughter* from 1760 (see Figure 34).[22] The woman in the painting, believed to be Frances Wilton, wears a light blue silk gown that lays open to reveal a matching petticoat, white stomacher and a muslin handkerchief tied over her decolletage. The subjects of the painting would have also been members of the

[22] Francis Hayman, *The Sculptor Joseph Wilton with his Wife and Daughter* (1760), V&A Collections, P.7 – 1985.

*Figure 34: Francis Hayman, The Sculptor Joseph Wilton with his Wife and Daughter (1760), V&A Collections, P.7 – 1985*

middling classes, successful artists or craftsmen, in a similar social position to Sarah Hurst and her new husband, and it is likely that Sarah's silk dress would look similar to this; lace detailing at the cuffs and some detail on the sleeves and petticoat, but not overly extravagant or bejewelled. The woman in the painting wears a cap with her hair tied back, which can be indicative of either her age, or her position as both a wife and mother; wearing hair loose was regarded as something suitable for girls and young, unmarried women in private.

Jane Scrimshire, a relative and regular correspondent of Elizabeth Shackleton remarked upon the changing attitudes towards fashion, and who should be the primary audience for new styles: 'I Can't help guessing at what thot will occur to you at this…[that]…a Marry'd Woman & a Mother of Children [should] talk of Dress but these…are Antiquated Notions & were you here you wo'd find Women of Sixty and Seventy just as anxious about [fashion] as formerly Girls were at 18'[23] To Mrs Scrimshire, it was entirely outdated to assume that only young girls would care about their dress, and that married women, as well as mothers and the elderly, had just as much cause to keep up with fashionable trends. This comment implies the existence of a broadly popular idea that women needed to relinquish their love of fashion after marriage in order to appear respectable and responsible; a view that was now being challenged by Jane and her peers. However, as we have seen from Elizabeth Pepys, married women in the seventeenth century also placed a great deal of emphasis on their clothing, and one of the main hinderances to pursuing fashion could be a husband with tight purse strings.

Of course, the opposite could also be true. In 1692, John Verney presented his soon-to-be second wife Mary, who was thirty one, with a brooch, or 'breast jewel' worth approximately 100*l*, with the intention of buying her more jewellery after they married: 'Diamonds are cheaper than they were a dozen years ago, I design to buy her another toy of £50 after marriage in what she likes best'.[24] Whilst this is perhaps simply an example of male posturing, or a desire to impress his fiancée, it also illustrates that, for some women, part of marriage was receiving gifts from their spouse, which could include fashionable dress and accessories.

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[23] J. Scrimshire, in A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 177.
[24] M. Verney, ed. F. P. Verney, Memoirs of the Verney Family, vol. IV, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1899) p. 468.

*Single Women: Barbara Johnson and Being Unmarried*

Marriage was not a universal experience for women in this period. There was a clear social distinction between women 'who were, or had been wives and mothers of legitimate children, and women who were, and had been, neither'.[25] Unmarried women should still be considered when looking at this stage, as a large part of their social identity could be linked to the fact that they were not wives or mothers: they were regarded by many as the antithesis of the central period of a woman's assumed life cycle. Froide has suggested that 'never married women may have necessarily had more of a sense of the individual self than married women', thinking of themselves in a more singular sense than wives, and perhaps having more freedom to construct a visual identity that was entirely their own and not influenced by or linked to a husband. That is not to say that unmarried women did not have familial networks or close bonds with friends; these women would be aunts, surrogate mothers, sisters, daughters and dear friends and could exchange gifts and knowledge of material goods within these networks, in the same way that married women would.

Unmarried women did not have to partake in the legal practices of dower and jointure, and had some degree of freedom over whatever income they might have. For poor women, remaining unmarried might present significant financial difficulty; for those women with an annual income from their families, who owned businesses or land, or those who were part of the gentry, remaining unmarried meant not having to merge their finances with a husband. Bailey remarks on the prevalence of single and widowed women making 'purchases in credit in their own names', emphasising that women did not have to shop under a man's name, and could build their own financial reputation and credit, enhancing their independence.[26] Froide describes some of the garments and material objects synonymous with wives: 'what we see when we look at [wedding] rings, head coverings…is marital status, one of the most important distinctions between women in the early modern era', suggesting that unmarried women might consciously choose to avoid these objects as items that did

[25] A. M. Froide, *Never Married: Single Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 3, 16.
[26] J. Bailey, 'Favoured or Oppressed?', p. 358.

not fit their own identities.[27] Conversely, some single women might have chosen to wear these items as a way of avoiding public scrutiny and questioning of their marital status.

One of these single women was Barbara Johnson, the daughter of a moderately wealthy reverand whose familial circumstances, including being the recipient of multiple inheritances, allowed her to live independently in comfort, without marrying.[28] According to Natalie Rothstein, Barbara 'managed her finances well, relying on her steady income of £60 p.a', as well as several stock investments; she was clearly capable of developing her financial estate in such a way that allowed her to regularly move to various residences of friends and family around the country, as well as also providing herself with expendable income to devote to clothing.[29] Barbara was undoubtedly fashionable: the detailed collection of fabrics found in her album suggest a woman with knowledge of, and access to, changing styles and fabrics. Rothstein has described her as 'enlightened but conventional' in her approach to choosing fabrics and styles of dress, selecting her favourite colours and styles, with red silks and negligee styles being common.

Froide notes that an unmarried woman's forties to sixties were 'a significant time period in a single woman's life cycle, as this was when she would confront the likelihood of lifelong singleness', regarded as too aged for the new marriage market, and with a distinctly different life experience to that of widows.[30] Whilst Barbara might have decided to not pursue marriage after reaching that point in her life, she remained committed to updating her wardrobe with new clothes reflecting both her love of fashion, and the developments in the fabric trade. In 1780 and 1781, at the age of forty two and forty three, Barbara ordered two chintz and one calico gown; the

[27] A. M. Froide, *Never Married,* p. 1.
[28] Barbara's father, mother and grandmother all died in relatively quick succession, leaving her with an annual income of £60 per annum. In 1799, her brother Robert died and left her an additional £50 per annum.
[29] N. Rothstein, ed., *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashion and Fabrics* (London: The Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1987) p. 14.
[30] A. M. Froide, *Never Married*, p. 202.


*Figure 35: Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics, 1746 - 1823. V&A Collections, T219-1973*

advances in printed cotton were establishing it as a fashionable fabric, with great demand for a variety of prints over heavier silks, and Barbara made several additions of this to her wardrobe. The fashion plates in her album from these years emphasise the changing styles of headdress, hair pieces and hats, which were becoming ever more essential accessories from the 1780s onwards (see Figure 35). It is possible that Barbara felt it more appropriate to have her hair covered or worn up as she aged, contrary to Froide's perception of head coverings as a style of garment largely intended for married women. It is very likely that these were linked to age as well as marital status.

Barbara was still receiving gifts of fabric from her family and friends during this stage of her life, and remained incredibly sociable, as evidenced both in her letter writing and in records of her visiting various estates. Clearly, remaining unmarried did not prevent Barbara from cultivating a wide social circle, all of whom contributed to her collection of clothing. One of her brothers gave her 'eight yards of ell-wide Callicoe. A gown and petticoat…made at Thenford'.[31] The calico was a dark ground with a small floral design, with eight yards providing enough fabric for the new straighter gown designs. More abstract patterns, with stripes and geometric shapes can also be found in Barbara's fabric swatches from this period, showcasing the advancements in fabric printing. Despite remaining unmarried, Barbara was able to use her own finances, as well as gifts from her broad network of family and friends, to maintain a fashionable wardrobe that included examples of new advancements in fabrics and printing. In Barbara Johnson's situation, it is entirely possible that remaining unmarried actually allowed her greater freedom to invest her own money into fashionable dress and to continue collating her album.

Being a wife, or acknowledging the choice to remain unmarried and single, was an important part of women's identities in this period. Sara Read argues that 'women themselves were conscious of this change in identity' and the social shift that would come from marriage, and that this could be visually represented through dress.[32] As well as purchasing personal items, a wife might also become mistress of a household, organising the material consumption of her entire family and any

[31] N. Rothstein, ed., *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashion and Fabrics* (London: The Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1987)
[32] S. Read, *Maids, Wives, Widows: Exploring Early Modern Women's Lives, 1540 – 1740* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2015) p. xv.

servants they might have, adding a further layer to her wifely identity. Bailey describes how 'Household management gave married women a sense of self-identity and public worth', allowing them to build credit and consumer reputation on behalf of their husband and family, cementing their identity as a caregiver and manager of the household.[33] For women who did not marry, this stage of their life cycle could provide them with increased financial freedom, provided they received an annual income, and, as in the case of Barbara Johnson, allowed them to travel between households as guests, cultivating their relationships with family and friends. Dress, as we have seen throughout this chapter, could be a contentious economic issue between wives and their husbands, a source of sentimental gift giving, or a statement of the social status and responsibility afforded to married women; dress was also, at this stage of the life cycle, carefully chosen to reflect the steadily increasing age of the women who wore it.

This period of the life cycle was less of a sudden change to how these women identified themselves; the abrupt moment of first becoming a wife occurred on the wedding day. Rather it was a continually developing, underlying thread of identity that became more comfortable and flexible over time, and was closely linked to being the head of a familial household and the responsibility this entailed; a role that arguably also became easier and more comfortable with time and practice, and could be overshadowed in its importance by subsequent life stages and caregiving roles.

[33] J. Bailey, 'Favoured or Oppressed?', p. 357.

## Chapter Five

*'I was so prodigious big': Dressing for Pregnancy*

Pregnancy was a critical time during a woman's life in early modern England. Personal and social expectations of impending motherhood weighed heavily on pregnant women's minds and bodies and were reflected through their choice of dress. This stage of the life cycle, for the women that experienced it, was relatively short but heralded intense physical changes, which were often accompanied by anxieties around health and changing medical discourse. It was also a stage that might be repeated frequently, and therefore an identity that would be adopted and then shed multiple times over the course of a woman's life. It is entirely possible that a woman's first pregnancy would have the most impact on how she constructed her identity as an expectant mother; with no prior experience of the bodily changes or the emotional labour of carrying a child, this could be a formative experience for women in which they would rely heavily on networks of female friends and relatives. Alternatively, a particularly stressful or dangerous later pregnancy could have a similar impact on how women perceived themselves whilst pregnant. Clothing during this stage of the life cycle could be used to help mediate the physical discomfort of pregnancy, but also to provide women with control over how publicly visible their pregnancy was, and to maintain a visual link to their pre-pregnancy selves.

This chapter will consider how women dressed themselves throughout pregnancy: the ways in which garments might be specifically designed for this stage of the life cycle, or the ways in which women would be able to alter their adult wardrobe; how women might use dress to either conceal or draw attention to a pregnancy; and how the medical discourse that changed throughout this period attempted to influence women's choice of dress. Laura Gowing has acknowledged that 'Only in exceptional, usually negative circumstances were women likely to be recorded talking about their own bodies, about sex, pregnancy or childbirth', and that 'menstruation, sex, pregnancy, and childbirth feature only occasionally in letters, diaries and autobiographies'; similarly, Karen Hearn has noted that in pre-20th century portraiture, 'it has generally been the norm to edit out or conceal any signs of pregnancy, rather than to show them', making visual representations of

pregnancy rare.[34] This section will look to examine the few women who do record their experiences, or the experiences of others, as well as their relationships with dress and material consumption during this time.[35]

Whilst pregnancy might be eagerly anticipated, and a child much desired, Pollock argues that in early modern England 'pregnancy was viewed through the prism of miscarriage: as a difficult, uncomfortable and potentially dangerous condition.'[36] Pregnancy impacted a woman's physicality, her identity and her sense of agency, making it a key phase in the female life cycle, and for many women one that was often repeated. Pregnancy also shaped the lives of women who never personally experienced it: 'husbandless and [or] childless, she was effectively marginalised', being marked out as women unable to fulfil their biological purpose.[37] Sara Mendelson identifies the tension felt by seventeenth century diarist Sarah Savage: 'In the early years of her marriage she recorded her anxiety each month that she would never become pregnant', and the implications that this would have upon her identity as a wife, and a woman, in early modern England.[38] Certainly, Sarah Savage would not have been alone in feeling the social and familial pressure to produce healthy children.

Maternity, including pregnancy and breast-feeding, had significant social ramifications for women; it could be a 'unique experience from which women claimed authority', or conversely, as Jacques Gélis has described, one in which the 'pregnant woman is very aware that she is not in control of her own body'.[39] Here we can see some of the tensions that may have manifested in the minds of pregnant women, and shaped their sense of self-identity throughout this stage of their life cycle: a constant pull between the social status and influence of becoming a

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[34] K. Hearn, *Portraying Pregnancy from Holbein to Social Media* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2020) p. 10.
[35] L. Gowing, 'Bodies and Stories' in M. Mikesell & A. Seeff, *Culture and Change: Attending to Early Modern Women* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003) pp. 317 – 332, p. 318.
[36] L. Pollock, 'Embarking on a Rough Passage: the Experience of Pregnancy in Early Modern Society', in V. Fildes, ed.,*Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren*, (London: Routledge, 1990) pp. 39 – 67, p. 59.
[37] J. Gélis, trans. R. Morris, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy and Birth in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) p. 19.
[38] S. Mendelson, 'Stuart Women's Diaries and Occasional Memoirs', in *Women in English Society, 1500-1800* ed. M. Prior (London: Routledge, 1985) p. 195.
[39] P. Crawford, 'The Construction and Experience of Maternity in Seventeenth-Century England', in *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England*, p. 29; J. Gélis, trans. R. Morris, *History of Childbirth*, p. 58.

successful mother, and the fear of surrendering control of bodily experience to the unborn, or newborn, child. Dress was one of the ways in which woman could navigate these tensions, whether that consisted of dressing for comfort, proscribing to contemporary medical thought, or continuing to wear their clothes with only minor alterations to account for their pregnant bodies.

In modern sociological studies of maternity wear, there has been an emphasis on pregnancy as one of the 'liminal transitions [that] occur throughout the lifespan and serve as periods of transition whereby an individual's identity may be suspended', and a time during which the 'focus on possessions serve as a symbolic means for representing the self when identity is in flux'.[40] The implication here is that during transitional periods of a woman's life, there is an emphasis on consumption as a way of maintaining a sense of self and negotiating changing identities: something that can also be seen occurring in the early modern period. Women undertake 'purposeful management of their appearances to affirm either their current, liminal status as 'mother to be', or their actual, impending role as mothers', whilst also employing material culture to serve as a 'bridge to a past self', dressing to navigate bodily and social change.[41] If we look to apply this sociological theory to women in England between 1660 and 1780, it is also possible to find examples of women constructing identities through the consumption of material goods. M. Sohn and E. Bye have examined the primary functions of maternity wear and the motivations of the women who wear it, noting that 'maternity clothing was worn primarily for comfort and assurance'; whilst other types of clothes might perform the functions of individuality, camouflage or fashion.[42] This is not an inherently modern concept; women between 1660 and 1780 can also be seen choosing their clothing within several of these categories, and the notion of comfort is one that is referenced frequently as these women chose their maternity clothes.

Medical discourse surrounding women's reproductive bodies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was divided and often contradictory: Naomi

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[40] J. P. Ogle, K. E. Tynor, S. Schofield-Tomschin, 'The Role of Maternity Dress Consumption in Shaping the Self and Identity During the Liminal Transition of Pregnancy', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 13 (2), (2013) pp. 119-139, pp. 119, 120.
[41] J. P. Ogle, *et al.,* 'The Role of Maternity Dress Consumption', pp. 131, 133.
[42] M. Sohn & E. Bye, 'Pregnancy and Body Image: Analysis of Clothing Functions of Maternity Wear', *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 33, (2015) pp. 64-78, pp. 64, 68.

Miller describes the way in which the uterus was 'associated both with powers of femininity in physical reproduction, and with apparently female weaknesses such as fluidity and instability'; a socially constructed view of women as both powerful and weak, symbolised by the physical nature of the womb.[43] Crawford has identified the ways in which maternity literature, written by women between 1600 and 1700, was an 'important area of publication' in which women 'wrote to bear witness to their own different reality', highlighting the tension between male medical knowledge, which further increased in influence through the rise of the male midwife in the eighteenth century, and female bodily experience.[44] This developing knowledge of the female body and its relationship with social constructions of womanhood were also linked to dress and consumption; the ways in which women perceived their bodies and identities impacted their choice of dress and helped to shape their patterns of consumption.

*Extant Maternity Wear*

A rare example of specific maternity dress survives from the late seventeenth century: a pink, white and lilac pair of stitched maternity stays with a corresponding stomacher (see Figure 36). They are described in *Patterns of Fashion 5* as being 'a pair of stays with a matching stomacher, both made of two layers. The outer layer is a patterned silk in white, lilacs and salmon pink (colours now faded), with scrolling stems of foliage and flowers in stripes. The inner layer is a white linen with a small, tight herringbone or chevron weave'.[45] The stays are kept in the Verney Collection at Claydon House, Buckinghamshire, and have been attributed to Mary Verney, the wife of Edmund Verney, who had three pregnancies in 1666, 1668 and 1675, at the ages of twenty five, twenty seven and thirty four.

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[43] N. Miller, 'Mothering Others: Caregiving as Spectrum and Spectacle in the Early Modern Period', in N. Miller & N. Yavneh, ed. *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) p. 5.
[44] P. Crawford, 'Women's Published Writings, 1600-1700', in M. Prior, ed, *Women in English Society, 1500-1800* (London: Routledge, 1985) pp. 222, 226.
[45] J. Arnold, J. Tiramani & L. Costigliolo, *Patterns of Fashion 5: The Content, Cut, Construction and Context of Bodies, Stays, Hoops and Rumps, 1595-1795* (London: The School of Historical Dress, 2018) p. 69.

Whilst the construction of the stays is fairly typical of the period, 'in many respects, of a similar cut and construction to those made for non-pregnant women', the stomacher is what indicates that they may have been worn in pregnancy.[46] Rather than tapering to a triangular point, the stomacher expands outwards underneath the breast and is very rounded, suggesting that it was to be worn over a growing pregnant belly. Other signs imply that the garment was to be worn by an expecting mother: the 'short length of the skirts [the flaps that would sit on the hips]…and the use of a diagonal boning pattern', which would have allowed the stays to be worn over expanding hips suggests pregnancy, as would the 'extremely rigid **CB** [centre back channel] and back peak' which 'might have helped the back ache that often occurs in late pregnancy, and…given some welcome support'.[47]

We can see then, that this garment appears to take standard construction techniques and has cleverly modified them to fit the body of a pregnant woman. The laces of the stays could have been let out as the belly expanded, with the rounded stomacher continuing to conceal the shift below. As the stomacher was not permanently attached to the stays, there is a possibility that a standard, tapered one could be swapped out and worn when not pregnant, giving added use and longevity to an expensive garment. Karen Hearn has described the stays as 'an outstandingly rare set of garments specifically made for pregnancy…such purpose-made clothing for pregnancy reflects both the status and the life experience of the original wearer'; Mary Verney's position as part of a wealthy family, and the expectation that pregnancy would be one of her main occupations, is made apparent through her ownership of these stays.[48]

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[46] *Ibid.*
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] K. Harvey, *Portraying Pregnancy,* p. 70.

*Figure 36: Pink silk stays belonging to Mary Verney. Claydon House, National Trust*

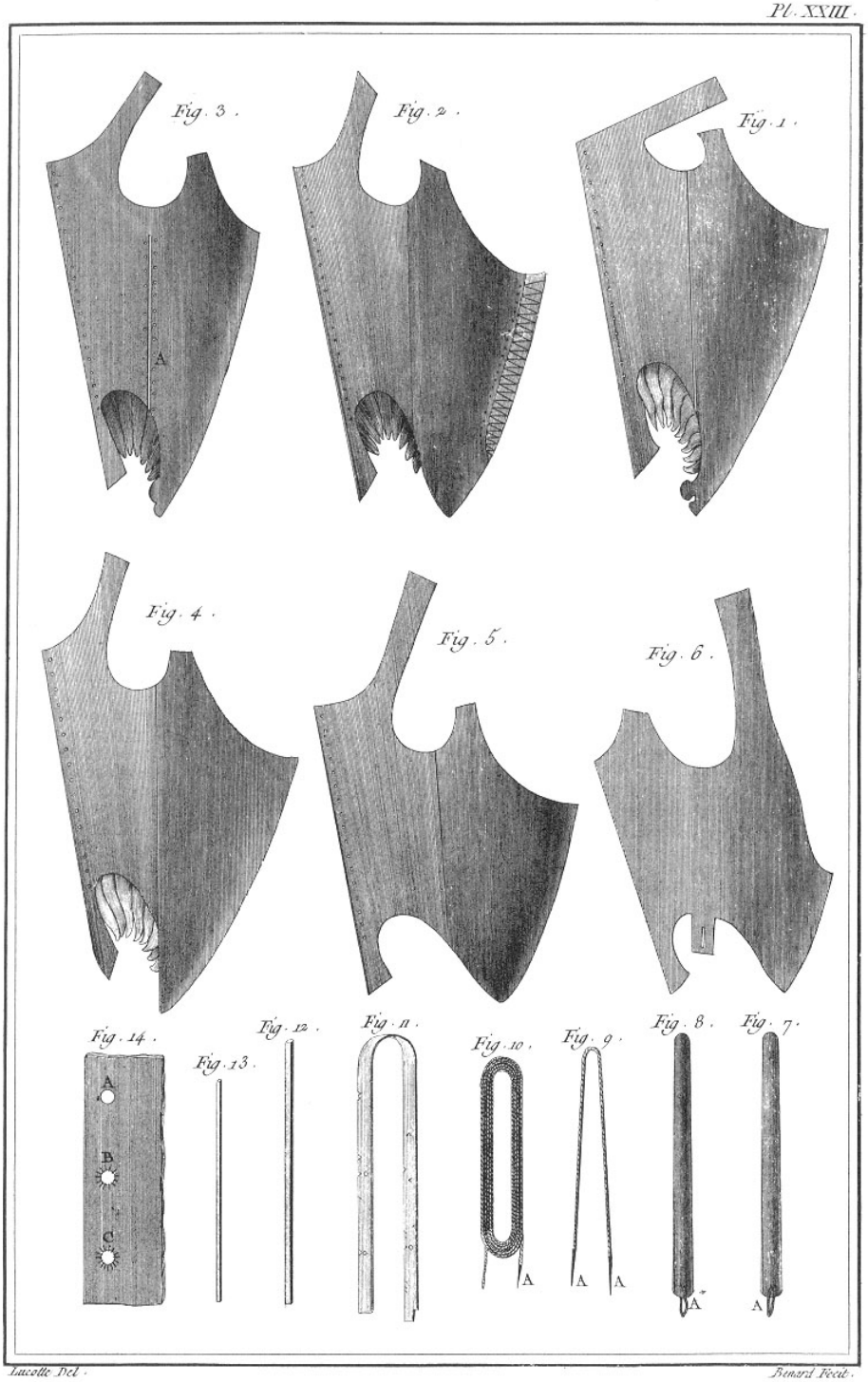


*Figure 37: "Tailor of suits and tailor of bodices." The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project. Translated by Bob Trump. Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2003, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.00*

Lynn Sorge-English describes a drawing of a 'stay that opened at the sides, for pregnant women' in Garsault's 1769 *Art Du Tailleur*, as well as jumps: a 'softer, unboned garment worn on less formal occasions, including following childbirth'.[49] An engraving of a similar style of stays can be found in the French *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* , in the section devoted to tailoring and bodies; this French publication was part of a wider encyclopaedia of science, arts and crafts intending to depict the trade of tailoring for a wider audience, using illustrative plates the demonstrate the work of a traditional tailor. Figure 3, or 'Bodies for pregnant women laced by the two sides at A', shows the additional side lacing included on maternity stays to allow for growth of the belly, but also emphasises the similarities in shape and construction to other varieties of structural undergarments, suggesting that whilst they were designed to accommodate the pregnant female form, they might also be worn by a woman who was not, at the time, with child (see Figure 37).[50] A pair of stays like the ones at Claydon House might have been worn on alternate days with jumps after labour as a compromise between comfort and style, being laced tighter as the body returned to a pre-pregnancy size.

