CONSUMING PRODUCERS

Retail Workers and Commodity Culture at Eaton's in Mid-Twentieth-Century Toronto

by
DONICA BELISLE

A thesis submitted to the Department of History
in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
September, 2001

ABSTRACT

Why do workers consume? To answer this question, this thesis examines the experiences of retail workers at the T. Eaton Company in mid-twentieth-century Toronto. Eaton's employees were situated at an immensely significant position within the marketplace: the commodity-exchange. They moved daily through the market's three spheres of production, distribution, and consumption, and they considered themselves to be producers, sellers, and consumers. Arguing that Eaton's workers' consuming interests were born from their experiences at the T. Eaton Company, this thesis traces the cultural and political consequences of this development.

The introduction presents an overview of literature related to working-class consumption; it also describes the T. Eaton Company, its customers, and its employees. In Chapter One, selected critical theory is surveyed to demonstrate that the commodification tradition provides the best analytical lens for understanding the culture of commodity capitalism. Chapter Two applies commodity theory to an analysis of Eaton's managers' and customers' treatment of Eaton's employees. In the process, it demonstrates that Eaton's managers and customers encouraged workers to consider themselves both advertisements for the T. Eaton Company and consumers of the T. Eaton Company's commodities.

In Chapter Three, this thesis illustrates how Eaton's workers responded to customers' and managers' commodifying efforts. Specifically, it argues that Eaton's employees constructed performative and consumerist personas that enabled them to both navigate the world of commodity culture and express pride in their identity as retail labourers. In Chapter Four, this thesis addresses the politics of working-class consumption by investigating the

events of a four-year-long unsuccessful attempt made by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), in conjunction with the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL), to organise all fifteen thousand of Toronto's Eaton's workers into an industrial union. During the union drive, appeals were made to Eaton's workers' consuming interests, but due to organisers' particular ideological assumptions, these appeals were wrought with contradiction.

Finally, the conclusion weaves the findings of the various chapters together, demonstrates how these findings provide insight into workers' consuming interests, and proposes some new directions that historians may take to arrive at a nuanced understanding of twentieth-century working-class consumption.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I wish to thank Bryan Palmer, my advisor. Not only has he been an outstanding mentor, but his insights, suggestions, and criticisms have been invaluable.

At the Ontario Archives, John Dirks provided valuable support in locating records, reproducing materials, and suggesting additional sources. Yvonne Place, Queen's History Graduate Secretary, offered helpful administrative assistance. Brandon University, Queen's University, and the Ontario Graduate Scholarships program granted generous financial aid. Thanks are also due to Sears Canada for permitting me to reproduce selected graphics contained in the T. Eaton Papers.

Through the course of my studies, I have had the good fortune to work with several exceptional academics. I would particularly like to thank Reinhold Kramer, Tom Mitchell, and Jim Naylor. Their brilliance and enthusiasm have been a constant source of inspiration.

I wish also to extend gratitude toward family and friends. With compassion and understanding, Kyla Madden, Jennifer Marotta, Karyn Taylor, Michael Belisle, David Belisle, and Kathryn Belisle sustained me through difficult and light moments alike. Darren Taylor provided a place to stay during research trips. David Taylor, through his love, support, and sense of humour, helped me believe this project was worthwhile; he also helped me keep it in perspective.

Finally, I wish to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Julia Belisle and Garry Belisle. Without their unwavering encouragement and generous support, this project could never have been undertaken. I offer them my heartfelt thanks.

Donica Belisle
Queen's University
September 2001

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Tables

Figures

INTRODUCTION

Working-Class Consumption and The Case of Eaton's Employees

It is intellectually heroic to want to understand poor consumers.

--Lizabeth Cohen and
Victoria de Grazia, 1999[1]

In contemporary Canada, thousands of workers participate as consumers in the mass market. Whether they purchase clothes to adorn their bodies, furnishings to adorn their homes, vehicles to provide transportation, vacations to provide recreation, or leisure products to support hobbies, Canadian labourers have, it seems, joined the bourgeoisie in celebrating the fruits of the capitalist marketplace. For owners of industries and advertisers of commodities, this joining is an unequivocal economic and cultural victory. Certainly, this victory need not be questioned—unless, of course, it is to conduct research into how to market even more successfully toward workers. For labour historians, however, working-class consumption represents a different and difficult conceptual problem, one that is not easily reconciled with conventional understandings of working-class experience. If, as many labour historians attest, workers' identities are shaped by their position as the labourers who sustain industrialised nations, then how are labour historians to understand the origins and consequences of contemporary workers' consuming interests and activities?

Note: All issues of *Flash* referred to in this introduction are located at the Archives of Ontario, in the T. Eaton Papers (F 229), Series 141, microfilms 6767 through 6770.
Note: All issues of *Unionize* referred to in this introduction are located at the National Archives of Canada, in MG 31 B 31, Vol. 1.
[1] Lizabeth Cohen and Victoria de Grazia, "Introduction" to "Class and Consumption," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 55 (Spring 1999), p. 5.

The obvious place to look for an answer to this question would be into analyses of consumerism written by historians attuned to both the inequalities generated by capitalism and the position of working people within this economic system. Since the field of labour history has existed for over a century and the contemporary field of social history for over three decades, one would expect that a substantial body of work devoted to the relationship between working-class production and working-class consumption would have been produced. Regrettably, such a body of work has not yet materialised. To be sure, there have been some tentative forays into the field of working-class consumption, and these have generated valuable results. Susan Porter Benson has recently begun researching consumption patterns within American working-class families between 1919 and 1940; importantly, she finds that within these families, "sons were seen primarily as producers, daughters primarily as consumers."[2] For the most part, however, the literature that exists on working-class consumption is fractured into and confined within three separate fields within labour and social history: fordism,[3] popular culture,[4] and women's studies.[5]

---

[2] Susan Porter Benson. "Gender, Generation, and Consumption in the United States: Working-Class Families in the Interwar Period." *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Susan Strasser et. al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 240. Also see Benson's "Living on the Margin: Working-Class Marriages and Family Survival Strategies in the United States, 1919-1941," *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, eds. Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 212-243.