Gélis claimed that it was only 'ordinary women' who 'had to adapt their…everyday garment…in particular by adjusting the stitching at the waist', but we can see from the adjustable pink stays of Mary Verney that upper class women also wore multi-functional clothes.[51] Harriet Waterhouse, in her exploration of boned stays and pregnant women, notes that 'stays were a daily reality for women of all classes', including those who were pregnant; the adaption of normal dress through the 'addition of a larger stomacher was a simple and elegant solution' that would prevent the necessity of an entirely new pregnancy wardrobe.[52] The aristocratic and upper classes were certainly not exempt from reusing or recycling garments across

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[49] L. Sorge-English, *Stays and Body Image in London: The Staymaking Trade, 1680-1810* (London: Routledge, 2011) p. 100.

[50] "Tailor of suits and tailor of bodices." *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project*. Translated by Bob Trump. Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2003, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.178 [08/02/19] Trans. of "Tailleur d'habits et tailleur de corps," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers,* vol. 9 (plates). Paris, 1771.

[51] J. Gélis, *History of Childbirth,* p. 80.

[52] H. Waterhouse, 'A Fashionable Confinement: Whaleboned Stays and the Pregnant Woman', *Costume*, 41:1 (2007), pp. 53-65, p. 56.

this period, and it is logical that this would be particularly true during the temporary, physically disruptive and oft repeated stage of pregnancy.

As has been stated, it is believed that the pink stays belonged to Mary Verney (née Abel), who married Edmund Verney in 1662. She gave birth to their first son, Ralph in 1666; Edmund, or Munsey, in 1668; and Mary, or Moll, in 1675. It is entirely possible that Mary would have worn the stays for all three of her pregnancies, and possibly for some time post-partum as well, as she recovered from labour. In the Verney *Memoirs*, Mary was described as experiencing frequent 'fits of madness', which have since been suggested as bouts of post-natal depression. It was noted that:

> Mary is generally better when she has a baby to look after, and takes pleasure in the adornment of the cradle and the 'peencushion'...there is also a fine white mantle to lay over the head of the cradle, and a smaller one to match, to wrap the child in when taken out, or to form a quilt.[53]

Here we can see the ways in which Mary took part in the material culture of pregnancy and childbirth, working on her son's cradle and 'peencushion', as well as acquiring a matching white christening wardrobe for herself and her son which will be discussed in Chapter Six. The implication in Frances Verney's description is that these material diversions helped to distract Mary from her poor mental health, and that they were a socially accepted and encouraged activity during pregnancy for wealthy women. Perhaps by ordering a new white outfit from London, Mary was able to regain some of the agency over her body that may have been lost during her pregnancy, as well as continuing to exert her influence over the household by decorating for a new baby.

Another surviving piece of maternity wear is a white cotton quilted garment in the museum collections of Colonial Williamsburg. The outfit was made in England, between 1780 and 1795, and is an excellent example of recycled fabrics being used to create pregnancy clothing: the three-piece outfit was 'made from a white cotton bed quilt, cut up and reused...The original quilt's undulating borders were positioned to ornament the petticoat's hem, and the quilt sides brought together and seamed down the centre front, forming a subtle panel effect'.[54] Whilst this piece of clothing is not as

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[53] F. P. Verney, *Memoirs of the Verney Family, vol. IV, From the Restoration to the Revolution 1660 to 1696* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1899) p. 170.
[54] Colonial Williamsburg Museum Collections, Acc. No. 1936-666, 1, accessed via http://emuseum.history.org/view/objects/asitem/items$0040:37619 [08/02/19]

luxurious as the pink silk maternity stays, it is suggestive of a desire to be both fashionable and practical during pregnancy. The petticoat has ties on its waistband, allowing it to be let out as the body expanded, or tightened again once its wearer had given birth. The adjustability of maternity garments across this period is a recurring theme, and is indicative of the female body as one in a state of constant change. The matching waistcoat similarly has 'adjustable lacings at the centre back' and 'was worn under the jacket and expanded the waist size for use during pregnancy', much in the same way that the rounded stomacher of the Claydon House stays allowed for growth.[55] The final piece of the ensemble, the quilted jacket, maintains the tight fit and characteristic emphasis on the waist: 'Back of jacket is shaped to fit closely, then flared into full pleated and gathered peplum 'skirt,' ending with deep point at center back waist'.[56] By hugging the back, the jacket allowed the pregnant woman to maintain a feminine silhouette, while the front flaps opened wider as the belly grew, making the under-vest or waistcoat more prominent. The jacket could presumably be worn fully laced without the waistcoat if the woman was no longer pregnant, making this outfit flexible and practical for multiple stages of the life cycle (see Figures 38 – 40). The emphasis on re-use and the recycling of fabric, whilst drawing our attention to the economic prudence of the garment's owner, also suggests that pregnancy was not approached as a singular consumer event in a woman's life, but rather that this stage of the life cycle was regarded as something that could be repeated, that would be temporary, and would draw attention to the constant changes of both a woman's body and her sense of self.

[55] Colonial Williamsburg Museum Collections, Acc. No. 1936-666, 2, accessed via http://emuseum.history.org/view/objects/asitem/items$0040:37630 [08/02/19]
[56] Colonial Williamsburg Museum Collections, Acc. No. 1936-666, 3, accessed via http://emuseum.history.org/view/objects/asitem/items$0040:37641 [08/02/19]

*Figure 38: Colonial Williamsburg Museum Collections, Acc. No. 1936-666*

*Figure 39: Colonial Williamsburg Museum Collections, Acc. No. 1936-666*

*Figure 40: Colonial Williamsburg Museum Collections, Acc. No. 1936-666*

*Depictions of the Pregnant Body in Women's Writing*

Perhaps the most outwardly visible signifier of pregnancy was the expanding belly of the mother, which impeded the wearing of certain styles of dress, and often prompted comments from peers. In a diary entry written by Lady Mary Campbell Coke in July 1773, she described the Princess of Prussia:

> The only Prince who was present was the Prince of Prussia … His present Princess is no beauty, but so good humour'd and civil that with no advantages of Person She is really agreeable. She is very big with child: a circumstance that never increases good looks.[57]

Mary laments the Princess' current pregnant state, and equates being 'very big with child' with being unattractive, in her own opinion. It is possible that some women strove to continue wearing their previous outfits so as to not succumb to the notion of the 'big' pregnant woman, despite the celebrated social status that would later come from being a mother. Waterhouse reminds us that even those garments made specifically for pregnancy still 'shaped into the waist', adhering to the broadly accepted ideal female silhouette.[58] Despite the 'clear incompatibility between the pregnant figure and the fashionable ideal', garments could still shape and compress the female body.[59] It is also likely that Mary is referring to the late stage of pregnancy by describing the Princess of Prussia as 'big with child'; she was most probably in her third trimester, nearing labour, perhaps dressing for comfort over royal court style, or as a compromise, wearing her court dress unlaced.

In 1698, a similarly scathing description was made by Mary Jepp Clarke to John Spreat about pregnant women, describing them as 'those so bigg that makes one allways walke in the shade to be with them', indicating that those women would take up excessive amounts of physical space and were perceived as a nuisance rather than a miracle of fertility.[60] These comments certainly seem to enforce the idea that 'the pregnant woman was never alone: pregnancy was a collective experience', particularly in regard to dress and bodily appearance.[61] The pregnant body was one

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[57] M. C. Coke, *The Letters and Journals of Lady Mary Coke, vol. 4* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1889), accessed via < https://bwl2.alexanderstreet.com> [22/01/19]
[58] H. Waterhouse, 'A Fashionable Confinement', p. 58.
[59] H. Waterhouse, 'A Fashionable Confinement', p. 53.
[60] M. J. Clarke, *Clarke Family Letters* (Alexandria VA: Alexander Street Press, 2002), accessed via < https://bwl2.alexanderstreet.com> [22/01/19]
[61] J. Gélis, *History of Childbirth*, p. 45.

that could be publicly examined and commented upon by other women, with the potential for criticism and ridicule. Even parts of the body that would not be seen in public might be privately scrutinised by a pregnant woman: Sara Read has suggested that women might take to 'wearing a linen cloth soaked in almond oil…around the abdomen to prevent 'wrinkles of the belly'', or stretch-marks, during their pregnancy, further emphasising the anxieties surrounding the physical changes that occurred during pregnancy, and the impact this had on a woman's attractiveness.[62]

An important use of the phrase 'big with child' was to indicate how far along in the pregnancy a woman was. Pollock has argued that women 'could judge the time of conception, the stage of gestation, and the immediacy of the birth', using a variety of bodily signs, including 'the size of the abdomen and increasing pains as the women neared confinement'.[63] These physical tells reinforce that a pregnant woman's body was open to examination by all, turning what might be a private and intimate experience into something much more public. In a letter to the Countess of Strafford written in August 1764, Lady Mary Coke describes Princess Augusta's first pregnancy: 'She is six months gone with Child, to the great joy of the whole Family, but She does not look the least biger then when you saw her'.[64] Here, Mary describes the lack of change in Augusta's pregnant body, something that is worth commenting upon, and which might merit further discussion. This letter emphasises the social importance of the outward visual display of a pregnant body, particularly if that body was smaller or larger than might be considered average, and especially for members of royalty or aristocracy, for whom pregnancy ensured the continuation of lineage.

Lady Coke, who appears to have had many pregnant acquaintances whilst keeping her diary and writing to friends, recounts an evening spent with Lady Grosvenor and Lady Beauclerk:

> Ly Grosvenor was dancing away, to the great surprise of Ly Catherine Beauclerk, who I believe is about as far gone with Child as her, & did not think herself in a condition for dancing.[65]

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[62] S. Read, *Maids, Wives, Widows: Exploring Early Modern Women's Lives, 1540-1740* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2015) p. 95.
[63] L. Pollock, 'Embarking on a Rough Passage', pp. 45, 44.
[64] M. C. Coke, *The Letters and Journals of Lady Mary Coke, vol. 1* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1889), accessed via < https://bwl2.alexanderstreet.com> [22/01/2019]
[65] M. C. Coke, *The Letters and Journals of Lady Mary Coke, vol. 1* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1889), accessed via < https://bwl2.alexanderstreet.com> [22/01/2019]

This exchange between two pregnant women indicates the individuality of the pregnant body, and the autonomy that some women were able to exert to the apparent disapproval of others. Lady Catherine perhaps believed dancing to be too much physical excess, or too uncomfortable for her own pregnant body. The seventeenth century midwife, Jane Sharp, reminded her patients to 'take heed of surfeiting or excess, and let her keep her body loose' and 'to use all things with moderation, to avoid violent passions, as care, and anger, joy, fear, or whatsoever may too much stir the blood'; Lady Grosvenor may have been regarded as over exerting herself by dancing, but it also shows that she was able to judge her own levels of physical wellbeing, as well as being able to make the choice to go to a formal, public space and engage in social activity.[66] The garments that these women would have been expected to wear at social gatherings would certainly have included structural undergarments, which, when tightly laced, contradicted popular medical advice for pregnant women. *Aristotle's Compleat and Experience'd Midwife*, written in 1711, advised against a 'woman being lace tightly in stays', as it 'caused many physical problems during pregnancy'.[67] We might suggest, then, that Lady Grosvenor was either dressed in a pair of maternity stays to accommodate her pregnancy, or was instead continuing to wear her pre-pregnancy wardrobe as a way of maintaining agency over her body and identity.

The emphasis on comfort in maternity clothes can be seen in a letter sent in August 1735 from Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough, to her pregnant granddaughter Diana Russell, Duchess of Bedford:

> still I wonder you should be so very uneasy after dinner if your stays are not made too long waisted. Though I remember when I was within three months of my reckoning, I could never endure to wear any bodice at all; but wore a warm waistcoat wrapped about me like a man's, and tied my petticoats on the top of it. And from that time never went abroad but with a long black scarf to hide me. I was so prodigious big.[68]

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[66] J. Sharpe, *The midwives book, or, The whole art of midwifry discovered.: Directing childbearing women how to behave themselves in their conception, breeding, bearing, and nursing of children in six books, viz. ... / By Mrs. Jane Sharp practitioner in the art of midwifry above thirty years.* (London: Printed for Simon Miller, at the Star at the West End of St. Pauls, 1671) p. 224, accessed via http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A93039.0001.001 [23/01/2019]

[67] L. Sorge-English, *Stays and Body Image in London*, p. 107.

[68] S. Churchill, ed. G.S. Thomson, *Letters of a Grandmother, 1732-1735: Being the Correspondence of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough with her granddaughter Diana, Duchess of Bedford* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943) p. 172.

Here, Sarah reminisces about her own experiences with pregnancy, describing her discomfort at wearing any kind of stays or bodices. There is a sense of unease about the size and shape of her body during this period of Sarah's life; she was uncomfortably large and relied on fabric to cover her form, and perhaps to distract from her lack of structural undergarments. Whilst the decision to not wear stays might have made Sarah want to hide her body, it is notable that she ultimately chose comfort over adherence to contemporary fashions. Here we can see the importance of personal choice and agency over the pregnant body; fashionable maternity wear was not necessarily proscriptive to a particular class, and an aristocratic woman like the Duchess of Marlborough might choose to instead dress for comfort. It is possible that aristocracy would provide greater freedom of choice for women, as their social status was at less risk than a woman from the middling classes, and they would not have to attend to work or strenuous activity during their pregnancies. When describing her petticoats, and being able to tie them over her large waistcoat, Sarah draws attention once again to the flexibility of maternity wear; being able to tie garments in a way that covered the pregnant body, remained respectable, but emphasised comfort whilst making use of items that were already in a woman's wardrobe.

The 'long black scarf' used to cover Sarah's body was perhaps similar to an apron that might also be worn by a pregnant woman. In May 1669, Samuel Pepys described meeting the King and Queen:

> there I waited upon the King and Queene all dinner-time, in the Queene's lodgings, she being in her white pinner and apron, like a woman with child; and she seemed handsomer plain so, than dressed.[69]

Pepys associates the Queen's apron, which would have been tied below the bust and covering the stomach, with the dress of a pregnant woman, emphasising the clearly popular practice of keeping pregnant bodies covered with an additional layer of clothing. In the 1710 etching, *Zwangere vrouw ontvangt een stuk ossenvlees,* or, *Pregnant woman receives a piece of beef*, by print-maker Caspar Luyken, a woman stands in profile, revealing the curve of her pregnant stomach under a white apron (see Figure 41).[70] The roundness of her form lifts her skirts in the front, indicating

[69] S. Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, accessed via http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/3331/pg3331-images.html [08/02/19]
[70] C. Luyken, *Zwangere vrouw ontvangt een stuk ossenvlees* (1710), Acc. No. RP-P-OB-45.477

another way that the pregnant female body could alter the fit of garments. Similarly, in William Hogarth's 1730-1735 etching, *A Woman Swearing a Child to a Grave Citizen*, the pregnant subject of the piece is wearing a white apron over her otherwise normal dress (see Figure 42).[71] There is the hint of a stomacher underneath her apron, suggesting that she is wearing a pair of stays, or a similar undergarment that it could be pinned to. These prints, along with the Duchess of Marlborough's letter, and the account in Pepys' diary suggest that the apron was often regarded as a visual symbol of pregnancy, perhaps as a result of its association with domesticity, the home and comfort; it was worn by women who had chosen to adopt these themes as part of their identities as wives and prospective mothers.[72] Hearn has similarly observed that in British portraiture from the late seventeenth century, depicting the expectant mother 'hold[ing] up a gauze scarf or mantle before her body … can be associated with pregnancy', suggesting a visual link between garments that shield or obscure the stomach and pregnancy.[73]

The physical body of a woman might also be used to disprove pregnancy in unfavourable situations. Anne Vane, the sister of Lord Vane, the later Earl of Darlington, wrote to Henrietta Berkely, Countess of Suffolk in October 1730:

> I suppose, madam, you are not ignorant of the aspersions I labour under; for I am informed that it is whispered about the court that I am with child. I confess the knowledge of this piece of malice has done infinite mischief with regard to my health, but none, I hope, to my reputation, because thousands daily see the contrary.[74]

Here, Anne describes with indignation the rumours of her pregnancy that had been circulating around court, the 'piece of malice' that threatened her status and had a

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Rijksmuseum http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.146631 [09/02/19]

[71] W. Hogarth, *A Woman Swearing a Child to a Grave Citizen, Acc. No.* 2000.171.FA, Dallas Museum of Art, Foundation for the Arts, The Alfred and Juanita Bromberg Collection, bequest of Juanita K. Bromberg, accessed via https://collections.dma.org/artwork/5323055 [09/02/19]

[72] The apron had also become something of a fashionable accessory amongst the elite during the course of the eighteenth century, with aprons being made from fine muslin or decorative lace, emphasising its departure from a working garment. For further discussion of this, see E. Spencer, "None but Abigails appeared in white aprons': The Apron as an Elite Garment in Eighteenth Century England', *Textile History*, 49 (2018) pp. 164 – 190.

[73] K. Hearn, *Portraying Pregnancy*, p. 66.

[74] A. Vane, *Letters to and from Henrietta, Countess of Suffolk and her Second Husband, the Hon. George Berkeley. From 1712 to 1767, vol. 1*, (London: John Murray, 1824), accessed via <https://bwl2.alexanderstreet.com> [22/01/2019]


*Figure 41: C. Luyken, Zwangere vrouw ontvangt een stuk ossenvlees (1710), Acc. No. RP-P-OB-45.477*


*Figure 42: W. Hogarth, A Woman Swearing a Child to a Grave Citizen, Acc. No. 2000.171.FA, Dallas Museum of Art*

damaging impact on her mental and physical health. Anne emphasises that 'thousands daily see the contrary', indicating that her body remained unchanged, that she did not have the growing belly that was indicative of pregnancy. By remaining able to wear her usual court wardrobe, and ensuring she was publicly visible on a daily basis, Anne takes measures to disperse the rumours of her illegitimate pregnancy, purposefully encouraging the visual consumption of her non-pregnant body by those around her.

*Unwanted Pregnancies*

There are examples of women who are open about their desire to not bear any more children, and a sense of unease around frequently recurring pregnancies. In January 1772, Lady Mary Campbell Coke describes:

> the Great Duchess (who is again with child) She said: "For this time I am not pleased." I suppose She is contented with the number of Children She has already, and thinks it may injure her health.[75]

Here we see evidence of Pollock's suggestion that 'pregnancy…was correlated with physical discomfort and mental unease', particularly amongst those women who had already borne children.[76] Lady Mary surmises that the Duchess is apprehensive about pregnancy for two reasons: that she has already produced enough children for her own satisfaction, and for the passing down of inheritance, along with legitimate concerns for her health. Crawford has noted the desire of women to 'control their own reproductive experiences', whilst Pollock argues that the 'concept of controlling family size did exist in early-modern society' suggesting that women could, and did, try to control their pregnancies.[77] It is likely that the construction of a domestic, familial unit is one that women like the Duchess would draw a sense of agency, control and identity from; the occasion of an unexpected pregnancy, when the family was already at an acceptable size, could cause distress and anxiety.

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[75] M. C. Coke, *The Letters and Journals of Lady Mary Coke, vol. 1* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1889), accessed via < https://bwl2.alexanderstreet.com> [08/02/19]
[76] L. Pollock, 'Embarking on a Rough Passage', p. 47.
[77] P. Crawford, 'The Construction and Experience of Maternity', p. 16; L. Pollock, 'Embarking on a Rough Passage', p.54.

Medical concerns were pressing, with experienced mothers understanding that multiple pregnancies could potentially damage their bodies. Alice Thornton described the pain of her fifth child's labour like being 'on the rack', and Jane Sharp's midwifery guide advises that 'hard labour attends most of them', and that 'she must look for a great deal of pain when the time of delivery comes'.[78] This fear of putting the body through excessive pain must surely have influenced the decisions of women to clothe themselves comfortably when they felt labour was imminent, to minimise what was already expected to be an unpleasant task. Clothes provided a tactile experience, and dressing in soft, warm fabrics, as well as having their bedchambers fitted with fresh linens, might have contributed to a woman's sense of security and wellbeing.

Other women were more vehement in their aversion to pregnancy: Mary Jepp Clarke writes in January 1698:

> I have no newes nor time to wright more att present then to assure you that the giddiness in my head doss not proseede from breeding, for I thanke God I am not with child; and I do wonder at anybody that can think one should gett more when one have so many allredy that one can hardly steppe for them… I have showed the world I am not barren and I am content.[79]

Mary's correspondent suggests that she might be pregnant after experiencing a dizziness in her head, further reinforcing the idea that discomfort was to be expected when carrying a child. Mary provides decisive assurance that she is not pregnant, and describes herself as over-encumbered with children, so that she 'can hardly steppe for them'; Mary's bodily and domestic spaces are overrun, and her identity risks becoming entirely one of motherhood. Most of Mary's desire to now avoid childbearing stems from having already experienced it: she writes 'I have showed the world I am not barren and I am content', emphasising the importance and social value placed on women's fertility and ability to birth children.[80] Mary has experienced pregnancy and adopted the identity of a pregnant woman multiple times during her adult life, and is now content to leave this stage behind her.

The themes of pregnancy, maternity clothing and the domestic household are a precursor to the phase of motherhood. Women during pregnancy would combine

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[78] S. Read, *Maids, Wives, Widows*, p. 96; J. Sharpe, *The midwives book,* pp. 167, 168.
[79] M. J. Clarke, *Clarke Family Letters*
[80] P. Crawford, 'The Construction and Experience of Maternity', p. 28.

multiple identities, including that of the individual, the wife, and the expectant mother; then, once they had given birth or sadly miscarried, women might experience the subsequent 'loss of [those] multiple identities including her pregnant self and her pre-pregnant self'.[81] By examining surviving material objects, we can decipher the ways in which women would have worn these garments; how they were designed to fit and adapt to a changing body, the materials that were preferred for both comfort and style, and whether the items were repurposed at a later date. Through dress, these women were able to associate themselves with their pre-pregnant bodies by continuing to wear their normal clothes with minor adjustments; assert agency over their bodies by choosing comfortable garments despite fashionable conventions; negotiate their emotional response to the changing size and shape of their bodies, or even avoid the accusation of pregnancy altogether. Pregnancy was a temporary identity that could often be repeated, but was shed once it was physically completed. This stage did not linger; much like the moment of marriage, it was a short, intense time that gave way to a more permanent state of identity: motherhood.

[81] M. Sohn & E. Bye, 'Pregnancy and Body Image', p. 66.

## Chapter Six

*'a piece of a coat belonging to my own Dear Child': Dress in Motherhood*

Motherhood was, arguably, one of the most pivotal stages of a woman's life cycle in early-modern England. Many women reached adulthood with the expectation that they would become mothers, and an understanding that this role would become central to their sense of self. Motherhood as a state of identity would come as an immediate successor to a successful first pregnancy, and became a constant state of identity from that moment onwards, existing in tandem alongside the stages of wifehood, subsequent pregnancies, and encroaching old age. Crawford writes that 'a woman's social existence is influenced by her maternal potential, irrespective of whether or not she actually gives birth' prompting us to consider how even those women who would never be pregnant or raise children would find their status, social value, and identity influenced by the concept of motherhood.[82]

Part of this identity could include the authority or knowledge that began during pregnancy; a sense of a woman's body as being inherently different to that of a man, and of the motherly bond with a child as being biologically natural and different to the experiences of the father.[83] Karen Harvey has described the ways in which 'maternity coexisted with female sexuality and could be associated with considerable power', as a result of women's bodies existing as something 'intrinsically and physically different from those of men'; through dress, it was possible for women to highlight their differences from men, as well as their sexuality, and their identities as mothers in an overtly visual, public way.[84]

Marilyn Francus has explicitly stated the links between motherhood and domesticity in this period, exploring how the 'image of the domestic woman' was often 'particularly…a wife and mother', reinforcing the location of both the domestic woman and the mother in the space of the household.[85] A central aspect of domesticity was the purchasing of material goods for the household and the

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[82] P. Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2004) p. 79.
[83] P. Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families*, p. 101.
[84] K. Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 122.
[85] M. Francus, *Monstrous Motherhood: Eighteenth Century Culture and the Ideology of Domesticity* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013) p. 1.

individuals within it. In this sense, a mother might be able to shape the identities of herself and her children through material consumption, emphasising the importance of clothing and material objects in constructing self-identity, as well as familial identity, particularly during this stage of the life cycle.

Amanda Vickery has described motherhood as a 'virtually inescapable institution for married women', that could 'absorb almost all reserves of physical and emotional energy for at least a decade, and was an anxious backdrop for a lifetime'; a perhaps bleak prospect for married women throughout this period.[86] We know, however, that many women enjoyed motherhood, just as others found it oppressive; that some mourned their inability to be mothers, and others took on a maternal identity through their position as doting aunts, godmothers or caregivers. Crawford argues that it was 'in old age, as grandmothers, that wealthier women enjoyed most social respect', reinforcing that maternal authority and enjoyment would come with age and experience, rather than as a direct result of biological function.[87] Miller stresses that the 'spectrum of…maternal roles and responsibilities extended well beyond actual mothers to the many female caregivers who participated and assisted in childbirth', allowing us to consider other, less commonly examined roles that challenged biological definitions of motherhood.[88] All of these roles fall on the spectrum of motherhood, and represented ways in which unmarried or infertile women, or those women who chose to remain single and childless, could practice motherly caregiving and take on a maternal identity.

As in all stages of the life cycle, women's experiences were undeniably individual, and uniquely their own. Crawford has argued that many women in early modern England 'responded creatively to being mothers', and this can be interpreted in a multitude of ways: creativity in parenting methods, emotional connections, familial hierarchies and domestic spaces, but also creativity in the use of material culture and dress to represent their identity.[89] It has been suggested that women in this period 'themselves utilized stereotypes, and even caricatures, of feminised roles

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[86] A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (London: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 92, 97.
[87] P. Crawford, 'The Construction and Experience of Maternity in Seventeenth Century England', in *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren*, ed. V. Fildes (London: Routledge, 1990) p. 26.
[88] N. Miller, 'Mothering Others', p. 3.
[89] P. Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families*, p. 88.

in order to establish speaking positions for themselves', adopting the culturally accepted visual identity of a mother to gain access to particular social spaces.[90] Motherhood was a complex, extended period of the life cycle, and women used dress as a way of incorporating this experience into their identities, as we shall explore in this chapter.

*Fashionable Dress for Young Mothers*

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the prolific eighteenth-century writer, wrote to her sister, Frances Pierrepont, from Vienna in 1716, as she travelled across the continent after her husband's appointment as Ambassador at Constantinople. She describes dressing for the Viennese court, three years after her first child, at the age of twenty-seven:

> I was squeezed up in a gown, and adorned with a gorget and the other implements thereunto belonging; a dress very inconvenient, but which certainly shews the neck and shape to great advantage. I cannot forbear giving you some description of the fashions here, which are more monstrous, and contrary to all common sense and reason, than 'tis possible for you to imagine.[91]

Mary depicts her body as being 'squeezed', implying the discomfort felt at the hands of 'inconvenient' formal clothing. It is possible that, as a mother to a young child, and a recent sufferer of smallpox, Mary had chosen to dress herself rather more comfortably in her first years of motherhood, and a return to extreme court dress came as both a physical and psychological shock. Although Mary does not deny the flattering silhouette of the gown, which 'shews the neck and shape to great advantage', it appears that the Viennese fashions go beyond her sense of taste and modesty, describing them, as she does, as 'monstrous'. There is an emphasis on sexuality and the attempts of Viennese women, even mothers, to appear attractive and alluring, 'contrary to all…reason', and conflicting with Mary's notion of appropriate behaviour and dress.

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[90] 'Workshop 5: "Good Enough Mothers?", in *Culture* and Change: Attending to Early Modern Women, ed. M. Mikesell & A. Seeff (London: Associated University Presses, 2003) p. 126.
[91] M. P. W. Montagu to F. Pierrepont, September 1716, in *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, v. 1*, Lord Wharncliffe, ed. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1890) p. 239.

Two years later, and ten months after the birth of her second child, Mary writes to her friend, Lady Elizabeth Rich, from Paris, describing the women in France:

> I must tell you something of the French ladies; I have seen all the beauties, and such -- (I can't help making use of the coarse word) nauseous creatures! so fantastically absurd in their dress! so monstrously unnatural in their paints! their hair cut short, and curled round their faces, and so loaded with powder, that it makes it look like white wool! and on their cheeks to their chins, unmercifully laid on a shining red japan, that glistens in a most flaming manner, so that they seem to have no resemblance to human faces. I am apt to believe, that they took the first hint of their dress from a fair sheep newly ruddled. 'Tis with pleasure I recollect my dear pretty countrywomen: and if I was writing to any body else, I should say that these grotesque daubers give me still a higher esteem of the natural charms of dear Lady Rich's auburn hair, and the lively colours of her unsullied complexion.[92]

Here, Mary clearly expresses her distaste for the 'fantastically absurd' fashions of Paris and the 'nauseous creatures' that wear them. The emphasis in this letter is on hairstyles and make-up, but there is an overall sense of resistance to artifice and extremity in appearance. There is a patriotic message within Mary's letter: the hideous Parisian ladies allow her to recollect fondly on her 'dear pretty countrywomen', Lady Rich among them. The dress of the French women prompts Mary to romanticise the appearance of her friends, and of Englishwomen more generally, as she returns home from her two years away. It is entirely possible that Mary's age of twenty-nine and identity as a mother contributed to her distaste for excess and extremity in fashion, at the expense of comfort and modesty. This is clearly based on Mary's personal taste and priorities, but also perhaps speaks to a broader theme of English mothers desiring to appear natural and unadorned compared to the show and pomp of young single women.

A similar attitude is celebrated in the conduct manual*, Loose Hints Upon Education, Chiefly Concerning the Culture of the Heart*, written by Henry Home, Lord Kames: an Edinburgh law lord who was married to Agatha Drummond, with whom he had two children in the middle of the eighteenth century.

> From a married woman engaged in family concerns, a more staid behaviour is expected, than from a young woman before marriage; and consequently, a greater simplicity of dress…A girl begins with her doll, then thinks of adorning

[92] M. P. W. Montagu to E. Rich, 10th October 1718, , in *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, v. 2*, Lord Wharncliffe, ed. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1890) p. 396.

> her own person. When she is married, her children become her dolls, upon whom all her taste in dress is displayed.[93]

Whilst it is unclear whether Agatha adhered to this notion of motherhood, it is evident that, in the mind of her husband, this stage of a woman's life cycle was linked to a renouncing of fashionable excess, and an embracing of 'simplicity'. The assumption that a married woman would have children is clear; Home uses the term 'married woman' as someone who is interchangeable with a mother, emphasising the overlap of multiple female identities during this period. Dress is closely associated with behaviour in Home's writing: the flamboyant patterns and accessories of courtship were to be replaced with respectability and sobriety in dress. Home's mention of dolls is interesting, and suggests that dress should be used as a creative outlet for women: a girl can use her doll to dress up; a young woman, her own body; a mother, the doll-like forms of her children. Home regards women's fashion as an acceptable form of creative expression for woman, but believes that the mother should indulge this, not on her own body, but through the dressing, care, and nurture of her children.

Despite this view that fashionable dress and self-expression through clothing were not appropriate for mothers, there are certainly examples of women taking a keen interest in clothing, being gifted fashionable garments, and having to negotiate their appearance with others after the birth of their children. Vickery has closely examined the records of Elizabeth Shackleton, a Lancashire gentry-woman, who had her first child in 1754, at the age of 28.[94] Her aunt, Ann Pellet, recommended a 'a very pretty light tabby' negligee, to be worn with 'a white gauze fichu . . . which is the high fash to throw over yr neck', without a hoop; an outfit which Vickery has described as a 'new look gown' following the trends of urban fashion.[95] Perhaps surprisingly, it was the elderly Ann who appeared to push for her niece to wear more fashionable garments; Vickery comments that Elizabeth 'baulked at the new silhouette, sticking with the older model of a long trailing sack back dress with hoop'.[96] It is possible that, in Lancashire, Elizabeth was in less of a rush to adopt the

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[93] Henry Home, Lord Kames, Loose Hints Upon Education, Chiefly Concerning the Culture of the Heart, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: 1782), pp. 258–59.
[94] A. Vickery, 'Mutton Dressed as Lamb? Fashioning Age in Georgian England' in *Journal of British Studies*, 52 (2013) pp. 858-886, p. 875.
[95] *Ibid.*
[96] *Ibid.*

new metropolitan fashions that her aunt was more readily exposed to from her home in Kensington, and did not feel pressure to update her wardrobe so soon after childbirth. There might also be concerns of comfort, particularly as Elizabeth was a new mother; perhaps she felt more at ease in her familiar wardrobe and saw no reason to update her outfit. Vickery notes that 'By the next year, Elizabeth Parker has succumbed and accepted the negligee…making up the loose dress in a blue and silver fabric'; the next year, Elizabeth also saw the birth of her second child, and we might argue that with greater confidence and experience in her role as a mother, as well as the progression of fashionable styles to more rural areas, she felt more inclined to try new styles and have new dresses made up for her.[97]

Ann Pellet's step-daughter, Jane Scrimshire, who had her first child in 1753, the year before Elizabeth became a mother, recommended to her step-cousin that she could alter her more formal clothes in order to keep up with the changing silhouettes: '[M]ake it for a hoop for the brides visit and then only take some of the fullness out of the sides and it is a negligee.'.[98] Perhaps Jane wanted to offer some thrifty advice to another new mother, or she was sympathetic to Elizabeth's wariness of new garments. After the death of Elizabeth's first husband in 1758, she is given advise based on her altered social position: 'it would not be thought decent for a widow with Children to show so much nakedness'.[99] Here we are able to see a network of women providing advice and suggestions concerning fashionable dress, particularly two women who had recently entered the same stage of the life cycle together. Whilst some commentators, like Henry Home, believed that motherhood should signal a departure from outward displays of fashion, it is clear from letters like the ones between Elizabeth Parker and her female relatives that dress was as central to motherhood as any other part of the life cycle.

As well as giving advice, women also shared gifts with their friends and relatives who were on the cusp of motherhood. Mary Delany, in 1741, wrote to her sister Anne Dewes, who was clearly expecting a child.

> I have had no trouble, my dearest sister, about any of your affairs, but much pleasure; I shall send the box this week by the carrier…The bandbox, basket, and pincushion you must be so good as to accept from me…I will get myself

[97] *Ibid.*
[98] *Ibid.*
[99] A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 175.

> *perfectly informed* of the new dress for the bantling, that I may instruct you when I come to Glocester. I have sent you four yards of course long lawn, and two yards finer for the little night-caps, etc.; I suppose you will line the cradle with dimity or white calico, *quilted*. Let me know if you want anything of the kind or any other, and I will bring it with me; as for *pins*, I think you *must pay the compliment* to Glocester of buying pins there…Short stays and long stays are forgot, but make them of *long lawn*.[100]

Here, we can see that Mary has sent her sister a 'bandbox, basket, and pincushion' as a gift for her expected baby, but also plans to immerse herself in the fashions of children's dress, so that she can 'instruct' her sister, who lives in the more rural, and therefore less fashionable, location of Gloucester. There is certainly a sense of excitement in the letter; an enthusiasm for dressing the new baby in a way that reflects the status of their mother. Mary sends linen fabric: four yards of a 'course long lawn', a lightweight, slightly sheer fabric, and two of a 'finer' lawn with which to make, amongst other things, night-caps for the baby. She also adds, in a postscript to the letter, instructions for Anne to make both short and long stays of '*long lawn*'. Despite Mary not having children of her own, her experience with fashionable dress and access to fabrics puts her in the position of advisor to her pregnant sister, suggesting that a comprehensive knowledge of dress and fashionable styles was something that Anne, as a new mother, wanted to maintain access to and would utilise to make her experience more comfortable.

The mention of pins in Mary Delany's letter, and her gift of a pincushion, indicates that Ann may have been making a commemorative pincushion for her baby. Pincushions were often gifted to heavily pregnant women or new-born babies: the example in Figure 43 shows an elaborate design of pins depicting a family crest, and the initials of the mother, thought to be Ann Pateshall, wife of Edmund Pateshall, who gave birth to a baby boy in 1778.

It is likely that at the end of the seventeenth century, Mary Verney, whose pregnancy was discussed in Chapter Five, was also working on a similar 'peencushion' for her baby, creating an object that could symbolise her emotional

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[100] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover, *The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany*, vol. II (London: Richard Bentley, 1886) p. 151.

connection and motherly bond with her son, Ralph. Mary Delany, in 1741, suggests that her sister Ann '*pay the compliment* to Glocester of buying pins there', establishing a geographical connection, and another layer of identity, between the mother and baby and the home they live in, through the pincushion. Susan Frye has described how needlework 'in particular offers small glimpses of English maternal and filial relationships', and it is certainly possible to include these pincushions in the 'distinct feminine textual tradition' of maternal materiality.[101] These objects solidify the bond between mother and child, and are a way for women like Ann Granville Dewes, Mary Verney or Ann Pateshall to mark their labour and the beginnings of motherhood through a tangible item.

In Chapter Five, Mary Verney's pregnancy stays provided a valuable insight into the types of maternity wear available to wealthy women across this period. There is also a reference to Mary's wardrobe as a young mother, at the christening of her first son, Ralph, in 1666:

> She has a 'white satin Mantle' for herself for the Christening of her little Ralph, a white satin waistcoat, a white summer gown lined with white silk and a white mohair petticoat, all of which Aunt Elmes orders in London.[102]

[101] S. Frye, 'Maternal Textualities', in N. Miller & N. Yavneh, ed. *Maternal Measures,* pp. 224, 225.
[102] F. P. Verney, *Memoirs of the Verney Family, vol. IV, From the Restoration to the Revolution 1660 to 1696* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1899) p. 170.


*Figure 43: Layette pincushion, 1788, V&A Collections, B.2-2009*

Mary has an entire outfit made for her in London, ordered by 'Aunt Elmes', who was presumably either based in London, or simply able to travel more freely than Mary, who would be observing her lying in period after the birth of her son. The white outfit, which consisted of multiple pieces of silk and a mohair petticoat, may have been intended to highlight Mary's return to a more public role after labour, but was perhaps also chosen to emphasise Mary's reclamation of her body and fashionable image after the complex bodily changes of pregnancy.

The outfit undoubtedly makes a statement: clothed entirely in white, matching baby Ralph's wrappings at his Christening, Mary would have been a positively angelic figure. The practicality of an entirely white outfit is questionable, and therefore instead speaks to Mary's wealth, status, and position as a pious and devoted new mother. There is evidence to suggest that nurses and servants might also have matched a mother and baby at the Christening. The collections of the Bath Fashion Museum contain Christening gowns for babies with matching sleeves for their nurses; a coordinated, purpose-made outfit that potentially allowed the mother to share her fashioned identity with her children and servants.

*Motherhood in Portraiture*

In the painting, *Unknown Woman and Two Children* by Gawen Hamilton, a mother sits with two very young children in a domestic scene (see Figure 44).[103] Her pink gown wraps across the front, and she wears a white modesty panel, with matching sleeves and gown lining. It is possible that the gown is intended as a nursing garment; the looseness of the front and the lack of fastenings suggest something that is both comfortable and that can be easily removed. In this painting, the mother's dress is intended to emphasise the very young age of her two children; at this moment, she dresses modestly and practically to accommodate their needs, and for her own comfort. In contrast, the painting *Portrait of an Unknown Woman and Child*, by Andrea Soldi (ca. 1740), shows a

[103] G. Hamilton, *Unknown Woman and Two Children,* (1700-50) V&A Museum of Childhood Collections, MISC.102-1989.

*Figure 44: G. Hamilton, Unknown Woman and Two Children, (1700-50) V&A Museum of Childhood Collections, MISC.102-1989.*

*Figure 45: A. Soldi, Portrait of an Unknown Woman and Child (1740) V&A Museum of Childhood Collections, B.251-1997.*

woman in a somewhat more formal dress with an older child (see Figure 45).[104] The woman sits upright, with her dark hair swept out of her face, wearing a blue silk dress with a low neckline. Her white chemise is visible, and has lace on the sleeves and neck. Around her shoulders, she wears a sheer blue fichu for added modesty and warmth. Although she wears no jewellery on her neck, there are two pearl strings around her wrist. The child is dressed in an infant's gown, with a padded bodice and long skirts. There also appears to be a hint of lace on the child's sleeves, matching those of the mother. This depiction of motherhood is less practical and emphasises decorative fashion: the focus on fine silks and lace and the sheer fichu particularly suggest an outfit that would not be worn as a nursing garment, and rather was incorporated to highlight the woman's taste and sense of style. The woman's posture is upright and her facial expression is serene and content; there is no hint of the stresses or cares of motherhood, and the child is sat, well-behaved and smiling. The child looks older than those in Hamilton's painting, suggesting that as children aged, their mother had more opportunity to return to pre-pregnancy fashions, and was not necessarily beholden to practicality or comfort above their own sense of style.

*Mothers of Adolescent and Adult Children*

The suggestion that mothers returned to their pre-pregnancy fashions once their children had reached a certain age appears to also be reflected in the accounts of poorer families: the Lathams of Scarisbrick, small-holders from Lancashire, left detailed financial accounts that have been extensively examined by Lorna Weatherill, John Styles and Amanda Vickery, and reveal interesting patterns in the family's spending on clothing across the life cycle. Nany and Richard Latham were married in 1723, and had eight children, with their youngest being born in 1741. Of the eight, seven of these were daughters; six daughters survived into young adulthood.[105]

> Richard and Nany Latham's married life, and their spending on clothes, fell into three distinct periods. During the first 18 years between 1724 and 1741,

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[104] A. Soldi, *Portrait of an Unknown Woman and Child* (1740) V&A Museum of Childhood Collections, B.251-1997.
[105] J. Styles, "Custom or Consumption? Plebeian Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England," in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, ed. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (London, 2003), pp. 103–15, p. 108.

> when their children were young and increasingly numerous, clothes expenditure was limited. The second period between 1742 and 1754, when the children were older and earning more…saw spending on clothes rise dramatically.[106]

In the accounts, it is revealed that Nany Latham experienced very little in the way of new clothing whilst her children were young, and she was herself a young mother. Vickery suggests that 'children's shoes in particular' were a heavy financial drain on the family, and that Nany had to forgo purchases for herself to ensure her children were adequately dressed.[107] We can see then, how early motherhood might impact a poorer woman's financial ability to fully express herself through dress, and that there might be an increasing reliance on the altered wardrobe of her young adulthood. Styles identifies a turning point in the purchasing of the Latham family from 1742, when their eldest daughter, Betty, was sixteen, and could work as a cotton spinner, providing more income for the family.[108] Nany was able to purchase 'camblet for a new gown in 1742, her first new dress in eighteen years, followed by new stays, two costly shag hats, and a silk handkerchief', alongside her daughters who were also purchasing garments for themselves.[109] Here, a distinction can be made between the experience of new motherhood, when children are very young, and the experience of being a mother to adolescents: Nany could not prioritise her own appearance when her children were still young, but when they were old enough to contribute to the family economy and purchase their own clothes, Nany was able to join them. Styles suggests that 'this new spending was led by the unmarried daughters themselves, whose purchases also embraced luxury…in that they purchased stylish accessories and garments in addition to practical, workaday items'. Nany perhaps took inspiration from her daughters as she began to purchase new hats, handkerchiefs and aprons, and was able to more fully develop a sense of her own personal style and identity during her later years of motherhood.

Another example the relationship between mothers and their adult children can be found in the diaries of Elizabeth Shackleton. Throughout her diaries, Elizabeth regularly records visits from her three sons, Thomas, Robert and John, and notes their exchanges of money and clothing: '2 prs of silver knee buckles to be

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[106] *Ibid.*
[107] A. Vickery, 'Mutton Dressed as Lamb?', p. 883.
[108] J. Styles, "Custom or Consumption?', p. 108, 109.
[109] A. Vickery, 'Mutton Dressed as Lamb?', p. 883.

mark'd T.P', 'Thomas Parkers own money that he leaves with me is viz £9:15:3'.[110] Elizabeth has clothes made, repaired and sent to her sons; a reflection of her status as their mother and head of the household. There is an extensive inventory of linen for Thomas Parker at the beginning of 1772, when Elizabeth is forty-six years old:

> Rider's British Muslin' Thomas Parker's new linnen 1772: 12 shirts: 4 ruffled 8 plain, 9 new fine muslin stocks, 2 new white P. Hs with red borders, 4 white & red figured Ditto, 1 red & white Ditto, 1 new silk Ditto, 1 new pr white stockings, 1 pr Ditto brown rib'd Ditto, 3prs black & white Ditto.[111]

Although Thomas is eighteen years old in 1772, and Elizabeth is approaching the beginnings of old age, she continues to provide him with new shirts; an important role that symbolises their relationship as mother and child, and one that is interrupted by his marriage several years later.

Elizabeth's identity as a mother shifts as she, and her sons, grow older; she continues to use dress to physically express her bond with her adult children, and perhaps to keep a part of them close to her. In April 1778, on Thomas Parker's twenty-fourth birthday, Elizabeth describes her outfit: 'I put on in Honour of this Good day my quite new purple cotton night Gown and a new light brown fine cloth pincushion – a piece of a coat belonging to my own Dear Child my own Dear Tom – with a near Blue string.'[112] As well as specifically choosing to wear an item of clothing that was both 'quite new' and a vivid colour as part of her celebration of Thomas' birthday, Elizabeth had an accessory made from one of her son's old coats. We can see the emotional significance of dress to Elizabeth; she has saved a piece of fabric that was worn by her son to be repurposed into something that she could keep close to her body, a reminder of the emotional closeness between her and her son, despite his progression into adulthood. Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello have described the 'intimate world' that is revealed through material culture and Elizabeth's pincushion is certainly evidence of this; a piece of fabric that embodies her identity as a mother, and serves as a tangible reminder of her relationship with her eldest son.[113] Two years later, on her last birthday, Elizabeth has another pincushion made:

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[110] April 1767, DDX 666/1/1, Lancashire Record Office (LRO).
[111] January 1772, DDX 666/1/4, LRO.
[112] April 1778, DDX 666/1/10, LRO.
[113] A. Gerritsen & G. Riello, ed., *Writing Material Culture History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) p. 7.