[3] Studies of fordism have grown out of Antonio Gramsci's "Americanism and Fordism," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 279-318. See for instance Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1973). In Canada, Bryan D. Palmer addresses fordism, but he also situates fordism in the broader economic and political frameworks of industrial legality and postwar social security: see Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992), pp. 337-339. Importantly, Palmer's analysis of working-class consumption is not strictly confined to fordism: he addresses issues surrounding workers and mass culture on pp. 229-236, 268-272, and 386-392.

[4] The history of popular culture is a large field, but for analyses of popular culture that address issues of working-class consumption see especially Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure*

Although insights generated by scholars within these fields are important, that these insights are scattered across three different avenues of inquiry causes many significant nuances of working-class consumption to become muted. By looking at working-class consumption through the lens of fordism, historians tend to evade non-unionised workers' consuming practices. By taking a popular-culture approach, historians often downplay the profit that capital derives from workers' purchasing of goods related to working-class forms of leisure. By studying women's consumption, historians sometimes minimise the consuming activities of men.[6] Most importantly, by situating analyses of working-class consumption within separate analytical areas, the fundamental historical phenomenon that connects studies of fordism, popular culture, and women's consumption is pushed into the background. This phenomenon is, namely, the

---

in Turn-of-the-Century New York (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours For What We Will: Workers & Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Richard Butsch, ed. *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990). For Canada, see Valerie Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) and Colin D. Howell, *Blood, Sweat, and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 51-82.

[5] The history of working women and consumption is a large field, but for America and Europe, see especially Sue Bowden, "The Techological Revolution That Never Was: Gender, Class, and the Diffusion of Household Appliances in Interwar England," *The Sex of Things*, pp. 244-274; Belinda Davis, "Food Scarcity and the Empowerment of the Female Consumer in World War I Berlin," *The Sex of Things*, pp. 287-310; Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Owl Books, 1999); and Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). For Canada, see Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989), pp. 138-40, 185-8; Cynthia Wright, "'Feminine Trifles of Vast Importance': Writing Gender into the History of Consumption," *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 229-260; Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); and Franca Iacovetta and Valerie Korinek, "Jello Salads, One-Stop Shopping, and Maria the Homemaker: The Gender Politics of Food," *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant Women, Minority Women, and the Racialized Other in Canadian History*, eds. Marlene Epp et. al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming).

[6] Mark A. Swiencicki makes this same point in "Consuming Brotherhood: Men's Culture, Style, and Recreation as Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," *Consumer Culture in American History: A Reader*, ed. Lawrence B. Glickman (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 207-209.

rise of the free market, including the economic aspects of this rise and the specific social and cultural developments that this rise has entailed.

It is a truism to state that the capitalist marketplace is characterised by three spheres of economic activity: production, distribution, and consumption. Among labour historians, it is conventional to situate workers within the sphere of production. Certainly, it is this sphere that generates and defines the material limits of labouring people's lives as well as many of the cultural forms that labouring people create. However, simply because workers' experiences are shaped by the sphere of production, it does not immediately follow that they do not participate in the sphere of consumption. Just as people can be workers, so too can they be consumers. Moreover, in a world organised around the economic structures of advanced capitalism, it is extremely difficult to escape the market's cultural reaches. In fact, the market has so affected contemporary life that its metaphors have even crept into everyday discourse. One undertakes an activity only if it is "worth it" or if it will "pay off," and when one is satisfied with one's activities one may say, "that is time well spent."[7]

Unfortunately, the majority of working-class historians—both inside and outside the subfields of fordism, popular culture, and women's studies—have been reluctant to address the cultural relationship between advanced market capitalism and workers' consuming activities. A review of socialist theory and historiography suggests there are two related reasons for this reluctance. First, there seems to be an ingrained abhorrence among Left thinkers and leaders against any cultural practice that boosts the coffers of industry. Such an abhorrence is more than understandable, especially considering that

contemporary giant multinationals like Wal-Mart and IBM have participated in the orchestration of a grossly inequitable international division of labour.[8] Yet, however unpalatable the effects of mass consumption, historians cannot erase the fact that many workers are also consumers. Choosing not to study working-class consumption is one way of avoiding this historical development, but this choice impoverishes historians' understandings of twentieth-century working-class experience.

A second impediment to historical research into working-class consumption is the sexual division of labour that has characterised the Western capitalist marketplace. With the important exception of Marxist feminists,[9] many Marxist theorists and their proponents have characterised production and producers as public, rational, and masculine. These same thinkers have characterised consumption and consumers as private, irrational, and feminine. In this paradigm, working men have been viewed as the vanguard of socialist and labour movements. As such, Marxist theorists, labour leaders, and historians have prodded and applauded male workers' rational agency and public voices. In contrast, consumer interests and consumption activities have been depicted as private and secondary at best, and as emasculating and degenerating at worst. Leftist discomfort about working-class consumption has been one of the consequences of these depictions.[10]

Obviously, many Leftists' adherence to the sexual division of labour has posed a barrier to successful organising. Thankfully, many social-feminists have revised and are

---

[7] For more on how language is affected by the market, see Margaret Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1999) and Rachel Bowlby, "Soft Sell: Marketing Rhetoric in Feminist Criticism," *The Sex of Things*, pp. 381-388.

[8] Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2000), pp. 196-229.

[9] Histories of Marxist feminists in North America include Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981) and Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*.

continuing to revise many erroneous, sexist assumptions about workers within the capitalist marketplace. But it is not only for the recognition of women workers' class position that historians need to revise Leftist thinking around production and consumption. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is clear that workers have entered on a large scale as consumers into the mass market. It is thus imperative that labour and social historians begin to address the problems surrounding labourers' consuming activities. Specifically, historians need to ask three related questions. What caused workers to enter the world of consumption? What are the social and political consequences of this entry? And what, if any, are the emancipatory possibilities of workers' consuming desires?

In an attempt to answer these questions, this thesis turns its attention toward a little-studied but immensely significant group of people within the Canadian working-class: retail workers. Because they are situated at the apex of the market's cycle, the commodity-exchange, these workers may be referred to as distribution workers. Yet, because they are labourers who sell products to customers, they are also both producers and consumers. In other words, retail labourers' working lives encompass simultaneously the market's three spheres: production, distribution, and consumption. It is this position that makes them historically significant, and it is this thesis's contention that an analysis of their experiences will reveal the cultural manifestations of commodity capitalism. By exploring the reasons causing retail workers to adopt consuming roles, this thesis will provide one conceptual path toward an understanding of how the market infuses and shapes labouring people's identities and actions.