> This day is my Birthday – fifty four or fifty five years old I think this day…In honour of this day I put on a new pincushion made of a piece of cloth of a coat of…Thomas Parker's a blue ribbon to it given to me by his Wife.[114]

Here, Elizabeth chooses to celebrate her own life by wearing an item that connects her to her motherly identity, and specifically to her first child whose birth marked her transition into motherhood for the first time. Beverly Lemire explores how textiles and clothing 'served to transfer memories across time and space', and it is possible that this is what Elizabeth sought to do with her new pincushion: evoke memories of Thomas when he was younger, when they all lived together at Alkincoats Hall.[115] The inclusion of a blue ribbon, given as a present by Thomas' wife Betty, was perhaps intended to represent her inclusion within Elizabeth's family, and her important position as a potential mother to Elizabeth's grandchildren; a new generation of the Parkers.

Crawford has argued that it was the maternal role of the grandmother that was the most eagerly adopted by women in early modern England, writing that 'women enjoyed sharing in the care of their grandchildren, and wrote with pleasure of their grandchildren's activities'.[116] This attitude is certainly reflected in the writing of Mary Delany, who doted upon her young great-niece Georgina Port, and kept up regular correspondence with her niece, Georgina's mother, Mary Port. Mary Port was the daughter of Mary Delany's beloved sister Anne, who died in 1761; it is possible that Mary's maternal role in the lives of her niece and great-niece served to fill both the emotional and practical caregiving gap left after Anne's death, and as a way for Mary to remain connected to her sister. In 1776, Mary Delany wrote to Mrs Port regarding her five year old grandniece:

> Sweet child, how I love her! I am dressing a doll for her; but oh, sad chance, the frisker who had her in hand let her fall and broke her nose, and as some of her clothes are made and her tete also fitted, it will be some time before I can get another doll that will do.[117]

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[114] December 1780, DDX 666/1/13, LRO.
[115] B. Lemire, 'Draping the Body and Dressing the Home: the Material Culture of Textiles and Clothes in the Atlantic World, c. 1500-1800' in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. K. Harvey (Oxon: Routledge, 2009) pp. 85 – 99, p. 91.
[116] P. Crawford, 'The Construction and Experience of Maternity in Seventeenth Century England', in V. Fildes, ed., *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren* (London: Routledge, 1990) p. 26.
[117] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover, *The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol 2* (London: Richard Bentley, 1886), p. 213.

As we have seen in previous chapters, the art of dressing fashion dolls was not simply to provide amusement for children, but to educate and replicate current fashionable styles, helping Georgina become literate in the important language of dress. By providing this gift for her great-niece, Mary took on a maternal, didactic role; her affection for Georgina is represented through the material object, but the object also served a practical purpose for the young girl. Miller describes early modern maternity as a role given to 'women in positions or nurture, instruction and even power in a variety of social settings', and although Mary Delany had no children of her own, she clearly held such a position in the lives of her niece and great-niece, which was cemented by her frequent gifts of clothing, advice on dress and position as a fashionable role model.[118]

Motherhood, and the variety of ways that it was experienced, remained a key facet of identity for the rest of the lives of those women who adopted it. For some, motherhood meant relinquishing styles that were thought to be reserved for more youthful individuals; for others, being a mother to adult children could have meant more income, and therefore more freedom in purchasing items of clothing. Clothing might be worn by mothers to symbolise their emotional ties to their children, or given as gifts, which might serve to enhance their child's wardrobe, or simply be given as an act of love. It is also clear that women who were not themselves mothers could still take on an active caregiving role and construct a maternal identity for themselves by helping to raise children within their social circles, giving items of clothing as gifts, providing advice and guidance, and taking part in public events with them. This chapter has demonstrated the ways in which motherhood, as a significant stage of the life cycle, influenced women's sense of identity, and as a result, the way they chose to dress themselves, Motherhood, once embarked upon, would remain part of a woman's identity throughout the remainder of her life cycle, influencing her sense of self and choice of dress alongside the changing identity that came with the onset of old age, which we will turn to next.

[118] N. Miller, 'Mothering Others', p. 4.

## Section Three: Old Age

Reaching old age is one of the final milestones of a woman's life cycle; a culmination of chronological ageing, bodily changes and the development of multiple identities. Lynn Botelho reminds us of the challenges of examining this section of a women's life cycle, noting that 'It is not merely the final stages of life, uncomplicated and universally experienced. It has different meanings for different people.'; a sentiment that remains true for all phases of the life cycle, and emphasises the importance of treating the women in our source materials as individuals.[1] Before examining the ways in which old age was acknowledged, constructed and experienced by women in England between 1660 and 1780, it is necessary to establish what the key social, cultural and biological signs of old age were during this period; the ways in which old age could be identified, both by women themselves, and by their peers.

Statistical evidence suggests that the average life expectancy for a woman at birth in eighteenth century England was approximately forty years old.[2] This includes data from women of all classes, as well as infant mortality, which will certainly have decreased the mean average age. When looking at middling and upper class women, there is certainly evidence that some women were living well beyond 40, as will be seen in this section. Barbara Crosbie has estimated, using data collected by Wrigley and Schofield, that people aged between forty-five and eighty-four made up around 25% of the population in the eighteenth century, with around 6% of that being people aged 65 to 84.[3] There is no gendered distinction made in Wrigley and Schofield's data, although we can extrapolate from this that the number of women aged sixty and beyond was consistently less than the number of woman in their forties. What these types of statistics do not show us is when early modern women actually considered themselves to have reached old age and how this impacted their identities, along with the way they presented themselves.

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[1] L. Botelho & P. Thane, *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2001) p. 3.
[2] J. P. Machenbach, *A History of Population Health: Rise and Fall of Disease in Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2020) p. 341.
[3] B. Crosbie, *Age Relations and Cultural Change in Eighteenth Century England* (Boydell & Brewer, 2020) p. 11.

Helen Yallop has written extensively around the important distinction between ageing as a process, and old age as a distinct stage of the life cycle; it is important to acknowledge this when considering the experiences of women in old age.[4] Ageing is a continual process that begins as soon as a person is born; a 'cultural schedule for an individual's appropriate social process through life', as well as a series of biological changes occurring in the body.[5] Old age is only one of those stages of ageing and progression through the life cycle, although it is often referred to with the phrases 'ageing' and being 'aged'. We must be careful, therefore, to distinguish when women are describing themselves in old age as opposed to describing the continual experience of ageing.

Botelho, Kugler and Yallop have explored the notion that old age occurred in multiple stages; that of the 'early, vigorous years of old age and later deterioration' or 'green old age…and advanced or decrepit old age', suggesting a key distinction between the physical appearances and abilities of women in this phase of the life cycle.[6] Those that were still in the throes of 'young' old age could remain mobile, sociable and active in their families and communities; it was not until advanced old age that the body would begin to fail, and thoughts might turn to impending death. It is important to emphasise the experiences of women in their 'young' old age, and 'deconstruct the popular notion that old age was a phase of life characterised only by helplessness and senility'; in many ways, these years of a woman's life could be some of her most empowered, and the first chapter in this section will seek to further explore this idea.[7]

One element of the life cycle that is encompassed by old age is menopause: a biological stage that resulted in social and cultural ramifications for women in this period. Whilst there was 'no rite of passage to mark the beginning of old age', and explicit references to the menopause are rare in diaries and letters, the end of a woman's childbearing years signalling the start of her old age was broadly recognised in early modern England. Botelho argues that the end of pregnancy and child-

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[4] H. Yallop, *Age and Identity in Eighteenth Century England* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013)
[5] H. Yallop, *Age and Identity*, p. 5.
[6] A. Kugler, ''I feel myself decay apace': Old Age in the Diary of Lady Sarah Cowper (1644-1720)', in L. Botelho & P. Thane, *Women and Ageing in British Society,* p. 67; L. Botelho, 'Old age and menopause in rural women of early modern Suffolk', in in L. Botelho & P. Thane, *Women and Ageing in British Society*, p. 43.
[7] L. Botelho & P. Thane, *Women and Ageing in British Society,* p. 3.

bearing alone was not necessarily a reliable indicator of fertility in older women, but rather the physical effects of the menopause, particularly those which affected the face, were what marked women as becoming 'old'.[8] These outward features: wrinkles, loss of skin elasticity and fat and the potential growth of facial hair, all of which were a result of the hormonal changes of menopause, became culturally associated with old age and an indicator that a woman was no longer fertile. Another factor to consider is the difference in experience between unmarried elderly women and those who were married, or were widows. Marriage, and the identity of wives has already been examined in Chapter Three and Four, but it continued to be an important factor in how women experienced old age, often determining whether they were able to live independently and comfortably.

There are few examples of work that considers the relationship between old women and dress during this period. Amanda Vickery is a notable exception, looking specifically at the fashions of old women in her article 'Mutton Dressed as Lamb? Fashioning Age in Georgian England', but there is certainly room for further exploration of this topic.[9]

A significant part of Section Three will be devoted to an examination of the diaries of Elizabeth Shackleton. Vickery has also explored these diaries, and Elizabeth's letters, in her book, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England*, although her focus is more concerned with the way in which Elizabeth established her household and upheld eighteenth-century notions of elegance and civility. The importance of Elizabeth Shackleton's diaries to this thesis is the way in which her discussion of clothing can be linked to her changing identity as she aged and approached the end of her life, making her a rich and fascinating case study of the relationship between fashion and the life cycle in the eighteenth century.

Barbara Johnson, Mary Delany and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu are also included in this section, as their diaries and letters continued into their old age. They also represent, in contrast to Elizabeth Shackleton who died in her fifties, women who reached their seventies and eighties, emphasising the potential differences in

[8] L. Botelho, 'Old age and menopause in rural women', p. 59.
[9] A. Vickery, 'Mutton Dressed as Lamb? Fashioning Age in Georgian England' in *Journal of British Studies*, 52, 4 (2013) pp. 858-886.

age and experience between women who all considered themselves to be old. These women were all capable of exercising some degree of control over their identities, their physical appearance and their methods of consumption, and many did so up until the moment of their deaths.

It is death and mourning that is discussed in the final chapter, which examines how women of all ages dealt with death, ideas of mortality and mourning practices, which were governed by sartorial rules. Barbara Johnson and Moll Verney each detail their extensive experiences with mourning dress and its importance in their own lives, whilst Elizabeth Shackleton records how she changes into her final iterations of garments when she suspects she will not live much longer. Despite being faced with such emotionally and socially significant occasions that had strict guidance on appropriate forms of dress, women would still use their garments to make statements about their social status, the importance of their relationship to the deceased, their knowledge of fashion and access to goods, and their own sense of identity. This final section of the thesis concentrates on how women approached their own old age and mortality, as well as how these women were expected to dress themselves when confronted with death and mourning throughout the entirety of their life cycle.

## Chapter Seven

*'I…put on my best stays for Good': Dressing for Old Age*

One of the main ways in which old age was identified in women was through physical appearance: if a woman looked old, she could be categorised as such. Lynn Botelho writes that 'in the very visual world of early modern Europe, age was assigned, like status, on the basis of visual clues and physical signifiers'.[10] Some of these clues might include missing teeth, wrinkled skin, a hunched back, grey hair, excessive hair loss on the head, or hair growth on the face: all features of the highly caricatured elderly crone. Anne Kugler describes the widespread criticism of women who sought to counteract the signs of old age: 'worst of all were women that still attempted to maintain a youthful appearance', who might attempt to 'affect[s] the follys and aires of youth, display[es] her breasts…while her eies look dead'.[11] The caricature, 'Six Stages of Mending a Face', printed in 1792, depicts a Lady Archer appearing to reverse the ageing process through the use of a wig, a glass eye, false teeth and make-up; this satirical print clearly mocks older women who might try to appear more youthful through artificial means, and criticises their apparent use of deception and trickery (see Figure 46).[12]

Another, earlier satirical print, published by Sayer & Bennett in London, 1776, entitled 'Age and Folly, or the Beauties' shows an 'aged and repulsively ugly' caricaturized couple walking in public (see Figure 47).[13] The woman's sartorial mistakes are clear: her elaborate gown and lavish accessories contrast with her hooked, warty nose and prominent chin; the exaggerated profile is reminiscent of an old hag or witch, and the silk patches indicate that her skin has been ravaged by smallpox.

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[10] L. Botelho, 'Old age and menopause in rural women', p. 60.
[11] A. Kugler, ''I feel myself decay apace': Old Age in the Diary of Lady Sarah Cowper (1644-1720)' in L. Botelho & P. Thane, *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), pp. 66-88, p. 73.
[12] Thomas Rowlandson, 'Six stages of mending a face', hand-coloured etching, published by S. W Fores (1792) British Museum, 1877 1014.10.
[13] 'Age and Folly, or the Beauties', mezzotint, published by Sayer & Bennett (1776) British Museum, 1877 1013.867.


*Figure 46: Thomas Rowlandson, 'Six stages of mending a face', hand-coloured etching, published by S. W Fores (1792) British Museum, 1877 1014.10*


*Figure 47: 'Age and Folly, or the Beauties', mezzotint, published by Sayer & Bennett (1776) British Museum, 1877 1013.867.*

The oversized wig, which features a family of birds nesting at the top, along with ostrich feathers, ribbons, coifs, and jewels, had been a subject of criticism and ridicule amongst satirists more generally.

The print by Matthew Darly of London, 'The vis. a vis. bisected. Or the ladies coop', depicting two women sat on the floor of their carriage to accommodate their wigs had been printed the same year. 'Age and Folly' uses the wig to highlight the far-reaching and foolish attempts of the old woman to look young, beautiful and fashionable.[14] Her appearance has not gone unnoticed; two young ladies, in more modest dress and simple hats, stand behind with their hands raised to their mouths in shock. The old woman in the print becomes a spectacle, a source of entertainment, as well as a lesson on clothing the aged body appropriately. A similar woman appears in another satirical print published by John Bowles in 1777, entitled 'A new fashion'd head dress for young misses of three score and ten' (see Figure 48).[15] The same grossly exaggerated profile, with a drooping nose and protruding chin, is used to indicate that this is undoubtedly an old woman. Her short, thinning hair and frontal baldness is about to be disguised by a large wig; the ideal style for the 'young misses' of seventy years old. The print directly mocks old women for still considering themselves to be youthful, particularly those who remain 'misses', or unmarried, at their advanced age.

Amy Froide describes how the aged single woman was publicly 'scorned for never fulfilling the roles of a wife or mother', despite often holding prominent positions in family and community networks; the image of the comical old woman, as seen in these prints, was more culturally pervasive than the actual lived experience of older, unmarried women.[16] Katharine Kittredge explores how these women might also be socially reviled for remaining 'outside the sexual norm for "mature" women',

[14] Another satirical print poking fun at wigs, 'The preposterous head dress, or the feathered lady' was also published in 1776 by Matthew Darly.
[15] 'A new fashion'd head dress for young misses of three score and ten', mezzotint, published by John Bowles (1777) British Museum, J, 5.101.
[16] A. M. Froide, 'Old Maids: the Lifecycle of Single Women in Early Modern England' in L. Botelho & P. Thane, ed., *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2001) p. 89.


*Figure 48: 'A new fashion'd head dress for young misses of three score and ten', mezzotint, published by John Bowles (1777) British Museum, J, 5.101.*

highlighting the conflict between the 'desexualising aspects of physical aging with the old maid's persistence in participating in forms of feminine gender construction: clothing, physical display, and flirtatious behaviour'.[17] The woman in this particular print represents just such a conflict: her ruffled and lavish dress, the elaborate dressing table housing jars of cosmetics and perfumes, and the highly decorated wig all suggest a feminine, and therefore sexually desirable, identity, which is at direct odds with her grotesque face. This trend in satirical prints and popular imagination of the disguised old woman, or the old woman dressing as a youth in the eighteenth century is suggestive of broader social concerns regarding old and unmarried women's positions in society, the potential to conceal their true physical attributes, the opportunity to deceive men, and their ability to destabilise social norms.

Jill Campbell, when considering popular literature surrounding women's ageing in the eighteenth century, examines the notion that the 'loss of beauty that defined a young woman's essential identity constitutes such a sharp break in her life course that her earlier self might as well be declared dead'.[18] Such ideas, promoted by newspapers, literature and satirical prints, explicitly link women's old age to a loss of physical attractiveness, and a sudden collapse of their previous identity, which was supposedly entirely constructed around that attractiveness. As Campbell rightly argues, these ideas left no space to acknowledge the variety of ways that women in this period construct their identity during this stage of the life cycle, or to consider the complex and individualised impact of ageing on individual women. What it does reinforce, however, is the importance of the relationship between outward physical appearance and ageing; the transition into old age was largely defined by unfavourable changes to a woman's looks. This is linked closely to dress: as the face and body changed, so too did the social conventions of what constituted acceptable or appropriate dress.

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[17] K. Kittredge, '"The Ag'd Dame to Venery Inclin'd": Images of Sexual Older Women in Eighteenth Century Britain' in L. Botelho, S. Ottaway & K. Kittredge, ed., *Power and Poverty: Old Age in the Pre-Industrial Past* (London: Greenwood Press, 2002) p. 252.

[18] J. Campbell, 'Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the "Glass Revers'd" of Female Old Age' in *Defects: Engendering the Modern Body*, ed. F. Nussbaum & H.Deutsch (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 2000) pp. 213 – 251, p. 223.

*Inappropriate Dress*

Mary Delany, one of the most prolific commentators on dress and fashion in the eighteenth century, regularly recorded instances of women dressing too youthfully for her tastes, emphasising the ways in which women might have to negotiate their appearances and choice of clothing with their peers. In 1742, at the age of forty-two, she wrote to her sister Anne Dewes describing the dress of Grace Carteret, Countess Granville, at the occasion of the Princess of Wales' birthday:

> *My Lady* was in dark green velvet trimmed with ermine, and an ermine petticoat -- a present from her son, but it would have better suited the slender-waisted daughter Fanny, who had a scarlet damask and all her mother's jewels.[19]

At the time of the event, Countess Granville was seventy-five years old, and only two years away from her death. Her outfit was worn to uphold her high status at a grand public occasion, as well as being a gift from her eldest son, John Carteret. Evidently, Mary felt that John's taste in clothing was too excessive, and perhaps too revealing, for his mother; she notes that it 'would have better suited the slender-waisted daughter Fanny'; potentially Frances Worsley, John's wife and the Countess' daughter-in-law, who was forty-eight. As Mary was also in her forties at the time of writing the letter, it is possible that she regarded this outfit as something that she could have acceptably worn to such an event. Mary's description of the Countess Granville and her daughter-in-law evokes the idea of the socialite mother who refused to give up her attractiveness in favour of her daughter, a notion which 'casts mothers and daughters as rivals for male affection', or indeed as rivals for fashionable outfits and social standing.[20] Here, the old woman was always at risk of unfavourable comparisons with the younger women that surrounded them.

One of Mary Delany's most explicit instructions for old women was the avoidance of the colour pink. At the age of fifty-two, which would have been regarded as suitably old, she remarks to her sister that 'I own I think there is a time of life as well as station when very gaudy entertainments are as unbecoming, as pink colour

[19] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover, *The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol 2* (London: Richard Bentley, 1886), p. 199.
[20] K. Kittredge, '"The Ag'd Dame to Venery Inclin'd", p. 250.

and pompadours!'[21]. Here, Mary claims that pink is not only unsuitable for old women, but also for women of particularly high status. In 1780, she has a pink silk gown made for her grand-niece Georgina, who was nine years old to Mary's eighty, "I have made her up a pink lutestring for the King's b. day; as perhaps some of the Royal Family may spy her out when she is peeping at them', reaffirming Mary's idea that pink was usually only a suitable colour for girls and young women.[22]

Elizabeth Shackleton, who will be discussed in much greater length later in the chapter, also has pink items made up for a young girl: 'a tippet & bonnet of nice Pink Persian to make for my Beautiful little companion Ann Brooke which I give her as a present', compared to her own purchases of scarlets, blues and whites.[23] Whilst this can largely be attributed to personal taste, it is interesting that the colour pink might have carried such pervasive connotations of youth that it was not something she wore into her old age.

A further reference to pink being considered a youthful colour comes from the letters of Barbara Johnson. Barbara describes the attendants of a benefit dinner, noting that 'Lady Say I think does not dance with her usual Alacrity, but she dresses as youthful as ever, a Yellow Gown with pink Gawz Ornaments, so that she very much resembles a Cousin Betty'.[24] The phrase 'Cousin Betty' might refer to a prostitute, or 'someone of limited understanding'; it was perhaps the 'youthful' pink gauze, or the combination of pink and yellow which made Lady Say look like a Cousin Betty to Barbara.[25] Barbara herself, during her forties and fifties, owned several fabrics with small pink printed patterns, including floral prints on a dark background, though presumably these were considered much more appropriate than a pink gauze. Barbara Johnson is another example of a woman who took a considerable interest in fashion and dress throughout her old age, well into her

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[21] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover, *The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol 3* (London: Richard Bentley, 1886), p. 110.
[22] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover, *The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol 2* (London: Richard Bentley, 1886), p. 526.
[23] February 1779, DDX 666/1/11, LRO.
[24] N. Rothstein, ed., *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabric,* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987) p. 14.
[25] S. Dyer, *Material Lives: Women Makers and Consumer Culture in the 18th Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021) p. 45

seventies and eighties; she was an unmarried woman with her own income, who regularly spent a sizeable amount of money on fabrics and dressmaking.

*Barbara Johnson: Fashionable Old Age*

Barbara was still receiving gifts of fabric from her family and friends during this stage of her life. One of her brothers gave her 'eight yards of ell-wide Callicoe. A gown and petticoat…made at Thenford'. The calico is a dark ground with a small floral design, with eight yards providing enough fabric for the new straighter gown designs. In the 1780s, the hoop was replaced by bustle pads for all but the most formal occasions, and by the 1790s, styles were drawing upon classical antiquity with their high waists and column-like skirts. In the mid 1790s, large floral styles were in decline, in keeping with the style of the period. More abstract patterns, with stripes and geometric shapes can be found in Barbara's fabric swatches from this time. Barbara received a gift of a 'French satin Gown, ten yards, seven shillings a yard' by her close friend, Mrs Wodhull in 1795, perhaps indicating the relative ease and reasonable price of acquiring French fabrics, despite the country-wide embargo of French silks established in 1766 to promote English industry, and later as a show of patriotic support during war against France. Whilst customs officials did regularly seize and burn French silks and lace in this period, Catherine Wodhull was able to obtain enough to gift her friend an outfit, suggesting that the ladies were un-phased by political allegiance in fashion.

At this point in Barbara's life, despite having property in Northampton, she had most of her dresses made at Thenford, where her close friends, the Wodhulls lived. It is likely that Barbara spent most of her time lodging with them and socialising with their mutual friends. The entries in the Album continued from 1800 to 1823, from the age of 62 to 85. Regardless of her old age, Barbara remained a fashionable and well-dressed woman, who owned a variety of outfits and continued to collect fashion plates. Her handwriting remained very good during this time and, according to Natalie Rothstein, was suggestive of a 'robust and active woman'.[26] After the death of her younger brother Robert in 1799, she inherited an extra £50 of

[26] N. Rothstein, ed., *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabric,* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987) p. 19.

annual income, and the addresses noted in the Album are in Bath, suggesting that she moved to, or frequently spent time in the fashionable town during the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Many of Barbara's fabrics from this period were given as gifts: 'A blue muslin round gown given by my Brother Johnson', 'A brown Sarsenet gown, thirteen yards, given me by my Brother Johnson', 'Present of Mary Ingram'. It is likely that as Barbara aged, she was less inclined to travel to London for fabric shopping, and instead received most of her clothing as gifts, remaining active in her correspondences with friends and relatives. There is a distinct shift in the types of fabrics in the Album during this section of Barbara's life as well: the most common fabrics are calico, muslin and sarsenet, lighter cottons and silks than were fashionable forty years previously. Rothstein emphasises that the 'plain materials…as well as a number of dark ground chintzes with fairly minimal patterns' were not 'the prudent restraint of an aging lady', but rather in keeping with broader trends in fashion during this period. Barbara also makes reference in 1811 to a 'Brown French Sarsenet Pelisse…a present of my Brother Johnson, who gave me at the same time a plain muslin gown'. The Pelisse was a fashionable outer garment, close in appearance to a coat, that was designed to be worn over thin one-piece dresses, such as the one of white muslin given by Barbara's brother. This does not appear to have been a long lasting fashion, as Barbara mentions no other pelisse after 1811.