---

[10] In Chapters One and Four, I explore the origins and consequences of this development more fully, but also see de Grazia, "Introduction" to *The Sex of Things*, pp. 11-24 and Enstad, *Ladies of Labor*, pp. 1-16.

In particular, this thesis examines the experiences of employees at the T. Eaton Company in mid-twentieth-century Toronto. The decision to study these employees is strategic for several reasons. Until its bankruptcy in 1999, Eaton's was Canada's largest commodity-distributor for most of the twentieth century. In this position, it attained a massive public stature among Canadians; it also set the standards for retail employment across Canada. As well, Toronto was the site of the T. Eaton Company's Head Offices. Workers in Toronto were therefore the closest of all of Eaton's workers to the company's upper-level managers and their decisions. Moreover, about 60% of Eaton's Toronto labour force during this period were women; therefore, an analysis of Eaton's labourers' consuming activities will draw out the differences and similarities between working women's and working men's consumption. Further, between 1948 and 1952, the Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO), in conjunction with the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL), attempted to organise all 15,000 workers within Eaton's Toronto operations into one industrial union. Though the attempt was unsuccessful, an analysis of the union drive's events provides insight into the relationship between unionisation and consumption. Finally, the immediate postwar years represent the historical period when workers entered, irrevocably it seems, as consumers into the mass market.[11] By studying the circumstances surrounding Eaton's workers' participation in consuming activities during this time, new understandings of the circumstances surrounding working-class consumption will be gained.

Retail workers, like most non-unionised workers, have been studied less than have labourers in unionised industries. However, accompanying the rapid growth of the white-collar labour force in the past fifty years, the percentage of the Canadian labour

---

[11] Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, pp. 268-272.

force in the Canadian retail sector has expanded. At the same time, the percentages of workers in primary and secondary industries have respectively declined and stabilised. According to sociologist Peter S. Li, in 1951 14.1% of the Canadian labour force was employed in the retail and wholesale trade, while 15.6% were employed in agriculture and 24.8% were employed in manufacturing. In contrast, in 1991, 16.9% of workers were in retail and wholesale, 3.6% were employed in agriculture, and 14.4% were employed in manufacturing. Although the retail and wholesale trade did not experience such a rapid increase as did other white-collar industries—especially education, health, and service work—this retail and wholesale increase is nevertheless one spinoff of the larger postwar shift from "entrepreneurial capitalism to corporate capitalism," as Li points out.[12] Therefore, a study of Eaton's employees' relationships with consumption and organising at mid-century will not only provide insights into working-class consumption, it will also provide broader insights into the history of the postwar workforce.

Despite the paucity of historical studies about retail workers, this thesis is not the first attempt by an historian to study such workers.[13] Nor is it even the first effort to

---

[12] Peter S. Li, *The Making of Post-War Canada* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 45-51. In 1941, waged clerical, sales, and service workers comprised 22.9% of the Canadian labour force. In 1991, they comprised 42.5%. See Li, p. 48.

[13] Most histories of retail workers focus on department-store workers, and this thesis is no exception. This focus is likely due to the fact that there have been vast amounts of archival records generated by department stores throughout the industrialised world, and now that many department stores are closing, historians are gaining access to these records. More historical studies of retail workers in other environments are urgently required, however, especially now that employment in chains located in malls, food outlets, and box stores is rapidly replacing employment in department stores. Histories of department-store workers include Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1995), pp. 125-159; Christopher Hosgood, "'Mercantile Monasteries': Shops, Shop Assistants, and Shop Life in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain," *Journal of British Studies*, 38 (July 1999), pp. 322-352; Theresa McBride, "'A woman's world: department stores and the evolution of women's employment, 1870-1920" *French Historical Studies*, 10 (Fall 1978), pp. 664-683; Mary Catherine Matthews, "Working for

study Eaton's workers' experiences in Toronto.[14] It is, however, the first attempt to articulate the connections among retail workers' class experience, their construction of consuming personas, and the effects their consuming activities had on formal organising. This thesis therefore draws from insights generated by other retail-labour historians—and this drawing is noted in the relevant sections of the chapters that follow—but it also reaches into secondary sources hitherto not utilised by retail historians.

Specifically, it turns toward ideas about commodity culture generated by Marxist and feminist critical theorists, especially Karl Marx, Georg Lukács, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Wolfgang Fritz Haug, Anne McClintock, and Abigail Solomon-

---

Family, Nation, and God: Paternalism and the Dupuis Frères Department Store, 1926-1952," (MA Thesis, Department of History, McGill University, 1997). In *Store Wars: Shopkeepers and the Culture of Mass Marketing, 1890-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), David Monod briefly discusses the feminisation of department-store saleswork in Canada: see pp. 113-5. Studies of personnel management in department stores include Gail Reekie, "'Humanising Industry': Paternalism, Welfarism, and Labour Control in Sydney's Big Stores, 1890-1930," *Labour History*, 53 (Nov 1987), pp. 1-19 and Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 77-121, 143-164, 215-230. Alison Howell has looked at non-department-store retail employment in "Retail Unionisation: An Historical Approach to the Suzy Shier Case," (Undergraduate Honours Thesis, Department of History, Trent University, 2000). For an entertaining and original approach to female salesworkers, see Helene M. Lawson, *Ladies on the Lot: Women, Car Sales, and the Pursuit of the American Dream* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000).