The final years of Barbara's life were marked with sadness as she lost her brothers, several nieces and her close friends. There are a number of mourning dresses accounted for in the Album, indicating that the overall tone of her wardrobe in old age was sombre by necessity. Despite this, there is a cheerful white and blue spotted muslin from 1812, a bright blue calico from 1816, and a number of Barbara's favourite reds and purples in the 1820s, suggesting that although Barbara was, by this point, an elderly woman she was by no means invisible, and kept up her interest in fashionable prints and styles (see Figure 49). A significant part of Barbara's identity was being a respected and fashionable member of her family and friendship networks, and this was something she cultivated throughout her old age; disproving the notion that old women were entirely cut off, either out of choice or social pressure, from the world of fashion in the eighteenth century.

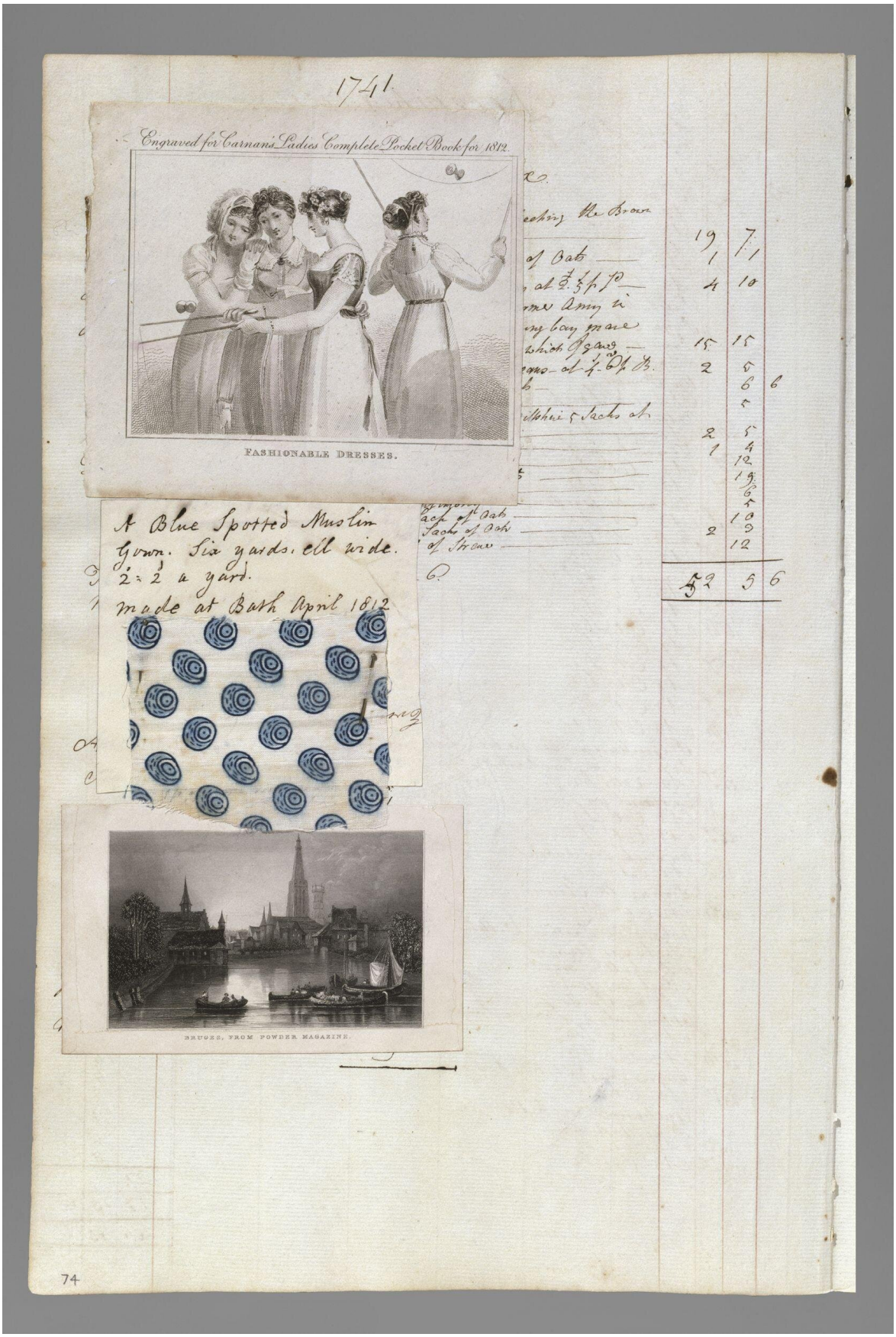


*Figure 49: Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics, 1746 - 1823. V&A Collections, T219-1973*

Barbara's album suggests, instead, that old women were able to use dress to reflect their changing identities as they navigated this stage of the life cycle.

*Mary Wortley Montagu: Old Age in Europe*

Another prominent woman who closely detailed her experience with old age and physical appearance in letters and diaries was Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the prolific writer and traveller. Of particular interest to this chapter is Mary's perception of herself as she approached old age, and her comparisons of the treatment of old women in the different places she visited. Most of Mary's writing about her appearance is concerned with the physicality of her face and body rather than dress; it is entirely possible that any interest she may have had in fashion waned as her opinion of her body decreased, and she felt herself age. In September 1716, Mary wrote to Lady Elizabeth Rich from Vienna:

> I have compassion for the Mortifications that you tell me befall our little Friend, and I pity her much more, since I know that they are only owing to the barbarous Customs of our Country. Upon my word, if she were here, she would have no other fault but that of being something too young for the Fashion, and she has nothing to do but to transplant herself hither about 7 years hence to be again a young and blooming Beauty. I can assure you that wrinkles, or a small stoop in the shoulders, nay, Gray Hair it selfe, is no objection to the makeing new conquests. I know you cannot easily figure to your selfe a young Fellow of five-and-twenty ogling my Lady Suff with passion, or pressing to lead the Countess of Od from an Opera. But such are the sights I see every day, and I don't perceive any body surprizd at 'em but myself. A Woman, till 5 and thirty, is only look'd upon as a raw Girl, and can possibly make no noise in the World till about forty. I don't know what your Ladyship may think of this matter; but 'tis a considerable comfort to me, to know there is upon Earth such a paradise for Old women.[27]

Although Mary was only a comparatively young mother of twenty-seven at the time of writing this letter, she was deeply attuned to the social criticism levelled at old women in England, and pleasantly surprised at how this was not experienced by the women of Vienna. Despite the identity of her 'little Friend' being unknown, Mary describes their situation with compassion; they have apparently been criticised and ridiculed, suffering 'Mortifications', for daring to be an older woman in the public

[27] Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 20th September 1716, in *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. R. Halsband (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) Vol I, pp. 269 – 270.

eye. Mary also makes reference to Lady Suffolk and the Countess of Oxford, who were both prominent widows in their late sixties; she maintains that if they lived in Vienna, they would be subject to 'ogling' by young men and would become objects of sexual desire, and could happily adopt this as part of their identity if they so wished. Sarah Toulalan has described how English 'attitudes towards sexually active old women were invariably condemnation, expressing disgust and contempt', as sex with them could not lead to reproduction and therefore 'was unnatural because it had no purpose'.[28] Lady Mary, in her travels through Vienna, appeared to have found a place in which older women could be sexually active and desirable without prompting public scorn.

In the letter, Mary recounts the common signs of old age in a woman, 'wrinkles…stoop in the shoulders…Gray Hair', that would signal the end of her youth and beauty in English society, but perhaps gave an air of experience and wisdom in Vienna. She notes that a woman 'can possibly make no noise in the World til about forty', and that those in their mid-thirties are 'look'd upon as a raw Girl', emphasising the apparent differences in social perceptions of ageing, and perhaps revelling in her new-found status as an incredibly youthful woman. Mary refers to Vienna and its notions of ageing as a 'considerable comfort', providing her with the knowledge that when she also reaches this stage of her life cycle, she could retreat to this 'paradise for Old women'. The language here, whilst undoubtedly embellished for entertainment, provides us with a perspective of England as a particularly cruel place for old women, where they are made to feel repulsive and unwanted as a result of their outward appearance and apparent lack of biological function. Whilst not all women would have felt as strongly as Mary, and may indeed have contributed to the general criticism of the old, it is likely that these notions would have coloured women's perceptions of themselves, and led them to critically edit their consumption of dress, the way they presented themselves in public, and their self-identity, so as to appear fashionable but not become a subject of ridicule.

[28] S. Toulalan, '"Elderly years Cause a Total dispaire of Conception": Old Age, Sex and Infertility in Early Modern England', *Social History of Medicine*, 26 (2016) pp. 333 – 359, pp. 348 – 349.

As Mary herself reached old age, she corresponded regularly with her daughter, Lady Bute, detailing her strained relationship with her own appearance. In October 1757, when she was sixty-eight, Mary wrote:

> as to my looks; I know nothing of the Matter. It is eleven Year since I have seen my Figure in a Glass. The last Refflection I saw there was so disagreeable, I resolv'd to spare my selfe such mortifications for the Future, and shall continue that resolution to my Live's end. To indulge all pleasing Amusements and avoid all Images that give Disgust is in my opinion the best method to attain of confirm Health.[29]

Here, Mary's disdain for her physical appearance in old age is clear. She has apparently not used a mirror for eleven years, claiming to have been so horrified by her own reflection that she would not look in one again before her death. Mary believes that her reflection, the source of her 'Disgust', would cause her ill-heath were she to see it again. It is a deeply saddening letter, written to her daughter who was in the process of lying-in after the birth of her eleventh child. Mary's words are perhaps a stark reminder to Lady Bute that her identity as a wife and mother would warp with old age, as her children became adults themselves, and that old age, and the effects of multiple pregnancies, would bring with it the complications of an aged body and a strained relationship with her reflection. Mary regards her appearance in the same manner of the 1770s satirists, whose cruelly exaggerated women represented the total loss of beauty and youth, and therefore respectability and value, in old women. Jill Campbell describes Lady Mary's 'aging and the discontinuities of self that it entails'; although she remained healthy and independent, able to write well and speak several languages, Mary's sense of self was unshakeably challenged by her aged appearance, and any previous interest in fashion discarded.[30]

Five years later, returning to England at the age of seventy-three, Mary was the subject of great attention and criticism from Horace Walpole, with whom she had a notoriously fraught relationship. After seeing her arrive in London, Walpole maliciously recounted her appearance to his male friends, writing to George Montagu:

> Lady Mary Wortley is arrived; I have seen her; I think her avarice, her dirt, and her vivacity are all increased. Her dress, like her languages, is a galimatias

[29] Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 8th October 1757, in *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, Vol III, pp. 135 -136.
[30] J. Campbell, 'Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the "Glass Revers'd" of Female Old Age', p. 215.

> of several countries; the groundwork, rags; and the embroidery, nastiness. She wears no cap, no handkerchief, no gown, no petticoat, no shoes. An old black laced hood represents the first, the fur of a horseman's coat, which re- places the third, serves for the second; a dimity petticoat is deputy and officiates for the fourth, and slippers act the part of the last.[31]

In Walpole's description, Mary embodies all of the impropriety, confusion and distain for English social norms that were to be feared in old women. Mary's outfit is a mix of items obtained throughout her travels, with little consistency or care about her outward appearance, perhaps as a result of avoiding mirrors for so long. The list of clothing items missing from Mary's person: a cap, handkerchief, petticoat, gown and outdoor shoes, are regarded by Walpole as the norm, even the bare minimum, for a woman of Mary's age and status to appear publicly decent. Here we are reminded of Mary's experience in Vienna forty-six years ago, and her excitement at finding a place where old women were not subject to such criticisms of dress, a 'paradise' to live at the end of one's life. Walpole's letter, whilst no doubt motivated in part by spite, illustrates the way in which old women could, and would, be socially ostracised for failing to maintain their appearance; a thin line between appearing shabbily underdressed or laughably clinging to youthful fashions.

Lady Mary's descriptions of old age were deeply influenced by her experience of living across Europe, which she found far more liberal in its attitudes towards old women than England, her own dissatisfaction with her changing appearance, and her choice to instead focus on her internal health and amusement. The outfit that was perceived by Walpole as 'dirt' and 'rags', may well have been comfortable, warm and practical for Lady Mary to travel in, represented her lifetime of travel and experience of different cultures, as well as loudly declaring her disregard for outer appearances in contrast to other prominent ladies such as Mary Delany.

*Elizabeth Shackleton's Diaries*

One of the most comprehensive accounts of dress in old age comes from the letters and diaries of Elizabeth Shackleton, neé Parker (Dec 1726 – 81) who lived in

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[31] Horace Walpole, 2nd February 1762, in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937-1983) Vol. X, p. 5.

Lancashire after her father, a London linen draper, inherited Browsholme Hall, near Clithero.[32] Elizabeth married her second cousin, Robert Parker, and moved to his home at Alkincoats Hall, Lancashire, in 1751, where they had three sons. Robert died in 1758, and Elizabeth became a widowed mother of three young boys, just seven years after her marriage. In 1765, Elizabeth remarried John Shackleton, a twenty-one year old local wool merchant, who was notably seventeen years younger than the thirty-eight year old widow. Elizabeth was clearly a fashionable woman, and matters of dress take up a considerable amount of space in her diaries, which were written regularly between 1764 and 1781; spanning her second marriage, from middle to old age.

Elizabeth died at the age of fifty-five, not reaching the impressive lifespans of women such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who died aged seventy-three; Barbara Johnson, who died aged eighty-five; Barbara Johnson, who also died at eighty-five; and Mary Delany, who died at eighty-seven. Whilst this means that Elizabeth might not have reached the same advanced old age experienced by septuagenarians, it is clear from her writing that she begins to feel old, physically and emotionally, particularly after the marriage of her eldest son. In this section, which will focus on Elizabeth's Shackleton's writings, her final years will be referred to as her old age; whilst not necessarily old compared to other eighteenth-century women, Elizabeth's own perception of herself was of a woman who had aged to the final stage of her life cycle.

Throughout her diaries and letters, Elizabeth Shackleton provides evidence of her active role as a consumer of fashion. Whilst living on her country estate in Lancashire she maintains close friends and contacts in London who provide her with regular updates on the changing styles that might otherwise be slow to reach the north of the country. Although a trip to London might be rare, Elizabeth visited Preston for dress fittings and alterations, and regularly had packages sent to and from the capital city to maintain her wardrobe. Similarly to Mary Delany, Elizabeth appears to advise and support the young women in her household and wider network

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[32] A comprehensive biography of Elizabeth Shackleton has been written by Amanda Vickery for the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-59566> [accessed 25/08/2020]

with matters of dress, frequently giving gifts or donating outfits from her personal collection. Elizabeth purchased new outfits, but also employed local tailors and seamstresses to alter her old clothes, and occasionally mended items herself; she also oversaw the providing of linens for all three of her sons and her husband. This consumption of dress lasts well into her final years, making Elizabeth an excellent example of older women's continued interest in fashion and clothing in the eighteenth century, and disputing the notion that dress became a much less significant part of the lives of old women.

At the age of fifty-one, Elizabeth records in her diary a series of interactions with a Mrs Margaret Fielden of Burnley, who was evidently one of Elizabeth's preferred local mantua makers. On the 6th July 1778, Elizabeth travelled to Mrs Fielden's shop laden with old garments to have re-made:

> I went this morning to Mrs Fielden to Burnley – took with me my flower'd silk negligee & Petticoat to be made into a night gown & petticoat with cuffs. Also my white satin nightgown to be made up with cuffs & to chuse one of the patterns of silks come lately down from London for a new nightgown & petticoat – I got to Mrs Peggy's about one we had a great deal of talk – shew'd me a most Beautifull Chintz of Mrs Ormerod's of Burnley Wood. We consulted what was best to be done about my gowns fixed for my going to try them on – Please God all is well – on Thursday the 23rd of this [month].[33]

Elizabeth is clear and confident when writing about her orders; the flowered silk is to be made into a nightgown and petticoat, the white satin nightgown is to be given new cuffs, and she will choose a silk pattern fresh from London to make a third, brand new nightgown and petticoat. Elizabeth seems particularly fond of the English nightgown, or robe à l'Anglaise, having her negligee re-purposed to add to her collection. The nightgown was a close-bodied style that did not require a stomacher or visible stays; it is possible that Elizabeth felt more comfortable in this style than the negligee, or sack-back style, which was more formal and required more fabric to make. From this diary entry, we can see that Elizabeth still took a keen interest in new patterns and fabrics from both the capital and her local area; as well as planning to choose a new silk from London to make a nightgown, Elizabeth visited another friend, Mrs Peggy, who showed her a 'most Beautifull Chintz' procured from

[33] July 1778, DDX 666/1/10, LRO.

Bromley.[34] Elizabeth, in her fifties, was not content to only re-use her old garments, and actively enjoyed viewing and selecting new fabrics for her outfits.

Unfortunately, the second visit to try on her newly made dresses was postponed due to illness; on the 26th July Elizabeth writes to Mrs Fielden 'to tell her I wo'd be with her soon to try on my Gowns' and reassure her dressmaker that she hadn't forgotten about her purchases.[35] She was able to travel again on the 12th August, and took Little Moll with her, as well as ample supplies of silk and trimmings to be made into yet another nightgown.

> Little Moll & I set off for Burnley I took my new Ruby silk good seventeen yards of silk at 8' per yard with two dozen and a half of Ruby trimming to Mrs Fielden to be made into a full Night gown & Petticoat I got there well & she tried on my white satin night gown & my flower'd ailk night gown & petticoat both look'd very handsome.[36]

After trying on the new nightgowns, Elizabeth notes her approval; both the flowered and the white silk 'look'd very handsome' on her. It is important to note Elizabeth's pleased response to her new outfit; while it might be common to assume that older women were regularly dissatisfied with their appearance, and longed for the beauty of youth, here Elizabeth was content with her appearance, and enjoyed the way her new clothes looked on her body. Elizabeth received the finished dresses on the 5th October, and mentioned them again in her diary: 'I brought home my flowered silk night Gown & Petticoat complete and my white satin night gown both fits exceedingly well'.[37] Mrs Fielden was clearly a skilled seamstress, and Elizabeth was very satisfied with the finished outfits.

The Little Moll mentioned in the diary entry is most likely the same 'Little Molly' who was first recorded as visiting Elizabeth in February 1772: 'Little Molly came here in her new stuff gown – looked very smart. Mr Parker gave her her new silk mitts – very good ones & fitted her well'.[38] Molly is not identifiable as a direct relative of Elizabeth, either as a niece, granddaughter, or cousin, but it is clear from her endearing nickname that her relationship with Elizabeth is one that holds sentimental, or perhaps maternal, feeling. Little Moll also joins Elizabeth for a trip to

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[34] July 1778, DDX 666/1/10, LRO.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] August 1778, DDX 666/1/10, LRO.
[37] October 1778, DDX 666/1/10, LRO.
[38] February 1772, DDX 666/1/4, LRO.

see her son Thomas at Alkincoats Hall in September 1778, suggesting that Elizabeth had been away visiting friends and family with Moll in attendance. It is possible that Moll worked for Elizabeth as a maid, although the new silk mitts given as a gift by Thomas Parker would indicate otherwise.

The relationship between Elizabeth and Miss Lucy Smith is one of the most referenced in the diaries. Lucy does a considerable amount of seamstress work for Elizabeth and is a regular figure in the diary until 1778, well into Elizabeth's old age. Lucy is first mentioned in 1765 as the recipient of a number of goods: 'to Miss Smith muff 6d, needles 1s2d, hat 9s, gloves 2s6d, hair cutting 6d, Handkerchief 7s6d, stocking weaver 16s1d, Tea Kettle 11s – total: £2:8:3'.[39] Similarly, in 1767, Elizabeth orders clothing from her London-based cousin, Bessy Ramsden, for both herself and Lucy Smith:

> Wrote B Ramsden for the following articles for Lucy Smith: a black figured satin for a cloke, lace…it, a yd or yd half muslin for an apron, a single handkerchief, a pair of double ruffles to be drawn for running… for myself: a hat, a cap, a necklace, 2 prs of silver knee buckles to be mark'd T.P. J.S., six dozen round shirt buttons, 2 pieces of fine narrow tape, four oz. of thread at 12', six white round laces 3 yards long.[40]

Whilst the knee buckles were clearly intended for Elizabeth's son, Thomas Parker, and her husband, John Shackleton, the rest of the items were to be for herself and Lucy. There was a purchase of caps for both women in 1771, 'Lucy Smith [cap] cost 10s, a cap for me cost 10/6'; we can see that Elizabeth does spend more money on her own items, which befits her higher social status, but she is also not reluctant to fit Lucy with a wardrobe of her own.[41] Lucy's visits were usually to either deliver finished garments or to pick up new jobs from Elizabeth, but they were clearly also social visits; Elizabeth notes that she 'came here after an absence of near five weeks was in high good humour & got me & made me up my best sute of worked muslin linnen another apron & new shirts of my son's', mixing work with enjoyment and conversation.[42] Lucy delivered fine quality work to Elizabeth, but she also provided companionship and an opportunity to socialise; she was greeted with gifts of new clothing for herself, and did not leave Elizabeth's home until late at night. Their

[39] September 1765, DDX 666/1/1. LRO.
[40] April 1767, DDX 666/1/1. LRO.
[41] April 1771, DDX 666/1/3, LRO.
[42] May 1771, DDX 666/1/3, LRO.

relationship is one which is centred around dress: Elizabeth is a patron of Lucy's seamstress skills, but also expresses her appreciation and affection through gifts of clothing that Lucy might not be able to obtain herself, such as the items from London.

Elizabeth's diary is filled with references to other women with whom she shares knowledge and advice about dress, and frequently gifts items of clothing to. Here we can see the ways in which clothing was a key solidifier of women's relationship and social networks, and how Elizabeth fostered a relationship with both Little Moll and Lucy Smith by taking them shopping, giving sartorial gifts and sharing her knowledge and experience of fashion. The exchange of consumer knowledge establishes Elizabeth as a pivotal figure of fashionable advice and guidance in her local area, and highlights the relationships between Elizabeth and the younger women in her household as didactic in nature; she helps to facilitate their clothing purchases and often makes orders on their behalf. The difference in age between Elizabeth and the younger women in her household, whilst giving her a certain air of authority, may also have contributed to her nagging feelings of old age and identity as a matriarchal figure, passing on her knowledge to help them as they entered stages of life that Elizabeth had already left behind.