[14] Joy L. Santink's *Timothy Eaton and the Rise of His Department Store* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), as Cynthia Wright points out, is "squarely within the business history tradition," and Santink's chapter on Eaton's employees is no exception: see Santink, *Timothy Eaton and the Rise*, pp. 182-203 and Wright, "The Most Prominent Rendezvous of the Feminine Toronto: Eaton's College Street and the Organization of Shopping in Toronto, 1920-1950," (PhD Thesis, Graduate Department of Education, University of Toronto, 1992), p. 7. Santink asserts on p. 190, for instance, that "The paternalistic world governed and directed by Timothy Eaton and, one suspects, most of his contemporaries was one that was accepted by the majority of unskilled female workers, *who were only too happy to obtain paid employment* in an environment that was both pleasant and superior in quality to that of either domestic or factory work [emphasis added]." More analytical investigations are contained in Ruth Frager, "Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Eaton Strikes of 1912 and 1934," *Gender Conflicts*, pp. 189-228; Bradley Pragnell, "Organizing Department Store Workers: The Case of the RWDSU at Eaton's, 1983-1987," (Queen's University: Industrial Relations Centre, 1989); Eileen Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive: The Campaign to Organize Canada's Largest Department Store, 1948-1952*, (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1982); and Sandra Aylward, "Experiencing Patriarchy: Women, Work, and Trade Unionism at Eaton's," (PhD Thesis, Department of Sociology, McMaster University, 1991). In "The Most Prominent Rendezvous," Wright argues that since Eaton's hired predominantly white Anglo-Saxon Protestants to staff its selling floors, it was attempting to "Canadianize" both its labour force and its customers: see pp. 208-212. Finally, in "The Influence of the Social Reform Movement and T. Eaton Company's Business Practices on the Leisure of Eaton's Female Employees During the Early Twentieth Century," (PhD Thesis, Department of Kinesiology,

Godeau.[15] Though these scholars diverge in important ways, they share the assumption that "commodity-*structure*," as Lukács puts it, "is the central structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects."[16] That is, in a market economy predicated on the commodity exchange, identities and activities within that economy become organised around the three-fold market process: production, exchange, and consumption.

Crucially, however, this thesis diverges from these theorists on one key point: it does not attempt to use their arguments to try and explain the reasons why workers enter the mass market. With the exception of Marx himself, commodification theorists have made some extremely disempowering statements about why workers consume.[17] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer have asserted, for instance, that the "masses" purchase commodities because they are duped by capital into doing so.[18] To avoid making such brash and erroneous claims, this thesis uses arguments derived from commodification theorists *only* in order to demonstrate how the T. Eaton Company

---

University of Western Ontario, 1998). Susan L. Forbes shows how the moral purity movement affected Eaton's treatment of its women workers.

[15]Karl Marx, "Capital, Volume One," trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. Ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 294-438. "The *Grundisse*," Martin Nicolaus, trans. *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 221-293; "The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," trans. Martin Milligan, *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 66-125; Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971); Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 1976), pp. 120-167; Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality, and Advertising in Capitalist Society*, trans. Robert Bock (London: Polity Press, 1971); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Other Side of Venus: The Visual Economy of Feminine Display," *The Sex of Things*, pp. 113-150.

[16] Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of," p. 83. Emphasis in original.

[17] Marx seems to recognise the liberating possibilities of consumption, even if he does not fully articulate these possibilities. On pp. 95-6 of the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," for instance, he writes:

> [P]olitical economy—despite its worldly and wanton appearance, is a true moral science, the most moral of all the sciences. The less you eat, drink and read books; the less you go the theatre, the dance hall, the public-house; the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you *save*—the *greater* becomes your treasure which neither moths nor dust will devour—your *capital* [Emphasis in original].

[18] Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," pp. 139, 133.

shaped the commodified structures of its workers' lives. From there, it argues that Eaton's workers developed their own unique consumer personas for reasons born in their specific economic and cultural experiences at the department store.

There is thus a fundamental distinction between this thesis's understanding of commodification and those articulated by critical theorists. Namely, while critical theorists view working-class consumption as an indication that they have been tricked into doing so, this thesis contends that Eaton's workers participated in commodity culture for their own reasons and sometimes on their own terms. The importance of this argumentative nuance cannot be overstated. From the perspective of critical theory, workers have no agency, and their consuming activities have no emancipatory possibilities or points of class struggle around which they can rally. From this thesis's perspective, workers do have some agency in the consumer marketplace; moreover, their consuming personas and activities carry some potentially liberating—if contradictory—promises.

To further draw out the strengths and weaknesses of the commodification tradition, Chapter One undertakes a detailed review of its leading proponents. In doing so, it provides the background necessary for an understanding of one of this thesis's main arguments: that the T. Eaton Company treated its workers as both commodities and consumers. Moving from the theoretical into the historical realm, Chapter Two analyses documents contained in the T. Eaton Company's archival collection—including sales training manuals, company magazines, customer letters, secret shoppers' reports, and internal managerial correspondence—in order to demonstrate that Eaton's managers and customers commodified Eaton's employees' bodies, identities, and experiences.

Chapter Three also analyses the department-store's archival records, but from a different perspective: that of social history. It argues that while Eaton's may have been campaigning to turn its workers into, one, advertisements for the company, and two, consumers of the company's commodities, Eaton's workers responded to these commodifying efforts by constructing consumerist and performative personas. These personas allowed them not only to navigate managers' and customers' commodifying demands, but also to express pride in their identities as skilled retail labourers.

In Chapter Four, this thesis explores the relationship between unionisation and consumerism. Particularly, it examines the efforts made by the CIO's and the CCL's organisers to appeal to workers' consuming interests. It argues that although union organisers did recognise workers' consumer yearnings, they blunted the radical nature of these yearnings by couching consumption in terms that supported the sexual division of labour and the insularity of the nuclear family. Although this couching may have induced married male workers to join the union, it denied the existence of the working-class identities constructed by thousands of youths, women, and single men employed at Eaton's.

In the conclusion, this thesis gathers together the various arguments and findings presented in its chapters. It also reflects on the problems and possibilities contained in Eaton's Toronto employees' participation in the world of commodity culture. Finally, it points toward further directions that historians may take to reach a sensitive and nuanced understanding of working-class consumption.

To draw out the historical context surrounding Eaton's employees' development of their consuming personas and activities, it is useful to undertake a brief description of the

T. Eaton Company, its customers, and its workers in mid-twentieth-century Toronto. In fact, the 1940s and early 1950s represented the summit of Eaton's commercial success. In the latter half of the fifties, and for several different reasons, Eaton's began to experience a downward economic spiral that culminated in its bankruptcy in 1999.[19] However, before this spiral began, the company's stature was immense among Canadians. Self-described as the "largest retail organization in the British Empire," Eaton's garnered around $500,000,000 in sales a year and accounted for almost 60% of the total amount of department-store business in the country.[20] Stretching across Canada from St. John's to Victoria, Eaton's operated four large department stores in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Montreal; it also maintained 48 smaller stores in cities in every Canadian province. An integral component of its operations was its mail order: Eaton's churned out 6,000,000 catalogues a year, from which it generated $300,000,000 in sales annually. A corporation whose customers ranged from "prairie farmer and Maritime fisherman, to village housewife and big-city hostess," at mid-century, Eaton's truly was, as its public-relations experts often attested, "Canada's Greatest Store."

As in the broader Canadian economy, the centre of Eaton's economic and decision-making power rested in Toronto. In 1869, Irish immigrant Timothy Eaton bought a dry-goods shop on the corner of Yonge and Queen Streets. An astute entrepreneur, he garnered enough capital to expand his operations steadily throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. In 1891, the T. Eaton Company was incorporated,

---

[19] These reasons include suburbanisation, market segmentation, Canadians' rejection of British nationalism, Canadians' antipathies to paternalism, women's increasing involvement in the workforce, the Eaton family's unwillingness to relinquish control of the organisation, the Eaton family's unwillingness to adopt new retailing practices, and competition from both shopping malls and Sears, Roebuck, and Company.

[20] *Eaton's of Canada: the story of the largest retail organization in the British Empire including a digest of useful information about the Canadian Market* (Toronto: T. Eaton Company, c. 1952], p. 2, F 229, Series 69, Box 8, File: [1947-mid-60s], Archives of Ontario [hereafter AO]; Bosworth, p. 62.

with the Eaton family retaining control of half its shares. Throughout the store's 130 years of existence, the Eaton family remained at the helm of the enterprise, with only two non-Eatons ever gaining Presidency. During the period under study, there were two Eaton Presidents: Robert Young Eaton, Timothy's nephew (1922-1942), and John David Eaton, Timothy's grandson (1942-1969).[21]

Even though the store's operations expanded across Canada, Toronto remained the corporation's headquarters. For the firm's first 80 years, the Main Stores in Winnipeg, Montreal, and Halifax all put out their own catalogues, bought their own merchandise, and initiated their own policies, but Toronto was where the Company's Directors and the Eaton family were located. It was also, therefore, the site of the firm's General Offices. These Offices had the power to veto all decisions made in the company's branches, and they also set the pace and tone of most of the company's buying, merchandising, and personnel directives. Moreover, beginning in the early fifties, Eaton's management began to undergo a major centralisation that saw Toronto grow in administrative control.

As is perhaps fitting for the site of the company's headquarters, the scope of Eaton's operations in Toronto was larger than in any other location. Between 1940 and 1952, the company operated three department stores, a factory, and a mail order building in the downtown area. The Main Store, built in 1882, constituted one city block; its walls faced Yonge, Albert, James and Queen Streets. As the company's primary flagship store, the Main Store sold commodities ranging from "hats to hardware, provisions to prams."[22] It also boasted several restaurants, a hairdressing salon, a Wedding Bureau, a Fashion Bureau, an automotive repair shop, a shopping service, an optometry outlet, and

---

[21] McQueen, *The Eatons*, frontispiece and pp. 17, 167-202.
[22] *Eaton's of Canada*, p. 2.

Toyland—Canada's largest toy department and home of Eaton's Santa Claus every Christmas.

While the Main Store catered broadly toward the petit bourgeoisie and the upper ranks of the working class, the Annex and the College Street Store were more class-specific in their target consumer groups. The Annex, also called the "Lower-Priced Store," was the smallest of the three stores; it was located directly adjacent to the Main Store. Aimed primarily at low-income rural customers and Toronto's working class, the Annex offered many of the same types of commodities, only in cheaper varieties, as did the Main Store. However, displays were less elaborate and customer-service expectations were less extensive.

The College Street Store, as Cynthia Wright has shown in her doctoral dissertation about gender, ethnicity, and shopping at Eaton's between 1920 and 1950, was the most upscale of Toronto's Eaton's stores.[23] Described in *Eaton's of Canada* as one "of the mercantile beauty spots of the North American continent," College Street still stands today, though it was sold by Eaton's in 1977. Made of grey Manitoba limestone and designed in "a blend of classic and modern forms," the former College Street Store was opened in 1930 and is located on the city block bordered by Yonge, College, Bay, and Hayter Streets. When it was open, it was devoted almost entirely to home furnishings, boasting an Interior Decorating Service and a model house that featured fashions in home decorating. The store also contained a few exclusive "Specialty Shops for smart wearables for Men, Women and Children," a Fine Art Gallery, a fashionable restaurant entitled the Round Room, and a Piano Shop.[24] Crowning Eaton's attempts to make

---

[23] Wright, "The Most Prominent Rendezvous."
[24] *Eaton's of Canada*, p. 10.

College Street the cultural centre of Toronto's bourgeoisie was its Auditorium. Almost weekly, concerts, recitals, and performances were on display in the Auditorium; the site was also home to the many fashion shows Eaton's sponsored.

Thus, the T. Eaton Company marketed toward a broad social spectrum. Yet, who were the people who actually patronised Eaton's stores? Evidence from the company's market research files dating from the immediate postwar years suggests that the typical Eaton's Toronto customer was a Canadian-born, full-time housewife aged between 20 and 40 whose husband was either a skilled blue-collar labourer, a businessperson, or a professional.[25] Nevertheless, as Cynthia Wright points out, it is important to note that not all of Eaton's in-store Toronto customers were wealthy, Canadian-born, or female.[26] The General Merchandise Office of College Street preserved two sets of documents that demonstrate the heterogeneous mix of shoppers at Eaton's. The first, a file entitled "New Canadians Committee, 1952-57," was devoted to how to market toward immigrants. Though this file contains little information about the actual customers themselves, there is evidence that at least one group of immigrants, people from Germany, shopped at the store in substantial numbers.[27] The second group of documents are two boxes of complaint letters written to the College Street Store in the forties and fifties. While most of these letters were written by married women with Anglophone last names, a quick leafing through the contents of these complaint letters does reveal that single and married

---

[25] "Report of Study of Shopping Habits of Toronto Housewives," May 1946, F 229, Series 163, Box 16, File 03/10-Consumer Surveys, AO; "Changes in Retail Distribution Metropolitan Toronto, 1949-1957," F 229, 165, Box 1, File 4.1-City Surveys, AO.

[26] "The Most Prominent Rendezvous," pp. 195-224.