Colour and style remained at the forefront of women's minds when choosing clothing, as we have seen with the previous examples of Barbara Johnson and Mary Delany; far from a relegation to drab and unfashionable garments, some women in their old age displayed a keen interest in saturated colours and current trends. Elizabeth Shackleton is no exception to this, and her diary refers to several instances of having garments re-dyed. She seemed to particularly like the colour blue, as indicated by her diary entries in 1771 when she was forty-five years old:

> My white satin petticoat which I sent…by R.P to be dy'd blue which is returned cut to pieces in the dying such a figure as never was seen gives me too great a concern. I valued the petticoat as it was my Dear Mother's.[43]

> Bot a new Handker. & Muslin apron…Sent by Miss Nelly Cockshott to get dyed…breadths of black & white figured lutstring – 15 pieces of ditto – a piece of plain white, 6 pieces of plain blue do., in all 22 pieces to be dyed a…blue &

[43] April 1771, DDX 666/1/3, LRO.

> watered – at the same time sent four breadths of the Damask & 12 pieces of ditto to be dyed…blue. Gave her a pair of earrings cost 4/6.[44]
>
> Rec'd from Mr Cockshott of Pank the blue & white lutsting & the blue damask & sent to Manchester to get dyed…blue – paid Miss Nelly Cockshott for them nine shillings.[45]

By the end of 1771, Elizabeth appears to have formed a productive relationship with the Cockshotts, who supplied her with fabrics and sent them for dyeing. The R.P who returns her petticoat with extensive damage is potentially her youngest son, Robert Parker. Perhaps the experience was distressing enough that Elizabeth sought more professional means for the rest of her dyeing requirements. The damaged petticoat had the added weight of belonging to her 'Dear Mother', and thus held significant sentimental value.

In 1778, aged fifty-one, Elizabeth describes dressing in a vibrant gown to celebrate the birthday of Miss Betty (Elizabeth) Parker, her soon-to-be daughter-in-law who had now come of age:

> Miss Parker of Newton at age this day, my son invited to dine here upon the occasion…I also drank Tom and Miss Parker wishing them join'd together and to be very happy. I dressed me out in my Scarlet Damask & best linnen I was laced with a new blue lace.[46]

Elizabeth felt it was necessary to dress for the occasion, in her best linen and damask silk gown. The contrast of the scarlet fabric and blue lace is bold, and a testament to Elizabeth's continuing love of colour in her clothes. The event was an important one; Betty is being celebrated as she is now 'at age' and has marriage, starting her own family, and the establishment of a new household in her near future, with the express encouragement of Elizabeth. It is likely that Elizabeth wanted to dress particularly well for this occasion, as a positive reflection of her son, Thomas, who was looking to marry Betty, but also to present herself as a well-established, successful woman of the local gentry in her own right. Although Elizabeth was in her old age as opposed to Betty's fresh adulthood, she was still fashionable, capable of running her own household, and not a figure to be totally overlooked in favour of the younger Elizabeth.

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[44] September 1771, DDX 666/1/3, LRO.
[45] December 1771, DDX 666/1/3, LRO.
[46] February 1778, DDX 666/1/10, LRO.

Elizabeth did not only interact with younger women: her diary shows an active social life, which includes visits to aged friends and acquaintances. On the 11th April 1778, Elizabeth records a visit to the Crooke's, who she both specifically describes as 'old': 'we call'd at Nanny Crooke who went with us to old Bernard Crooke's –where he made us all drink tea and very civil to us. But his old woman very cross as she was cleaning all up & herself much in her dishabille'.[47] While Bernard Crooke was happy to entertain, his 'old woman' was clearly caught off guard with unexpected visitors. Elizabeth describes Mrs Crooke's dress as 'her dishabille'; a casual, undressed outfit, perhaps without overskirts or a jacket, that might be worn by a woman who was not intending to see other people that day. Mrs Crooke's reaction is important: she is 'very cross' to be seen in this outfit, showing her awareness of, and adherence to, social conventions of acceptable dressing, despite her advanced age. Whilst comfort and ease in dressing might become more of a priority for women as they progressed through old age, it was clearly still important to these women to maintain their well-dressed and put-together appearances whilst in the company of others. Old age did not rid these women of their desire to dress well, and their clothing remained a marker of pride and status; we have seen in the correspondences from figures such as Mary Delany that old women could be just as cutting, if not more so, in their criticisms of dress as younger women.

A particular item of clothing that was a staple in Elizabeth's wardrobe, and perhaps became even more essential as she reached her old age, is the cap. Throughout her diaries, there are numerous explicit references to caps, bonnets and hats: at least twelve new mob caps were bought, seven night caps, three 'dressy caps', three bonnets and one hat, as well as a large amount of repairs, alterations and updates to old pieces of headwear. Vickery describes both hats and neckwear as items of clothing 'which declared the dignity of age', suggesting that they were popular, or necessary, as part of the outfits of old women.[48] The cap, or hat, has often been associated with the image of a married woman, but might have provided an old woman with the added security of disguising hair loss, thinning or discolouration, as well as extra warmth. However, it is also entirely possible that Elizabeth continued to purchase caps and hats throughout her old age because she found them easy and

[47] April 1778, DDX 666/1/10, LRO.
[48] A. Vickery, 'Mutton Dressed as Lamb?', p. 871.

affordable to accessorise and believed them to be an attractive addition to her outfits; she describes the colours of the ribbons in her caps with great detail, and often has matching breast knots made to compliment and coordinate with her dresses.

In April 1771, Elizabeth wore her 'new Bonnet a La Mode de London' and was 'in high conceit with myself'; she specifically ordered a fashionable style of bonnet from her London contacts, the Ramsdens, and felt particularly stylish upon wearing it.[49] Although her comments are clearly tongue-in-cheek, it illustrates the idea that, for Elizabeth, this particular piece of headwear was bought with fashion and beauty in mind, rather than to disguise her features or make her appear more demure. In June 1773, at the age of forty-six, Elizabeth placed an order for 'a French night cap, a jaconet muslin to pin under the chin with a narrow edging 6' or 8' pr yard, a green shaded ribbon in it & a breast knot the same.'[50] Here we can see evidence of dressing for modesty that is described by Vickery: the muslin for underneath the chin to hide the neck and decolletage, as well as the new night cap. Elizabeth remains clear in her aesthetic choices; although these items might well be to promote her modesty and dress in keeping with her age, they are still to be in an attractive green, with a particular edging, and with a matching breast knot to tie the look together.

Elizabeth would not settle for an unattractive headpiece: in June 1778, aged fifty-one, she 'met with my box from London which contain'd my bonnet & cap & double muslin edged Robins – Mrs Ramsden sent the Bill she paid for them £2:1:1. I like not one of them. She also sent patterns of silks all ugley.'[51] Proxy shopping, even through close friends, could be fraught with difficulties, and here Elizabeth found herself wholly unimpressed with the items sent from London by Mrs Ramsden. Thankfully, a couple of months later, Lucy Smith made a much better cap for Elizabeth: 'Lucy made me up my best Laced wyred Cap with purple & Pomona Green ribon in it very handsome & ornate'.[52] This was a statement headpiece, with fashionable coloured ribbon and wire to maintain shape. As an old woman, Elizabeth could have kept her head covered with simple muslin, or less eye-catching colours, but she chose to keep her hats as fashionable and particular as the rest of her dress. Whilst they might serve the purpose of modesty, and Elizabeth does record in her

[49] April 1776, DDX 666/1/3, LRO.
[50] June 1773, DDX 666/1/5, LRO.
[51] June 1778, DDX 666/1/10, LRO.
[52] August 1778, DDX 666/1/10, LRO.

diary being upset by her son Thomas when he refuses to allow her a cap: 'Tom…would not let me have a cap out of the great room – I sat bare head a long time', hats are clearly also another way that Elizabeth could express her identity as a fashionable, confident woman in her old age.[53]

At the age of fifty-three, Elizabeth recorded in her diary that 'I now have only five teeth in all my head', whilst reflecting upon her own age and mortality; a suggestion that teeth were very much bound to ideas of ageing in early modern social thought. Colin Jones has extensively examined the importance of teeth in early modern French culture in his book, *The Smile Revolution in Eighteenth Century Paris*, suggesting that at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Europe had a largely universal issue with tooth decay and loss.[54] Jones states that 'tooth loss after a certain age was the norm…Discomfort, inconvenience…and facial disfigurement cause by the bad state of the mouth were the substance of everyday middle-aged life', noting that individuals could often end up with a complete loss of teeth by their old age.[55] It is interesting to consider whether women in England, who would also have experienced chronic tooth problems during this period, would see tooth loss as something that had occurred as a symptom of their old age, or whether it was as a result of this visible tooth loss that they were now perceived as old.

Elizabeth's diary entry coincides with the day that her eldest son, Thomas, was married to Elizabeth Parker of Newton. Their close relationship, one of mother and child, was permanently altered when Thomas married Betty Parker, with whom he would now establish his own family in Alkincoats Hall. Elizabeth's longstanding task of providing linens to her eldest son, which was recorded at the start of each year's new diary, would now be taken on by his new wife. It is perhaps unsurprising that the diary entry celebrating their marriage is tinged with sadness. On the 4th May 1779, Elizabeth wrote:

> I now have only five teeth in all my head. I left off my old stays & put on my best stays for Good – I left off my very old green quilted callimanco petticoat and put on my new drab callimanco quilted petticoat for Good. On this Good

[53] September 1772, DDX 666/1/4, LRO.
[54] C. Jones, *The Smile Revolution in Eighteenth Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[55] C. Jones, *The Smile Revolution*, p. 18.

> day at the old church in Manchester … Thomas was married to Dear Miss Parker of Newton … may good old Alkincoats flourish in every degree.[56]

The first thing mentioned in this entry is the poor state of Elizabeth's mouth. This speaks to ideas of decay, loss and pain; as Jones has suggested, most people would 'put up with [tooth] pain until it went away', although 'It was not uncommon to pull out one's own teeth' if it became unbearable.[57] Elizabeth's tooth loss is a physical, painful reminder of her age and her movement through the life cycle, and its prevalence in her diary on the day of her son's wedding is indicative of her shift in identity from motherhood to an aged woman.

The insistence that her best stays and new drab quilted petticoat will now be worn 'for Good' suggests that Elizabeth does not expect to live much longer beyond this point, and that these are her final iterations of undergarments. Earlier in the diary, in the July of 1778, Elizabeth mentions having multiple items of clothing adjusted by a James Brundsworth, including her 'best stays' which needed to be let out, 'they being so straight over my breast I co'd not wear them'.[58] Here we see evidence of Elizabeth adjusting her clothing for wearability and practicality, and in order to extend their lifespan. Rather than seeking a fashionably exaggerated silhouette that compressed the body, Elizabeth's stays were altered for comfort and to accommodate her body, potentially alleviating back pain, as she progressed through the changes of old age. Having had them altered, she was now able to wear them 'for Good' in 1779, suggesting that either Elizabeth believed her body would not undergo any further drastic changes, or that she would not have the opportunity to have new ones fitted again.

It is saddening to discover that it is the occasion of her son's wedding day that has prompted such a melancholy inventory of clothes and appearance. There is again a link here between Elizabeth's loss of identity as an active mother to her eldest son and her introspective examination of age and her body; her children's progression through the life cycle is a stark reminder to Elizabeth that she is also ageing, and that her comfortable identity as a mother was changing. Whilst hoping that her son and his new wife's household would 'flourish in every degree', Elizabeth's perception of

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[56] May 1779, DDX 666/1/11, LRO.
[57] C. Jones, *The Smile Revolution*, p. 22.
[58] July 1778, DDX 666/1/10, LRO.

herself in this diary entry appears to be of someone who is waning, relinquishing her matriarchal attachment to the family home of Alkincoats, and handing it over to the next generation.

It is clear from Elizabeth's diary entries since Thomas and Betty's wedding in 1779 that she feels the beginnings of advanced old age, and suspects that she might die soon; on her birthday, when she cannot quite remember her true age, she celebrates her son's family, and the crucial role she has had throughout their lives with her new pincushion. In the final year of her life, Elizabeth continued to use dress to mark all three of her sons' birthdays, but it is clear that her desire to buy large items of clothing had waned. On the 16th March, 1781, Robert Parker's birthday, Elizabeth writes that she 'had some new tape'; on John Parker's birthday, the 21st March, she wears a 'new muslin double Handkerchief bordered'; finally, on Thomas' birthday, on the 20th April, Elizabeth records her wearing a 'quite new border'd double muslin red Handkerchief', which was perhaps the same one worn for John's birthday the month before.[59] There is no mention of new gowns, suggesting that Elizabeth was only willing to purchase brand new accessories so late into her life; both for frugality, and practicality, as she might not have a chance to wear them. This may point towards a shift in the feeling of 'green' old age, when keeping abreast of fashion and making large sartorial purchases was still both desirable and necessary, to the self-assessed movement into 'decrepit' old age, where accessories would still allow a sense of individuality and emotional connection, but required less cost and effort to acquire.

Elizabeth Shackleton's diary is a hugely rich source of information about fashion, dress and consumerism in the country gentry of the eighteenth century, but also provides us with a fascinating glimpse into the life of a woman navigating her identity and social position in her old age. There is certainly a sense of the divide within old age between those years that were still active and sociable, during which women would still maintain their outward appearance and consumer identity, and the final years in which the desire for new outfits might slow, and the ability or need to order new, fashionable items waned, replaced by pieces that had more emotional and intimate meaning.

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[59] March, April 1781, DDX 666/1/14, LRO.

During old age, women in the middling and upper classes were evidently aware of the potential for scrutiny of their appearance, and needed to be able to navigate this policing. For women like Mary Delany, it meant establishing a clear notion of what styles, colours and fabrics were appropriate, and imparting this knowledge to other women. Mary Wortley Montagu, on the other hand, chose to ignore her appearance entirely as she reached old age, instead focussing on her health, her mind and her relationships; removing herself from fashionable discourse as a way of protecting herself against the harshest critics. Elizabeth Shackleton, whose diary spans most of her old age, provides us with a sense of the changing identities that women might experience: the relinquishing of motherly responsibilities as her eldest son married and the subsequent removal of her position as head of the familial home, and how dress was linked to these events. The next chapter will focus on the ways in which women might use dress to prepare for the very end of their own lives, and how mourning dress was used to navigate the deaths of family, friends and nobility throughout a woman's life cycle.

## Chapter 8

*'Here we are all most dismal': Mourning Dress and Clothing for Death*

On the 14th January, 1758, the fifty-seven year old Mary Delany wrote a letter to her younger sister, Anne Dewes, describing the acceptable styles of public dress following the death of Princess Caroline:

> About mourning: bombazeens quite plain, broad-hemmed muslin, or white crape, that looks like old flannell, seven shillings a yard, and won't wash; Turkey gauze is also worn, which is thick and white, but is extravagant, as it does not wash, dirties in two days and costs 5s a yard; the mourning will be worn *six months*, three in crape and bombazeen.[60]

As a woman of significant status in London, Mary was expected to adhere to the social rules surrounding mourning dress for both personal family deaths, and for public mourning after the death of a member of royalty. From this letter we can see that mourning, and specifically the dress that was to be worn throughout this period, was beholden to a complex hierarchy of fabrics, colours and styles, and that women like Mary Delany were often aggrieved at the necessity of altering their wardrobes. Six months of public mourning meant that a whole season of fashionable dress would go unworn, and that a sizeable bill would be accrued from having to purchase appropriate fabrics; fabrics which, as Mary notes, are plain, quick to dirty and difficult to keep in good condition. Despite her complaints, Mary, and other women of her social status, would have maintained the image of mourning in public when it was necessary, adapting their own sense of style and identity to fit with the accepted guidelines of dress during these periods.

Lou Taylor, in her seminal work on mourning dress, explores the sartorial rules that governed periods of mourning across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the notions of first, second and half-mourning. First mourning, which would be adopted soon after the death of an individual, was the most severe and restrictive. Taylor describes the 'fundamental rule applied to mourning dress' which was that 'everything must be matt and dull', and it was during first mourning that

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[60] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover,The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol III (London: Richard Bentley, 1886), pp. 475, 476.

this was adhered to most strictly.[61] Plain black fabrics, woven with wool to ensure a muted texture, with little accessorising and no jewellery were the key indicators of first mourning. Although this would have greatly restricted the wardrobes of most middle and upper class women, there was still an emphasis, particularly as the eighteenth century progressed, on maintaining fashionable styles and silhouettes, which would have given women some scope to express their individual tastes even when wearing mourning dress.

Second mourning allowed much more room for fashionable manoeuvring: the severity and deference to grief that characterised first mourning was relinquished, and a greater range of fabrics were permitted. Aileen Ribiero describes how dress 'graduated from the matt, untrimmed cloth of deep black, through black silk with touches of ornament, to shades of grey and white with black…black silk, with fringed and embroidered muslin or net, and diamonds, with white or grey for undress wear', illustrating a progression in dress that could span a number of months.[62] Mary Delany, advising her sister Anne on how best to navigate second mourning, wrote in 1727:

> Now for the modes: - undrest people wear all sorts of second mourning, unless they go to Court, then they must wear black silk or black velvet. There is great liberty taken in dress; everybody pleases themselves.[63]

Here we are given a sense of the greater flexibility experienced in second mourning, or mourning that was conducted in private. Outside of the court where one might choose more casual 'undrest' styles, there appeared to be much less rigidity and compliance with strict mourning rules. Mary Delany's letters to her sister regularly emphasised the distinctions between dress in London, particularly at court, and in the 'country'; rural areas as well as towns and cities beyond the fashionable elite of the capital. The Granville family home was in Benchland, Gloucestershire, and would have been Anne's home until she married in 1740. Mary writes:

> You should, if you keep strictly to the rules of mourning, wear your shammy gloves two months longer, but in the country if it is more convenient to you,

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[61] L. Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983) p. 100.
[62] A. Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth Century Europe, 1715 – 1789*, revised ed. (London: Yale University Press, 2002) pp. 203, 204.
[63] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover,The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol I (London: Richard Bentley, 1886), p. 146.

> you may wear black silk; you might have worn black earrings and necklace these two months.[64]

The implication in this letter is that Anne, by virtue of spending most of her time outside of London, can move to black silk earlier than might be considered entirely in-keeping with mourning practices. Mary, even in her twenties, writes as an authority on dress, sharing her knowledge with her sister in order to help her navigate the complex rituals of mourning. It was not only Mary's sister who reached out for advice on mourning dress. In 1724, she responded to questions from a Mrs Carter through her letters to Anne:

> I will answer Mrs. Carter's questions about her mourning to you. I think her in the right in buying a white satin to top her black…but that she can only wear as a nightgown, and if she was in town she should wear only mourning when she is dressed, but in the country that will not be minded, white gloves, coloured fan and coloured shoes, and edgings if she pleases, and black or white short apron and girdle, which she likes best.[65]

Again, the contrast between acceptable clothing in urban centres and rural countryside is key in Mary's response. Mrs Carter must adhere to mourning rules when dressing in town, but there is greater leniency to be found in the country, where there was somewhat less opportunity for large social gatherings, as well as less opportunity to purchase the latest fashions. The recommendation of white satins, contrasting white accessories, and coloured fans and shoes suggests that Mrs Carter is not in deepest, first mourning, but rather attempting to tread the murkier waters of second or half mourning. By seeking advice from Mary, who is evidently well known in their social circle for her expertise in matters of fashion, Mrs Carter makes it clear that dressing in the correct mourning clothing is a matter of importance and anxiety to her; to be seen without proper mourning dress could damage her social reputation and might be taken as a slight against those grieving.

An example of the white accessories that might be worn with a second mourning outfit can be found in the V&A collections: a cream satin sleeve ruffle, edged with silk bobbin lace and dull black ribbons. The ruffle is from 1771, and comes with a note describing it as a 'Sleeve for slight mourning dress worn by Mrs Thomas

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[64] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover,The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol I (London: Richard Bentley, 1886), p. 96.
[65] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover,The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol I (London: Richard Bentley, 1886), p. 101.

Trigg' (see Figure 50).[66] Detachable sleeve ruffles could add interest and update an old outfit, and these might be worn with a black dress to progress from first to second, or half mourning. The fabric, particularly the use of silk bobbin lace, indicates that the ruffle would have been a fairly costly piece; perhaps justified by its versatility and suitability for periods of mourning.

Much of Mary Delany's mourning advice comes from periods of public mourning for royalty, during which mourning dress might be worn as a very visible status symbol, implying wealth, political connections and, as Taylor argues, a link to the monarchy.[67] Susan Vincent, when discussing mourning dress, describes the 'cultural and personal expectations of how a bereaved person looked and behaved', but these expectations were arguably very different between periods of royal mourning and mourning for close friends and family members.[68] There is a sense, particularly from Mary Delany's letters, that the frequency of royal mourning could turn it into a tiresome ritual, particularly when there was no familial or close relationship to the figure who had died, or if there was a sense of political animosity. Tension in the Granville's relationship with the royal family was not unheard of: Mary's father and uncle fell out of favour after the arrival of the Hanoverian kings, which forced them to move from London to Gloucestershire; her father was briefly detained and her uncle held in the Tower of London for two years. [69]

[66] V&A Collections, T.117-1985 [http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O315913/sleeve-ruffle-unknown/]
[67] P. Cunnington & C. Lucas, *Costumes for Births, Marriages & Deaths* (London: A&C Black Ltd., 1972) p. 259; L. Taylor, *Mourning Dress*, p. 112.
[68] S. Vincent, *Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Berg, 2003) p. 71.
[69] B. B. Schnorrenburg, 'Delany [*née* Granville; *other married name* Pendarves], Mary', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7442]

*Figure 50: Mourning sleeve, V&A Collections, T.117-1985*

In 1760, after the death of King George II, Mary wrote again to her sister, confirming that the mood in the city was bleak: 'Is the mourning general with you? Here we are all most dismal. I put on my mourning when I go into the *grande monde*'.[70] A few months later, in Bath, she again notes that: 'the public mourning will make every public place appear dismal till the eye is used to it'.[71] It is heavily implied that Mary would breathe a sigh of relief when she was able to return to her normal wardrobe, and when those around her could also dress like their usual, fashionable selves.

In the seventeenth century, Samuel Pepys took a particular interest in the mourning dress of his wife, demonstrating the anxieties that might present themselves when faced with the intricacies and emotional implications of mourning wear. After his mother's death in March 1667, Pepys made the decision to buy mourning dress for himself, Elizabeth, and a number of their servants. In May, two months later, he is enraged to find that Elizabeth has decided to dress according to the rules of second mourning:

> Anon comes down my wife, dressed in her second mourning, with her black moyre waistcoat, and short petticoat, laced with silver lace so basely that I could not endure to see her, and with laced lining, which is too soon, so that I was horrid angry, and went out of doors to the office and there staid, and would not go to our intended meeting…my wife sent twice or thrice to me, to direct her any way to dress her, but to put on her cloth gown, which she would not venture, which made me mad.[72]

The silver lace and lace lining worn by Elizabeth would have been considered appropriate to wear as part of second mourning, but Samuel evidently feels that it is too soon to move away from the dull colours and modest fabrics of deepest mourning. Here we can see the ways in which mourning dress could be a deeply emotional issue: Elizabeth has offended her husband, and potentially the memory of his mother, by choosing a more elaborate dress for their intended meeting with friends. Pepys claims that his wife asked for his advice on what would be an appropriate outfit, but drew the line at returning to her cloth gown that had been

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[70] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover,The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol III (London: Richard Bentley, 1886), p. 586.
[71] M. Granville, ed. Lady Llanover,The Autobiography and Correspondences of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, Vol III (London: Richard Bentley, 1886), p. 608.
[72] S. Pepys, H. B. Wheatley ed., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys Vol. VI* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1904) p. 342.

worn at the start of their mourning. Elizabeth's desire to dress up for their meeting with friends, and her apparent impatience with the length of first mourning induced the ire of her husband, who appears to be both personally offended by her dress, as well as worried about the implications of her being seen in public in second mourning so soon after his mother's death.