[27] Black Folder entitled "Interpreters, including correspondence re advertising in foreign language newspapers," F 229, Series 69, Box 27, File: New Canadians Committee, 1952-57, AO. Wright also refers to this file: see "The Most Prominent Rendezvous," pp. 213-5.

women and men of both classes shopped at College Street.[28] In her doctoral thesis, Wright admirably examines the gendered, racial, and ethnic composition of Eaton's shoppers, and historians looking for more information on the effects this composition had on Eaton's policies toward non-British and non-Canadian shoppers are urged to consult her work.[29]

To produce and distribute the goods and services that the T. Eaton Company offered its shoppers, the firm employed 40,000 workers throughout the year, and 60,000 at Christmas time.[30] In keeping with Eaton's large scope of its Toronto operations, about one third of these employees were situated in the city. Between 1940 and 1953, the T. Eaton Company employed an annual average of 13,418 permanent full-time and part-time Toronto personnel. Eaton's also employed yearly anywhere between 1,500 and 2,500 casual workers; these worked on Saturdays and during other busy periods. During the annual Christmas Rush, the number of Eaton's Toronto employees increased by as much as 3,675, as it did in 1941. As their title suggests, Christmas employees were seasonal workers, and the vast majority of them were fired before the New Year. During the last two weeks of December in 1948, for instance, 2,540 workers were let go. If one considers the regular, reserve, and Christmas employees together, the average annual total of Eaton's workforce between the years 1940 and 1953 was 18,199 workers.[31]

Eaton's personnel hierarchy between 1940 and 1955 was extremely complex. At the top of the hierarchy, of course, was the Board of Directors. Dominated by the Eatons

---

[28] F 229, Series 69, Boxes 16 and 17. See especially Audrey E. Dennis to Mr. Ivor Lewis, 1 Nov 1947 and T.A.C. Tyrell to John David Eaton, Esquire, 26 Feb 1947, both in F 229, Series 69, Box 16, File: Complaints (Actual), 1943-1948, AO.
[29] Wright, "The Most Prominent Rendezvous," pp. 195-224.
[30] *Eaton's of Canada*, p. 2.
[31] See Tables 1, 3, and 4 in the Appendix.

and close associates, the Board of Directors determined the general direction of the company. After the Board were the Supervisors: in charge of several departments at a time, these people liaised between the Board and other managers; they also introduced new policy directives. From there, occupations specialised rapidly. The Group Managers made most of the major decisions pertinent to the several departments in which they were in charge. Under the Group Managers were the Department Heads: they oversaw generally only one or two departments at a time and their tasks were focused on the day-to-day operations of their charges. The last managerial group, the First Assistants, acted as aids to the Heads; they were employed only in one department at a time.[32]

Finally, at least from the perspective of the executive offices, at the bottom of Eaton's employment ladder were the non-managerial employees. Fortunately, it is possible to arrive at an understanding of the composition of this labour force, for the T. Eaton Company's Wages Office kept detailed statistical information on its employees between 1939 and 1953.[33] Unfortunately, these records are somewhat misleading, as the statistics include both managerial and non-managerial personnel. Despite this mixture, though, the statistics are still valuable, for with the exception of office-related occupations, the numbers of workers within Eaton's various occupational groups far outweighed those of the company's managers. One particular selling department, for

---

[32] I have arrived at my understanding of Eaton's managerial structure by studying the numerous "signature books," or books containing lists of managers authorized to sign various forms, that appeared annually throughout the war and postwar years. They are contained in F 229, Series 59, Box 4, File 34, AO. A detailed reading of *Flash* also helped me to sort out Eaton's personnel hierarchy.

[33] [Statistics Notebook], c. 1910s-50s, F 229, Series 181, Box 1, AO. This meticulate record-keeping was due, no doubt, to the several labour-related crises affecting the firm during the period, including the loss of 2000 employees to the Active Services, the increased numbers of older employees and married women entering Eaton's workforce during the war years, the postwar reintegration of returning veterans, the Cold War, and the union drive of 1948 to 1952.

instance, could hold a staff of between three and 15 workers and contain only one manager.

According to the Wages Office, the largest group of employees at Eaton's were those who toiled in the company's numerous offices; the company referred to these employees as "Expense" staff. Expense departments were comprised not only of secretaries but also of upper-, middle-, and lower-level managers. After Expense, the second largest group of Toronto's Eaton's workers were in Sales—that is, they staffed the three stores' selling departments. Together, Expense and Sales employees constituted around 60% of Eaton's workers during the 1940s and 1950s.

Besides salesworkers, there were two other occupational groups in Eaton's three department stores, and these groups comprised an average of 16% of the company's total regular Toronto workforce. The first, whose members were referred to as "Sales Expense" by Eaton's, worked in the stores but did not staff the selling departments; they were elevator operators, delivery-truck drivers, floorwalkers, fashion and beauty experts, hairdressers, wedding planners, personal-service shoppers, courtesy-desk workers, gift-wrappers, and waitresses. The second non-selling Store group were those who toiled in what the firm referred to as "Store Workrooms." The occupations of these employees were diverse, and included food preparing, cooking, shoe repairing, caretaking, organ- and piano-tuning, painting, and making eyeglasses.

The factory employed an annual average of 15% of Eaton's Toronto labour force. Factory workers were divided into two main groups: those who worked in factory proper and those who worked in factory workrooms. In the factory proper, workers toiled at machines and produced some of Eaton's lower-priced garments, including ties,

handkerchiefs, and "budget-priced" clothes. Located in the factory workrooms were craftspeople; they produced goods ranging from furniture to saddles. Finally, the Mail Order Building housed an average of 13% of the firm's workforce in Toronto. "Mail Order Merchandise" employees packaged the catalogue orders and performed warehousing tasks, and "Mail Order Expense" staff performed clerical work like answering customers' letters and compiling invoices.

Throughout the period of study, women constituted the majority of Eaton's total regular labourers. In 1939, they comprised 55% of Eaton's staff; at the height of the war, in 1944, they comprised 67%; by 1951, their numbers had declined to 58%. In terms of occupational affiliations, women figured highest in Sales. In 1939, they constituted 76% of all Sales employees. This figure rose to 83% during the war, but leveled off at 77% in 1953. Other occupational groups that saw women in numbers over 50% were, in descending order, Mail Order Expense, Mail Order Merchandise, Factory pieceworkers, and Sales Expense. Unsurprisingly, women figured least in occupations traditionally typed as "masculine," including management and craft production.

All workers at Eaton's during the forties and fifties earned consistently less than did their unionised counterparts in both the white- and blue-collar sectors. According to Eileen Sufrin, "Eaton's wage policy ... varied with employees' age, sex and marital status. In 1947, it was customary for women to start at $20 a week. Boys were hired for less, and single men for $24 to $26 a week. Married men started in the range of $28 to $32."[34] Through the course of the union drive, organisers pressured Eaton's to increase wages by pointing to rises in the cost-of-living index and comparing Eaton's salaries to those paid

[34] Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, p. 56.

in unionised industries.[35] Such pressure had an effect on Eaton's personnel managers, and between 1948 and 1951, the company instituted seven Toronto-wide pay raises.[36] Nevertheless, Eaton's wages continued to lag behind their unionised counterparts. In 1951, the union's weekly broadside published the pay slip of a woman "employed in the sewing department of Swift Canadian, and a member of Local 208, United Packinghouse Workers, and compared it with that of a Main Store salesclerk at Eaton's." After deductions, "the salesclerk's take-home pay for two weeks was ... about $10 a week less, for five hours' more work."[37]

Sufrin has noted that Eaton's workers' wages depended on their gender, age, and marital status. Documents from Eaton's College Street Store's personnel office further reveal that employees' payscales also depended on their occupation. In 1947, a report was compiled by this office that illustrates Eaton's entry-level pay policies. According to this report, summarised here in Tables 1 and 2, manual labourers (except for Night Caretakers) were paid less than were white-collar labourers, even though entry-level single salesmen under 25 years of age did earn the same wages as did entry-level blue-collar workers under 25. Since most salesmen at College Street earned commissions, however, this apparent equity was offset by salesmen's extra earnings.

On the whole, adult females 19 years and older earned less than did men, thus suggesting that Eaton's constantly and purposely undervalued women's labour. Significantly, Eaton's did not classify women's payscales according to marital status, although it did perform this classification for men. This discrepancy in classification, combined with the further fact that both female and male youth received the lowest

---

[35] Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, p. 163.
[36] Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, p. 221.

OCCUPATION AND AGE (WOMEN)	ENTRY-LEVEL WEEKLY WAGE
16-18 Years Old Inspectors and Messengers	$19
All Ages Sales (Commissions)	$20
All Ages Sales (Non-Commissions)	$22
All Ages Elevator Operators	$20
All Ages Manual Workers	$20
All Ages Office Help and Cashiers	$21

Table 2: Entry Wages of College Street Female Employees, 1947 [Source: "Female Help." 1947. F 229. Series 69. Box 45. File: 1943-1956 Wages. AO.]

OCCUPATION, AGE, AND MARITAL STATUS (MEN)	ENTRY-LEVEL WEEKLY WAGE
Single 16-19 Years Old Inspectors, Messengers, Stockroom Help, Carriers, Despatch	$20
Single 20-25 Years Old Office, Sales and Manual Workers	$24
Married or over 25 Years Old Office and Sales	$32
Married or over 25 Years Old Manual Workers (Excluding Night Caretakers and Watchmen)	$30
Married or over 25 Years Old Night Caretakers	$32
Married or over 25 Years Old Watchmen	$34

Table 1: Entry Wages of College Street Male Employees, 1947 [Source: "Male Help." 1947. F 229. Series 69. Box 45. File: 1943-1956 Wages. AO.]

wages at Eaton's, reflects the company's ideological dependence on the structure of the bourgeois family. As numerous historians have demonstrated, the bourgeois familial ideal depicts wives and children as economically dependent on breadwinning husbands.[38] Hence, women's and youths' lower pay rates were justified by Eaton's contention that they did not depend on Eaton's wages for economic survival. Since Eaton's managers were well-aware that several of Eaton's female employees were self-supporting (the firm employed 665 widows in 1949[39]), they must have realised that the bourgeois ideal did not necessarily apply to working-class reality. Rather, it is apparent that Eaton's profit-motive caused it to depend on bourgeois domestic norms in order to justify women's and youth's low wages.

---

[37] Sufrin. *The Eaton Drive*, p. 176.
[38] See for instance Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall. *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1987).
[39] [Statistics Notebook], c. 1910s-50s.

Eaton's reach toward profit also caused it to reduce labour costs at every opportunity. This reductive drive is certainly unsurprising, since the purpose of every business is to generate surplus-value. However, the organisational structure of the T. Eaton Company put special emphasis on wage-cost reduction. At Eaton's, every department was operated as a kind of "fiefdom," as Rod McQueen puts it, in which the Department Heads and First Assistants kept their own books, chose and displayed their own merchandise, and managed their own staff.[40] Importantly, both the occupational mobility and the Christmas bonus of the Department Heads and First Assistants depended on how much profit they brought in for the company. Predictably, these practices caused department managers to attempt constantly to reduce the department's expenses—especially those of labour.[41] Managers' methods of reducing payroll included employing large numbers of women and youth, pressuring higher-paid older workers to quit, increasing the responsibilities of experienced workers without increasing their pay, laying off and firing workers during slack periods, forcing workers to take unpaid vacations, maintaining large reserves of mostly female part-time and casual staff who could be called in when necessary and sent home when no longer needed, and not paying overtime wages.[42]

Eaton's drive to constantly reduce labour costs caused Eaton's employees' jobs to be perpetually insecure. Between 1948 and 1952 hundreds of workers were pressured to quit or were fired for no reason other than that they were becoming too expensive to

---

[40] McQueen, *The Eatons*, p. 17.
[41] Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, p. 29.
[42] H. J. Vallery to G. G. Gringer, 12 August 1954, p. 2, F 229, Series 69, Box 45, File: 1948-1954, AO: *Unionize*, all items.

employ.[43] The widespread practice of favouritism among managers further increased workers' job instability, since managers retained only those workers they liked.[44] A final factor contributing to job insecurity at Eaton's was the firm's commitment to the Reinstatement in Civil Employment Act of 1942, which stipulated that "discharged veterans were legally entitled to return to the jobs they had held prior to their enlistment in the armed forces."[45] In 1945, Company Executives articulated the firm's policy toward reinstatement, stating that:

> In certain cases, the reinstatement of the returned man may involve a consideration of the transfer, demotion, or retirement of those employees who have been holding the position during the war.
> While every effort is to be made to place those displaced by a returning employee, it should be recognized [that] the first claim is that of the man who left his job to enlist for active duty.[46]

Since 1397 servicemen and 87 servicewomen returned to Eaton's after the war,[47] the rate of "displacement" must have been fairly high.