Six years previously, however, in October 1661, Elizabeth had embarrassed her husband by *not* updating her mourning wardrobe. He writes: 'in the afternoon to church again, my wife with me, whose mourning is now grown so old that I am ashamed to go to church with her'.[73] Here, Elizabeth's mistake is being too frugal with her mourning wardrobe and using the same dress enough for it to have become shabby, or allowing too many people to see her wearing the same outfit multiple times. Taylor describes how mourning, particularly at church, was the 'ideal occasion…where expensive clothes would be seen by all', a way of staging a 'public display of wealth and rank'.[74] Pepys' embarrassment at Elizabeth's reuse of an old outfit was undoubtedly linked to his efforts towards upwards mobility and social climbing; at this point, Elizabeth's old mourning dress was a sign that they either could not afford to buy more, or that she was unconcerned about appearing in public in an oft worn outfit, both of which would potentially scupper her husband's social machinations.

*A Lifelong Mourning Wardrobe*

Another prominent woman who collected a considerable mourning wardrobe throughout her life was Barbara Johnson, the reverend's daughter from Staffordshire who kept her impressive album of fabric swatches. Barbara's family were wealthy enough to recognise royal mourning, and her first experience of this was at the age of thirteen, in 1751 following the death of the Prince of Wales. Wearing a 'Black Stuff Gown', made from plain, dark, matte fabric, Barbara was expected to adhere to conventions of sympathetic royal mourning even as a child. Although royal mourning would have continued throughout Barbara's life, her next period of wearing

[73] S. Pepys, H. B. Wheatley ed., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys Vol. II,* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1904) p. 126.
[74] L. Taylor, *Mourning Dress*, pp. 19, 20.

mourning dress was far more personal: her father died in 1756, followed closely by her mother in 1759. Over these three years, Barbara recorded four mourning dresses: a 'black stuff short sack' for her father, and a black 'bombazeen negligee', a 'dark grey poplin negligee' and a 'dark grey tabby gown' for her mother (see Figure 51). The negligee was a relatively expensive gift: twenty-six yards of fabric at two shillings and nine pence a yard; Madeline Ginsburg states that as mourning was 'Always expensive, the cost was sometimes covered by gifts or bequests'.[75] As a young woman just into her twenties, Barbara would not necessarily have been able to afford all of her own mourning wear, and after the death of her parents, would have fallen under the care of her mother's executor, Edmund Smyth, a close friend of the family, as Barbara's brothers George, Robert and Charles were all under age, and still attending school at the death of their parents.

The gift of clothing, whilst being an economic way to adhere to mourning dress, also had an emotional dimension. Vincent describes how the giving of mourning gifts in both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was part of 'sustaining intimate relationships…spreading the loss of bereavement' and that the 'sharing of the clothing of grief also, to some extent, shared the burden of that grief.'[76] When purchased for personal, familial mourning, these garments could take on highly emotional meanings, reaffirming the connection between the wearer and the dead, and allowing the wearer to adopt a new identity of loss. Women wearing mourning dress in public sent a clear message to those around them that they were currently in a state of grieving, and thus part of a 'liminal time during which they were freed from the rules of polite social interaction and given time to adjust to their loss'.[77] By communicating through clothing, women could bypass the socialising that would usually be expected of them, and instead be given time and space to emotionally process their grief.

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[75] M. Ginsburg, 'Barbara Johnson and Fashion' in N. Rothstein, ed. *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashion and Fabrics* (London: The Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1987) p. 19.
[76] S. Vincent, *Dressing the Elite*, p. 69.
[77] *Ibid.*

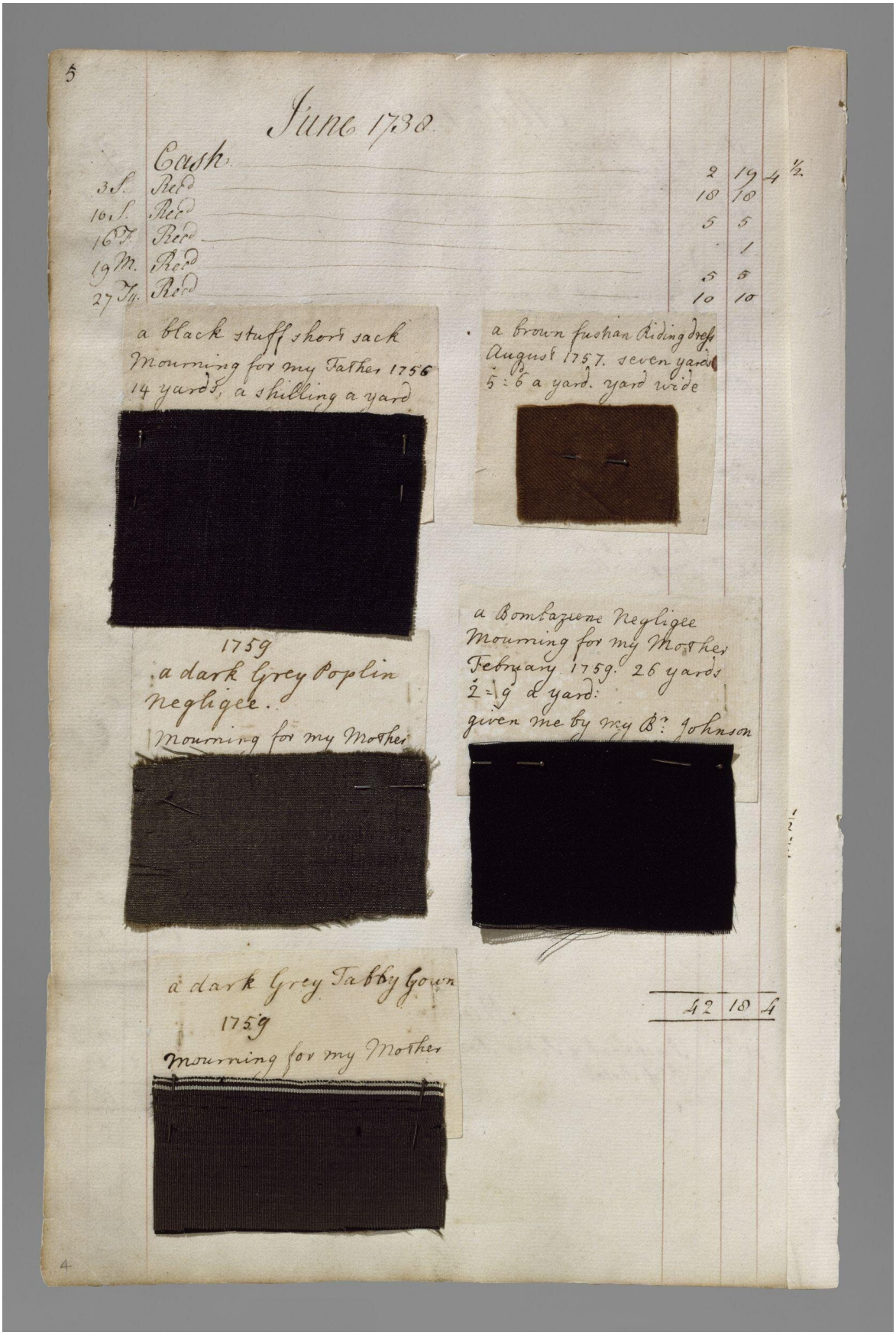


*Figure 51: Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics, 1746 - 1823. V&A Collections, T219-1973*

The inclusion of the two grey dresses in Barbara's mourning collection for her mother suggests that her wardrobe was suitable for second mourning, or for wearing in private at home, and implies that Barbara was intending to remain in mourning for a considerable period of time. This expense and commitment to mourning dress, and to the visual identity of grief, sent an important message about social status and economic position, but also emphasised a strong emotional connection to the dead, and a deep respect and sadness for their death. An elaborate example of grey dress can be seen in the portrait of Deborah Worsley of Platt, painted between 1765 – 1770; the outfit would have been appropriate for later stages of mourning, with its muted colours and white accessories, but the silk sheen and laced edging would have made this an expensive piece, and likely outside a young Barbara's financial means (see Figure 52).[78]

The next recorded example of mourning dress in Barbara Johnson's album does not occur until 1771. It is incredibly unlikely that Barbara did not go through any periods of public mourning during this time, particularly after the death of King George II that was so remarked upon in Mary Delany's letters, but these might not have necessitated new clothes. As Ginsburg has noted, after the death of her grandmother and parents, Barbara had a 'sadly sufficient and suitable stock' of mourning clothing, and could have also resorted to having clothes dyed black or having her gowns from the 1750s repaired and re-fitted.[79] Taylor has remarked on how Barbara's later mourning wear 'reflects the trends in fashionable fabrics', and illustrates how women could continue to dress in a way that reflected their personal tastes and fashionable interests whilst maintaining an appropriate state of respectful mourning; something which would have become easier with the relaxing of mourning outfits throughout the eighteenth century.[80]

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[78] Manchester Art Gallery, *Deborah Worsley of Platt*, 1765 – 1770, 1989.176 [https://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/title/?mag-object-9377]
[79] M. Ginsburg, 'Barbara Johnson and Fashion' in N. Rothstein, ed. *Barbara Johnson's Album,* p. 19.
[80] L. Taylor, *Mourning Dress*, p. 117.

*Figure 52: Deborah Worsley of Platt, 1765 – 1770. Manchester Art Gallery, 1989.176*

At the death of her uncle in 1771, Barbara purchased a 'Black Italian Lutestring negligee, eighteen yards, three quarters wide, [at] seven shillings a yard'. We can surmise that her previous mourning clothes had fallen out of style, no longer fit her, were less appropriate for her age after twelve years, or a combination of all three. It is also important to note that by this point, Barbara had full control of her finances, including a steady income in the form of inheritances from both of her parents, and could therefore choose to replace her mourning wardrobe with imported fabrics without having to rely on gifts, giving her greater flexibility to experiment with style. Developing trends and the growing popularity of printed cotton is visible in Barbara's mourning dress of 1788: a printed 'Stormont Cotten gown and petticoat' of small white speckles on a black ground. Here, Barbara is engaging with current trends in fashion and commerce and moving away from the heavy, plain fabrics of the 1750s.

The death of her middle brother Robert in 1799 prompted two dresses to be made. Barbara records a more traditional 'black taffaty gown' of nine yards, but also a 'dark callico' in a purple ground with black flowers, both for 'her dear Brother Robert'. Ginsburg has argued that this use of purple in mourning wear was 'a little in advance of its time', but this perhaps reinforces Barbara's identity as a woman who was interested in fashion, and confident to experiment with her dress, even in a time of deep sadness.[81]

Barbara's mourning wardrobe continued to expand in her old age, as her circle of friends and relatives began to decline. She purchased a 'Black chamberry muslin' to mourn her close friend Catherine Wodhull in 1808, and then a black bombazine in 1814 for her brother George William. The death of Catherine's husband, Mr Wodhull, in 1816 also prompted a new dress, this one of black twilled sarsenet. The Wodhulls had been a large presence in Barbara's life, often gifting her fabrics and clothing, much like her brothers; by buying new mourning dresses to mark their deaths, Barbara was perhaps reinforcing the emotional importance of dress in their relationships and choosing to remember them through this visual and tactile medium.

[81] M. Ginsburg, 'Barbara Johnson and Fashion' in N. Rothstein, ed. *Barbara Johnson's Album,* p. 19.

*Moll Verney: Adolescent Mourning*

A further example of mourning dress being used to commemorate familial relationships comes from the Verney diaries. Moll Verney, whose attitudes towards dress were initially explored in Chapter Two, collected a large selection of mourning garments after the death of her father and brothers at the end of the seventeenth century. Lady Cary Gardiner, Moll's great-aunt, was forced to intervene after the death of the young girl's father, Edmund Verney, in 1688 in order to ensure Moll's mourning wardrobe was both appropriate and plentiful. Lady Gardiner describes how it is a 'ridiculous sit to see her whit coat next her cloth crape coat for A father', emphasising the hierarchy of mourning dress; whilst Moll might have been able to wear this combination for second mourning, or for a less immediate relative, it is an unacceptable outfit for the daughter of the deceased. Vincent attests to the way in which the 'gradations of mourning attire…acknowledged the different degrees of relationship' between the dead and the mourner, and it is clear that Lady Gardiner felt that Moll's wardrobe was not suitable to outwardly express the grief expected from a daughter.[82]

Once Moll had reached the age of fifteen, she asked for her own mourning garments following the death of her last remaining brother, also named Edmund. Across a span of four years, Moll had been forced to mourn for her father and her brothers, Ralph and Edmund, so had presumably spent much of her teenage years in mourning dress. The instruction from her grandfather, Ralph Verney, was to ensure that Moll's mourning was 'as little & as cheap as possible, seeing she grows apace', suggesting that the head of the Verney family was, understandably, concerned with the cost of continually adding to his household's mourning garments. Taylor reminds us of the 'anxiety and financial problems caused by the cost of fashionable mourning' and the need to purchase black cloth for family members, but also for servants to wear, and to decorate the household with.[83]

The different reactions to mourning dress from Moll's two elderly guardians is interesting. Cary Gardiner, who was sixty two when she wrote in concern for Moll's dress, was largely focused on ensuring that her great-niece looked appropriate; that

[82] S. Vincent, *Dressing the Elite*, p. 68.
[83] L. Taylor, *Mourning Dress*, p. 101.

the young girl's grief for her father would be accurately reflected in her outward appearance, and that she would not give the impression that the family were withholding expense on their mourning. On the other hand, Ralph Verney, who was in his late seventies when his grandson, Moll's brother Edmund, died had prioritized the financial and practical issues of fitting a young girl with mourning dress over a prolonged period of time. Christiane Holm has stated that 'in the eighteenth century, mourning became a female task', but we might argue that the Verneys already displayed something of a gendered approach to mourning in the late seventeenth century, with the women of the family taking responsibility for the symbolism and emotional meaning of mourning dress, and the male head of the household concerning himself with the practicality and cost.[84]

Moll, even at fifteen years old, clearly understood the importance of mourning dress and what it was intended to communicate. She wrote to Ralph regarding her garments: 'I believe you wod have me morn hansomly for so deare a brother…since ther is none left but myself to morn for him'. The significance of Moll as the only surviving child of the deceased Edmund Verney, the very last of her siblings, lends weight to her argument that her mourning clothes should be costly and attractive. Moll also requested more fashionable items to add to her mourning ensembles: 'I beg that I may have a tipit bought me, since every gentellwoman has one as makes any show in the world'. Here, the concern is perhaps less about whether the garment would emphasize Moll's outward display of grief, but rather about ensuring that when she did appear in mourning dress, it was still in keeping with current fashions. As a young woman surrounded by death, Moll would have had little chance to dress exactly the way she may have desired to; by asking for a tippet, an item that she associates with 'gentellwoman', Moll is perhaps hoping to express some of her own tastes and sense of identity into her regimented mourning wardrobe.

*Widow's Weeds*

Arguably the most symbolic and emotionally significant mourning dress was that worn by a widow. The widow's weeds, as they might be referred to, were the ultimate

[84] C. Holm, 'Sentimental Cuts: Eighteenth Century Mourning Jewelry with Hair', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 38 (2004) pp. 139 – 143, p. 139.

sign of public mourning, with 'widows being mourners *par excellence*', who were expected to uphold the most severe mourning for their husbands.[85] Both Erin Griffey and Alessandra Nicola Malusà have noted the similarities between the widows' mourning dress and nuns' habits: the plain, dark colours and headwear worn by widows in first mourning bears a significant resemblance to the culturally prominent image of the nun. Malusà argues that 'the dress of widows and nuns was indeed aimed at materially detaching and disguising the sexuality and physicality of the wearer via layers of fabric which generated shapeless and concealing voluminous drapery', suggesting that one of the purposes of widows' dress was to obscure those elements of their identity – their bodies and their sexuality – which should have been shared only with their husbands.[86] Although this idea may have lost some of its influence with the adoption of more fashionable styles of mourning dress towards the end of the eighteenth century, it was largely accepted that widows should be expected to be 'nun-like, pious, in both their appearance and behaviour'.[87]

One example of the similarities between widow's dress and a nun's habit can be seen in the mezzotint print of the Lady Mary Fenwick, printed in 1737 after Michael Dahl (see Figure 53).[88] Mary Fenwick's outfit is severe, and her elaborate headdress bears a striking resemblance to a nun's wimple, supporting a gauzy black veil that could be used to obscure her face. The shape of the dress is demure: although the bodice is shaped to the body, the high neckline and long sleeves reveal almost no skin. Mary holds a miniature portrait of her husband as a symbol of her remembrance, and her gaze is directed downwards, appearing lost in thought.

Widows' portraits would be painted to commemorate the loss of a husband, presenting an image of the widow as devoted, chaste and emotionally restrained, showing an outward display of 'serenity, dignity and control'.[89]

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[85] P. Cunnington & C. Lucas, *Costumes for Births, Marriages & Deaths*, p. 261.
[86] A. N. Malusà, 'Mourning Dress and Representation in Widowhood of Two Seventeenth Century Savoy Regents: Christine of France and Marie-Jeanne Baptiste of Savoy-Nemours', *The Court Historian*, 24 (2019) pp. 17 – 47, p. 17.
[87] E. Griffey, 'Henrietta Maria and the Politics of Widows' Dress at the Stuart Court', in *Sartorial Politics in Early Modern Europe: Fashioning Women*, ed. E. Griffey (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019) pp. 277 – 302, p. 284.
[88] George Lumley, *The Lady Mary Fenwick*, mezzotint, 1737, The British Museum P,8.262.
[89] E. Griffey, 'Henrietta Maria and the Politics of Widows' Dress at the Stuart Court', p. 289.


*Figure 53: George Lumley, The Lady Mary Fenwick, mezzotint, 1737, The British Museum P,8.262*

*Figure 54: Godfrey Kneller, Barbara Palmer, née Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland (1705), National Portrait Gallery, NPG 427.*

One such portrait is that of the Duchess of Cleveland, Barbara Villiers, painted in 1705 (see Figure 54). Aged sixty four, Barbara is depicted as having 'grown plump and elderly and wearing deepest mourning for her husband', Roger Palmer, the Earl of Castlemaine.[90] Barbara's outfit is severe: entirely black, save for white linen sleeve ruffs and the hint of a shift; it covers her figure completely, with the main focus on her widow's cap. The high, structured headpiece allowed a black veil to be worn as part of traditional widow's mourning garb, and presumably allowed the wearer to hide their face in public if necessary. Barbara's face here reflects the qualities described by Griffey; she is calm and dignified with her head resting on one hand, while the other holds a small book, perhaps a bible, to further emphasise her virtue as a widow.

Barbara's age is visible in her fuller face and the slight wrinkles around her eyes; there is only the slightest suggestion in this portrait of the sexual appeal that surrounded her during her time as Charles II's favourite mistress, in the familiar pose of her hand resting on her head. Rather, the Duchess of Cleveland is presented as a pious, respectful widow, honouring her husband's memory, despite their separation in 1662 and her reputation for infidelity and salacious relationships. Whilst this choice of pose and dress is clearly intended to show Barbara's new identity as a widow, it also reflects her advanced age; her clothes are modest, with none of the decolletage that was so popular in the earlier portraits of her youth, and the hair that peeks out from her cap is greying. The painting is an effective example of how women adopted a different identity during their periods of mourning, and how they were able to use dress to communicate this transition in their lives.

In 1764, Thomas Gainsborough painted a mourning portrait of Lady Maria Walpole, wearing a second mourning outfit that had silver and lace detailing, much like Elizabeth Pepys wore almost a century earlier (see Figure 55). Lady Maria's husband, the Earl James Waldegrave, had died in April 1763, and Maria was presumably still wearing mourning dress in memory of her husband. Her gown, although black, has the distinct sheen of silk, and her sleeves have three rows of elaborate lace ruffs. The silhouette of the dress is in keeping with the popular fashion of the 1760s: the voluminous fabric at the back suggests that it is a robe á Française,

[90] L. Taylor, *Mourning Dress*, p. 98.

or sack-back gown, which would have required a considerable amount of fabric to construct, and thus cost a sizeable sum of money. Whilst the sack-back could be worn with a bare decolletage, here a delicate strip of white fabric, made from either lace or muslin, has been added to increase the modesty of the outfit, and also add further interest with the lace bows and ruffles. Lady Walpole has included silver decorative bows to the sleeves of her dress, creating an extra sparkle that would not be permitted in first mourning wear. There is no large widow's headpiece here, but rather a small lace cap perched on her hair; Maria has left the severity of widows' weeds and deepest mourning in favour of more fashionable and attractive outfits. Although her jewellery appears minimal, Lady Walpole is clearly wearing at least a large pair of earrings; potentially the diamonds that Ribeiro described as being acceptable in second mourning during this period.[91] She carries with her a lace edged shawl in a white or silver, which had remained fashionable since Moll Verney longed for one in the late seventeenth century.

The contrast between this portrait of Maria and Barbara Villiers' painting is clear: Lady Walpole has moved out of the initial period of mourning that was so crucial to maintaining the image of a grieving widow, and is instead pictured in an outfit that, in another colour, would not look out of place in her normal wardrobe. The two paintings highlight the move towards more fashionable mourning dress for women that took place in the eighteenth century, as the difference between standard and mourning garments narrowed. Also of note is the difference in age between the two sitters: whilst Barbara was in her mid-sixties when she was widowed, Maria was twenty eight, with a high likelihood of remarrying and still well within child bearing age. Maria's portrait, unlike Barbara's, maintains an emphasis on her beauty and sexual attractiveness, with much less focus on religious or pious themes. Maria did not present herself as a chaste, nun-like figure in her portrait; she was remarried to the Duke of Gloucester two years later, and went on to have three more children with him. Here we can see the difference that age, fashionable trends in mourning wear, and the different stages of mourning could make to the appearance of a widow, and the different messages that were communicated by those outfits.

[91] A. Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth Century Europe*, p. 204.

*Figure 55: Thomas Gainsborough, Maria Walpole, Countess of Waldergrave, 1674.*

*Dressing for Death*

Elizabeth Shackleton, who maintained her detailed diary throughout her later life, mentions mourning dress very infrequently; whether she had little need to purchase new mourning clothes, or simply chose not to write about them is unclear. We have seen in Chapter Seven that Elizabeth does, however, record her choice of clothes that she plans to wear 'for Good', not expecting to live much beyond the time of writing in 1779: 'I left off my old stays & put on my best stays for Good – I left off my very old green quilted callimanco petticoat and put on my new drab callimanco quilted petticoat for Good'.[92] The impact of her son's wedding and her own shifting identities have been discussed in the previous chapter, but in the context of mourning and death, Elizabeth's comments suggest that she had acknowledged her steadily approaching death and had planned to meet it in her best outfit. This might have been prompted by a desire to get more wear out of her new, good quality garments, or purely to ensure that she be remembered as a woman who dressed well for the entirety of her life. We might also question whether Elizabeth chose to wear her new stays and quilted petticoat indefinitely because these items were more comfortable; the new stays would have fitted her body better having been recently measured, and a quilted petticoat would keep her legs warm, along with a repurposed pair of stockings. Elizabeth described how 'I cut a pair of fine worsted stockings good legs and bad feet…over my stockings to keep my knees warm – like them much now they are made properly'; dressing for comfort, and to keep the chill out of ageing joints would likely have been a priority, as well as wanting to appear respectable and fashionable after death.

Elizabeth was somewhat premature in her predictions, however, as she lived for another two years after putting on her new stays and petticoat. Notably, the majority of new purchases made for herself during those final years were small accessories: ribbons, tape, handkerchiefs and gloves. Rather that purchasing any new outfits for herself, Elizabeth spent much of her time giving away items of clothing to women and girls in her household and social circle: 'gave…Alice my old sprigg'd muslin apron once a short one and an old wore done course double muslin neck

[92] May 1779, DDX 666/1/11, LRO

handkerchief…Gave Sophia Alkinson 6 little caps and Molly Thornter [?] six little caps'.[93] Clothing was often left as gifts or inheritance in wills after death, and Elizabeth upheld this practice, ensuring that her garments would live on in the wardrobes of her female circle after her own death.

We can see, then, the ways in which clothing was crucial to the practice of mourning as a way of communicating grief and respect for the dead, honouring relationships and establishing social hierarchies amongst mourners. Middling and upper class women would have been expected to go into mourning whenever necessary, throughout all the stages of their life cycles, and this led to different experiences of mourning dress across a variety of age groups. Mourning dress might have also been regarded by women as an inconvenient practice that interfered with their own sense of style, particularly when said mourning was not for immediate family or close friends. Dress could also be utilised by women who were anticipating their own deaths, as a way of establishing agency over their body and influencing the way they were remembered by mourners. Lady Anne Clifford, who died in March 1676, left specific instructions in her will detailing how her body should be wrapped – in 'cear cloth and encased in lead' – ensuring that she could have the final decision in how her body was presented to mourners. Cunningham and Lucas have argued that as the 'clothing of the dead tends to become a representation of [themselves], and the clothing of the living a means to self-expression, costume enters into most death customs'; whether women were experiencing mourning in the early stages of their life cycles, or approaching death themselves, their clothing allowed them to navigate public grieving and cultivate networks of gift giving and receiving, as well as maintain agency over their physical appearance and identity.[94]

[93] August 1781, DDX 666/1/14, LRO

[94] P. Cunnington & C. Lucas, *Costumes for Births, Marriages & Deaths*, p. 123.

# Conclusion

On the 23rd January, 1779, Elizabeth Shackleton visited her friends and recorded her outfit in her diary: 'I dressed me out in my scarlet Damask and best laced edging linnen'.[1] Elizabeth was 52 years old, and had spent the past two decades meticulously detailing the clothes she wore in her personal diary, alongside her daily engagements, errands and activities. Scarlet gowns were a particular favourite of Elizabeth's, and several are mentioned being bought and made throughout her late thirties and forties: she had a scarlet damask gown delivered in September 1772, which was worn for the birthday celebration of her future daughter-in-law, and had a scarlet cap made for winter. Another scarlet gown, this one made of stuff, was given to a Peggy Bell in November 1773: Elizabeth clearly had no further need for this particular dress, perhaps because she now had a finer damask one, or because she wanted the woollen garment to be a useful gift for Peggy to wear in winter. Her 'good Scarlet damask' was worn on Boxing Day of 1778 to celebrate Christmas, before then being used in January to visit her friends. Dress was central to the life of Elizabeth Shackleton, crucial in creating and communicating identity, as it was to so many middling and upper class women in England between 1660 and 1780. Part of Elizabeth's sense of self was represented in her love and appreciation of dress; she was a competent and respected head of her household and had a large network of female friends, relatives, and staff with whom she shared her interest in fashion and clothing.

*How were women using dress to represent their sense of self?*

This thesis uses a select group of women as case studies, along with supporting material evidence and smaller, more fragmented accounts from additional women's writings. In doing so, there is an emphasis placed on the uniqueness of each woman discussed: rather than attempting to gather a large, quantitative set of data from which to draw generalised statistics about women in this period, this thesis has

[1] DDX 666/1/11, 23/01/1779, p. 39.

focused on qualitative research, reading closely into the experiences of singular women and suggesting how they may fit into, or challenge, ideas around what women wore throughout their life cycles. These women all wore dress as an extension of their identities, whether that was through deliberate, intentional choice or them being subconsciously influenced by social norms and debate around appropriate, fashionable clothes. This thesis has shown that women changed and adapted the clothes they wore based on age, marital status, health, social occasion, taste in fashion, and financial position, amongst other factors. From Barbara Johnson's 'Laylock figur'd Ducape Negligee' for the Stamford Races to Sarah Hurst's marital silk negligee and petticoat, Mary Verney's pink pregnancy stays to Elizabeth Shackleton's best scarlet damask gown, dress provided these women with the means to visualize parts of their identity and outwardly communicate this within their social networks.

This thesis has demonstrated the importance of dress as a tool with which women were able to construct and communicate their identities, and shown how dress was used by individual women to represent age, class, material knowledge and social connections, within the framework of the life cycle. Barbara Johnson's fashion album is often referenced in works on material culture as a unique example of record-keeping, consumption, and sartorial literacy, and featured prominently in Serena Dyer's 2021 publication, *Material Lives: Women Makers and Consumer Culture in the 18th Century*. This thesis has taken the same source material, but examined it through the lens of women's identity and aging across the life cycle.

*How was women's identity influenced by their life cycles?*

The different stages of the life cycle provided women with a framework in which they could envision their lives: growing and changing during adolescence, moving into adulthood with the prospects of marriage, pregnancy and motherhood playing a key role, then slowly progressing into old age and accruing a sense of authority that stemmed from life experience; perhaps experiencing widowhood, or watching their children reach adulthood. Each of these stages impacted the way in which women perceived themselves, and created another layer of identity that could be adopted as part of their broader sense of self. Ideas of propriety, and notions of acceptable

behaviour, including appropriate dress, for women at each stage of their life cycle influenced the way they chose to present themselves: Moll Verney longed for a fashionable tippet during her adolescence; Barbara Johnson wore some of her most expensive and impressive outfits during her young adulthood; Elizabeth Shackleton baulked at the idea of adopting fashionable London styles immediately after childbirth; Mary Delany critiqued her older peers for still dressing as they did in their youth. As women progressed through their lives, their experiences allowed them to adopt new, additional identities, closely linked to each stage of the life cycle, that overlapped and coincided with each other to create a unique and individual sense of self.

*What were some of the most important stages of the life cycle?*

The stages of the life cycle included in this thesis are childhood, adolescence, courtship and marriage during young adulthood, wifehood, pregnancy, motherhood, old age, and death, including mourning periods. Each stage remains important on its own, but the interplay between them meant that some periods of the life cycle were more significant or impactful at particular moments in time than others.

During childhood and adolescence, we see a growth in agency and ideas about self-identity, with girls being able to ask for specific items of dress that they want or need; they lack financial independence but can begin to cultivate their personal preferences based on what they have seen their friends and relatives wearing, as well as by being taken shopping with adults. This reaches a peak of impact during the stage of courtship and potential first marriage, with young women experiencing the freedom to experiment with expensive, fashionable dress, and a focus on the importance of youth and beauty, with the understanding that this was necessary to secure a good marriage – even if a marriage eventually did not take place. This stage, including the short, but impactful moment of the wedding itself, was the culmination of the developing agency, personal taste and financial investment from childhood and adolescence. The social expectation that a bride would reflect the social and economic position of her family and her new husband meant that her appearance was of particular importance during the wedding.

Wifehood was experienced by many women as an extended state of identity from the point of marriage: some women might experience frequent widowhood and remarriage, whilst others could remain in constant wifehood throughout the rest of their lives. Part of wifehood might have been a desire to reflect well upon your husband, using his status and position to determine your own, as we can see in the actions of Elizabeth Pepys and Sarah Hurst. Wifehood could also mean establishing a household and being responsible for the material consumption of your husband, children and other people who lived with you. Becoming a wife meant the potential for greater economic independence: although dependent upon the finances of a husband, a wife would also receive pin money, and be able to shop with credit taken out in their husband's name. The length of this stage of the life cycle made it hugely impactful to the women who experienced it, and meant it became a longstanding and deep-rooted part of their identity.

Unlike wifehood, pregnancy was a short, physical stage of the life cycle that could happen multiple times over the course of a woman's life. It is likely that during pregnancy, it was this identity that took prominence over wifehood and other facets of the self: pregnancy was physically strenuous, could be fraught with anxiety and had a significant visual impact on a woman's body. This had considerable influence over the way women dressed themselves during this stage of the life cycle: some women sought to hide an illicit pregnancy, whilst others, particularly royalty, flaunted their apparent success in producing heirs. For women who carried multiple children, this was an identity that would be adopted and shed throughout the duration of each pregnancy, becoming the most important every time because of its physical strain on women's bodies, and the emotional and social anticipation of having a new child.

Motherhood, similarly to wifehood, was an extended state of identity that remained for the entirety of a woman's life. This stage of the life cycle brought an additional layer of responsibility and authority: ensuring that children were looked after and raised well, which included providing them with a wardrobe. During this stage, women were able to extend a level of influence over their children's identity through the clothes they were given; an act that perhaps allowed them to reflect on their own childhood, and their own caregivers' attitude towards children's dress. Motherhood would encompass a woman's adulthood, but also her old age, changing

subtly as her children became adults themselves, but still existing as a key part of her identity.

The beginnings of old age differed between individual women; rather than there being a clear numerical age that signified the start of old age, it was a stage interpreted by women based on their health, physical appearance, life experience and perception of themselves. For women such as Mary Delany, Barbara Johnson and Mary Wortley Montagu, old age spanned several decades, as they each lived into their seventies and eighties. In contrast, Elizabeth Shackleton died in her fifties, but clearly regarded herself as experiencing old age during the last years of her life. During this stage of the life cycle, we can see existing identities shifting and changing, and arguably becoming less of a focus: in the cases of Elizabeth Shackleton and Mary Wortley Montagu, they both lived largely separate from their husbands after their marriages broke down, and once their children were adults, they no longer had the immediate responsibilities of motherhood, leaving them with space to focus on themselves and cultivate their identities outside of these stages. The social emphasis placed on ridiculing old women who clung to youth during this period created an environment in which women had to carefully navigate their sartorial choices. There was an expectation that women would maintain their appearance without slavishly adopting every new fashion, and it is clear that many women at this stage of their life cycle still enjoyed choosing outfits and taking care of their appearance, particularly during their green old age.

The final stage of the life cycle, death, is considered in this thesis alongside mourning; death was closely linked to decrepit old age, during which time illness or bodily discomfort could become overwhelming, but mourning could occur at any point during a woman's life cycle. Mourning was both an identity and an activity that would happen multiple times: the personal mourning for parents, friends, children or husbands, and the more symbolic mourning undertaken by upper class women for members of the royal family. During personal mourning, dress could be used as a genuine expression of grief, and a way to signify the relationship between the wearer and the deceased, whilst national mourning required adherence to social expectations and being able to financially maintain an extended period of mourning within the household. It is arguable that mourning pulled other identities into sharp relief - being a grieving wife or mother – and highlighted the importance of these

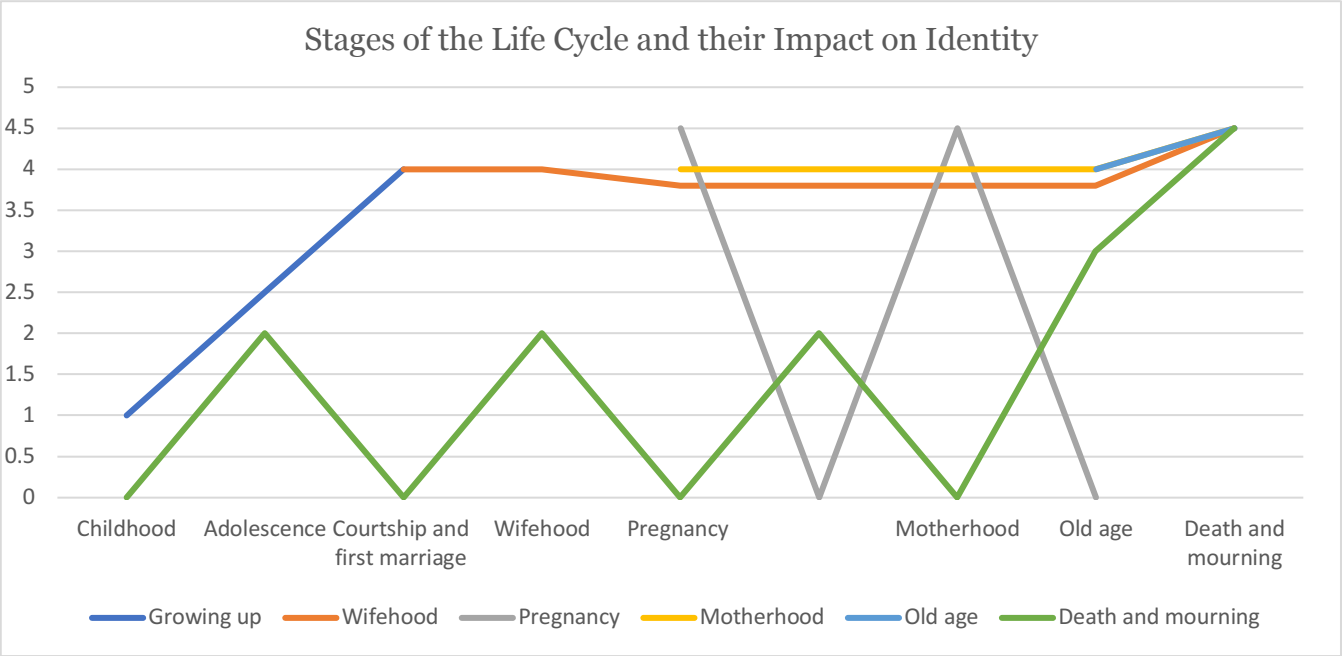
identities in the difficulty of adjusting to their loss. In preparation for her own death, we see Elizabeth Shackleton wanting to wear her best clothes 'for good', expressing concern with how they will be remembered by friends and family. By gifting items of clothing just before their death, or as part of their will, women could symbolize their relationships through garments that would continue to be worn, and as a result, they would be remembered.

This thesis has considered different stages of the life cycle in turn, selecting several of the most prominent phases that were the result of bodily changes, ceremonial significance, and social movement. Rather than looking at the life cycle as a purely biological progression as Mendelson and Crawford do, or one entirely dominated by ritual, similarly to Cressy, this work has considered which moments were given most attention and significance by women themselves, as evidenced in their diaries and letters, and used this to create a broad structure that fits the experiences of many women during this period. As part of this, we have also considered women who did not neatly conform to each stage of the life cycle and examined how their sense of identity could still be shaped by their apparent non-conformity. When considering the longevity of impact, and the interactions between different identities, it is those that were developed during adulthood – wifehood and motherhood particularly - that appear to have held the most significance during women's lives across this period. As depicted in the graph below, we can see the impact of the different stages of the life cycle on women's identity: during the first stages, we see a steady development in identity that might reach its peak at marriage; from this point, there are multiple co-existing identities that each influenced the way women chose to dress themselves. The peaks and troughs of both pregnancy and mourning illustrate them as temporary but recurring stages. During the final years of the life cycle, thoughts might turn more frequently to death, prompting contemplation of earlier identities and stages; for example, if a woman was mourning her husband, her identity as a wife would come to the forefront.

Barbara Crosbie, in 2020, noted that 'stages of the life cycle tend to be considered in isolation…limited attention is given to the fact that individuals progressed from childhood to old age'.[2] This thesis has sought to rectify this,

[2] B. Crosbie, *Age Relations and Cultural Change in Eighteenth Century England* (Boydell & Brewer, 2020) http://dx/doi.org/10.1017/97817874486817, p. 2.

following several prominent women from their childhood, through adulthood and into their old age, and examining how their relationship with dress, and their relationships with friends and family who expressed considerable input regarding their dress, developed and changed as they experienced the different phases of their life cycles, clearly impacting their sense of identity.




*Graph 1: Illustrating the interplay between different stages of the life cycle and the impact they had on women's identity and sense of self throughout their lives.*

*To what extent does women's writing about dress, and their surviving objects, reveal their identities?*

As this thesis has shown, women's writing is invaluable to our understanding of their bodies, identity, dress and the complex relationships between these themes. Many of the women who appear frequently throughout the thesis, such as Mary Delany, are well known to historians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and their diaries and letters are staple primary sources for exploring middling and upper class women's lives during this period. Elizabeth Shackleton's writing has been a key part of Amanda Vickery's work on Georgian households and upper class women, most notably in *The Gentleman's Daughter,* as well as being featured prominently in Sarah Fox's 2022 monograph, *Giving Birth in Eighteenth Century England*. Fox

uses Elizabeth Shackleton's letters as evidence of the birthing and maternity process as it was experienced by women, whilst Vickery focusses on how Elizabeth Shackleton was able to establish a genteel, country household and took part in the activities that were central to maintaining upper class domesticity. This thesis has taken this incredibly valuable body of source material and used it to closely examine the ways in which dress was central to the construction of Elizabeth Shackleton's identity, and how her approach to fashion changed as she progressed from adulthood to old age.

Works of traditional dress history have often focussed on exactly what women were wearing: the fabric, cut, construction and visual impact of the garments themselves. This thesis has sought to explore what women's dress was communicating about their identity; the implication of women wearing particular items during different stages of their life cycles, and how they sought to be perceived by others. By using a combination of material objects and women's writing, this thesis has examined how dress made women feel: how clothes could improve their mood, make them feel beautiful, cause them stress and worry, or make them question if they were indeed too old for certain styles. Focussing on women's voices helps to bring the material objects to life: Sarah Hurst's disappointment at her 'new gown which every body says is the ugliest thing in the World' is both tangible and relatable.[3] The ugliest dress in the world takes on additional meaning when seen through Sarah's writing; a youthful fashion *faux pas* that drew the criticism of her friends and family, and would unfortunately have to remain in her wardrobe for some time, when only a few months earlier she was 'prodigiously admir'd' for her new Indian muslin gown. Sarah was pushing the boundaries of fashion in a way that was acceptable for young women, with mixed success.[4] Examining women's writing about dress in conjunction with surviving garments provides us with a level of insight that could not be achieved with each type of source material alone: gleaning knowledge of the physicality and construction of items, understanding their production and their intended fit, alongside the written account of their cost, the occasions they were worn for, the emotional significance of owning them and the

[3] Hurst, B. & Djabri, S. C., *The Diaries of Sarah Hurst 1759-1762: Life and Love in 18th Century Horsham* (Stroud: Gloucestershire, 2009), p. 224.
[4] Hurst, B. & Djabri, S. C., *The Diaries of Sarah Hurst,* p. 211.

impact of wearing them, reveals considerably more about how women visualised their identities than if both types of source material were examined independently.

*In what ways is the period of 1660 – 1780 in England important to these themes?*

As demonstrated in this thesis, 1660 to 1780 in England was a period in which dress, and more broadly, material consumption, was an integral part of life for middling and upper class women. This thesis takes as its starting point the Restoration, when fashion once again took a central role at court, and examines the period of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century urban expansion and the development of shopping culture. Whilst not necessarily a consumer revolution, this certainly increased the accessibility and variety of goods available for purchase, particularly for the middling classes. The increasing speed of fashion cycles or seasons during this period meant that styles, patterns and colours could fall out of popularity more rapidly than before, and the increased use of fashion plates, dolls and literature ensured that these women were able to make informed purchases. This work has also demonstrated the well-practiced activity of keeping autobiographical writings and maintaining extended correspondences undertaken by a number of middling and upper class English women during this period, with the surviving examples providing rich source material; although total women's literacy was still limited at the end of this period, a sizeable amount of women consistently recorded their thoughts and feelings concerning both dress and their life cycles. The key changes across this time period with regards to the life cycle is arguably the movement away from large, public ceremonial events, such as weddings and funerals, with a greater emphasis on private, intimate affairs, that nevertheless still provided ample opportunities for women to communicate with their peers through dress.

*Further avenues for research*

Multiple avenues of research could be undertaken within the topics of women's dress and identity at each distinct phase of the life cycle. Whilst this thesis has sought to highlight movement throughout the life cycle, other pieces of research might

concentrate on individual stages in greater detail, gathering a more extensive collection of extant garments for each. A large project focussed entirely on the maternity dress of early modern women and how they used this dress to communicate their identities as expectant mothers, contrasting first and subsequent pregnancies, for example, could be beneficial to studies of early modern maternity. A similar approach could be taken in comparing the dress of women who married multiple times, examining how their choice of garments changed between relationships. Another stage of the life cycle that was not considered extensively in this thesis is the menopause: a project exploring how this biological change was interpreted through women's dress could be very interesting.

Along with focussing more closely on each stage of the life cycle, it would also be possible to extend the timeframe of this thesis and bring in examples from the sixteenth, early seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries, to establish a broader chronological study across the full early modern and long eighteenth century periods. In focussing on 1660 – 1780, this thesis has emphasised a level of cross-century continuity, whilst acknowledging the developments in fashion and trade, and the popular social roles of women and how these impacted the ways in which women constructed their identities. An alternative to broadening the period of comparison would be to extend the geographical range of source materials and examine women's dress and identity across country borders; a study on women's dress throughout the life cycle in Britain, Europe, or America would provide interesting contrasts, both in terms of styles of dress as well as the social expectations of women. Mary Wortley Montagu's travel writings, which record in great detail the different court fashions she encounters as she moves across Europe, would be an interesting body of primary source material for a multi-national approach.

There are also women who were not able to be fully worked into this thesis alongside their counterparts: Barbara Villiers' experience of marriage and motherhood in the context of her relationship with Charles II, for example, would be an excellent seventeenth century addition to the Adulthood section. The collected correspondences of Jemima York, 2nd Marchioness Grey, her daughters, and friends would also be a rich body of source material to add to the work of this thesis, with approximately 1800 letters sent across the eighteenth century, discussing, amongst other things, marriage, childbirth, housekeeping and fashion.

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This thesis has contributed to the wider scholarship of women's lives in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England by combining the study of dress and material culture with notions of identity across the life cycle. By approaching the written source material of diaries and letters through the specific lenses of dress and identity, this thesis has revealed the attitudes of upper and middling class women towards their clothes, and how this was inextricably linked to the ways they perceived themselves at different points in their life cycles. The inclusion of surviving material objects has allowed this thesis to also explore notions of construction, fit and fabric in the clothes worn by these women, deepening our understanding of why particular garments might be chosen at specific times in women's lives. By considering women's dress across their life cycles, this thesis has further emphasised that clothing, fashion and outward appearance was of great importance to middling and upper class women of this period throughout their entire lives. As Jane Scrimshire writes to Elizabeth Shackleton, 'you wo'd find Women of Sixty and Seventy just as anxious about [dress] as formerly Girls were at 18'.[5] Despite the bodily changes experienced by these women between their teens and the final years of their lives, how to best adorn that body was a question that never left their minds. Dress was an integral part of women's lives, used to illustrate their place in the life cycle, their position within the social and economic hierarchy, their fashionable knowledge, sense of taste, adherence to decorum, and ability to consolidate their sense of identity into something tangible and visible.

[5] J. Scrimshire, in A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 177.

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- Item 1877 1014.10
- Item J,5.101
- Item P,8.262

*Colonial Williamsburg Museum*

- Item 1936-666

*Dallas Museum of Art*

- Item 2000.171.FA

*Fashion Museum Bath*

- BATMC I.09-1386

*LACMA*

- Item M.2007.211.353

*Manchester Art Gallery & Gallery of Costume*

- Item 1949.137
- Item 1951.281
- Item 1953.211
- Item 1989.176

*The Metropolitan Museum of Art*

- Item 40.136.1a,b
- Item 1991.6.1a,b
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*Minneapolis Institute of Art*

- Item 31.106

*The National Gallery*

- Item NG4756

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- Item K.2002.510
- Item K.2013.67.1

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- Item NG4756
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- Item 272-1898
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