Thus, although they worked for Canada's largest and richest department store, the majority of Eaton's non-managerial employees earned low salaries and lived with the knowledge that their jobs were insecure. Their experiences were further structured by a sexual division of labour that saw youths, women, and single men receive less pay than married men. These stringent material circumstances would seem to suggest that many of Eaton's employees would not be able to participate in the world of mass consumption. Nonetheless, a review of the T. Eaton Company's and the CIO-CCL's archival records

---

[43] Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, p. 75.
[44] Local 1000 criticised this practice on numerous occasions. See for instance "Forelady Discriminates—Forces Curtain Workroom Employee to Quit Job." *Unionize*, 1 (27 July 1948), pp. 1-2.
[45] Michael D. Stevenson, "National Selective Service and Employment and Seniority Rights for Veterans, 1943-1946," *The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada*, eds. Peter Neary and J.L. Granatstein (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), p. 96.
[46] Irving W. Ford to H. F. Switzer, 3 Jan 1945, p. 5, F 229, Series 61, Box 59, AO.
[47] "Eaton's in Wartime, 1939-1949," F 229, Series 8, Box 13, File 327, AO.

suggests that thousands of Eaton's workers considered themselves to be not only labourers, but also consumers. It is the purpose of the rest of this thesis to explain how and why this development occurred, as well as what consequences this development entailed. In the process, it demonstrates that although working-class consumption is wrought with contradiction, many workers' consuming interests are born in class experience.

CHAPTER 1

From Marx to McClintock: the Commodification Tradition

> [In political economy,] the worker sinks to the level of a commodity, and indeed becomes the most wretched of commodities.
>
> --Karl Marx, 1844[1]

> Every man is a package of human merchandise.
>
> --Eaton's Staff Magazine, 1946[2]

Most contemporary cultural theorists and social historians who study mass consumption reject Marxist theories of commodification. Pointing especially to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's 1944 essay, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," they assert that commodification theory belittles workers' tastes, minimises workers' identities, and, most repugnantly, ignores workers' agency.[3] In many ways, these assertions are valid: Adorno and Horkheimer's treatment of workers' participation in mass culture is profoundly insensitive. Calling those who partake of mass culture "slow-witted" members of the "deceived masses," Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the cultural industry creates "too much satiation and too much apathy."[4] In an attempt to counter the Frankfurt School's pessimistic depiction of mass culture and to

---

[1] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," trans. Martin Milligan, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), p. 70.
[2] "Men Come in Packages, Too," *Flash*, 30 December 1946, p. 7, MS 6767, Series 141, T. Eaton Papers (hereafter F 229), Archives of Ontario (hereafter AO).
[3] Mica Nava, "Consumerism Reconsidered: Buying and Power," *Cultural Studies*, 5 (May 1991), pp. 164-5; John Clarke, "Pessimism Versus Populism: The Problematic Politics of Popular Culture," *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*, ed. Richard Butsch (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990, pp. 34-6; Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *The Jameson Reader*, ed. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), pp. 123-4; Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 1976), pp. 120-167.
[4] Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," pp. 139, 133, 144, 162.

understand the actions of those who participate as consumers in the mass market, many cultural and social theorists and historians focus not on deception but on participants' identities and experiences. Workers' motivations for consuming are now beginning to be understood, and the political gains of collective consumerist actions are becoming recognised as important achievements.[5]

Nevertheless, this thesis contends that cultural theorists and social historians have dismissed theories of commodification too hastily. In fact, when commodification is utilised as a method of understanding mass retailers' actions, it generates far-reaching insights into the specific forms that free-market commodity- and service-distribution take. Such insights are, upon reflection, not surprising: mass retailers—whether they are selling goods, services, culture, or all three—are in business to create profit, and their seeking of capital renders them susceptible to Marxist critiques. By applying the notion of commodification not to consumers but to capitalists, in fact, it becomes apparent that

---

[5] Influential theorists who focus on consumers' agency include John Fiske. *Reading the Popular* (Boston: Unwin and Hyman, 1989) and *Understanding Popular Culture* (London: Rutledge, 1989), and Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular," *People's History and Socialist Theory* ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 227-240. Prominent American historians who study consumers' identities and actions are Lizabeth Cohen. *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Consumption in Postwar America* (forthcoming); Kathy Peiss. *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Owl Books, 1999); Nan Enstad. *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1919-1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). See also the articles included in *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, ed. Lawrence B. Glickman (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1999); *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Susan Strasser et. al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Victoria de Grazia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). For Canada, refer to Valerie Korinek. *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000); Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, Moral, and Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); and Cynthia Wright, "'Feminine Trifles of Vast Importance': Writing Gender into the History of Consumption," *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 229-260.

what Georg Lukács refers to as the "commodity-structure" is central to retailers' regulation of the mass-distribution industry.[6]

A review of the T. Eaton Company's archival records illustrates that Eaton's managers regularly commodified the bodies, identities, and experiences of the firm's employees. Moreover, this commodification was a major determinant of Eaton's workers' class experience. To illustrate the extent to which workers were affected by commodification, therefore, the next chapter of this thesis depicts how commodification played out at Eaton's in mid-twentieth-century Toronto. This chapter, however, first presents an analytical overview of commodification theory. Specifically, it focuses on the work of seven of the most insightful contributors to the commodification field—Karl Marx, Georg Lukács, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Wolfgang Fritz Haug, Anne McClintock, and Abigail Solomon-Godeau—in order to demonstrate that while commodification analyses are not without problems, they do provide the best theoretical model with which to understand not only the ways in which agents of capital imagine their workers and customers, but also how they endeavour to profit from their workers' and customers' labouring and spending power.

The commodification tradition, like most sustained critiques of capitalism, originates with the work of Karl Marx. As the tradition grew through the twentieth century, its adherents merged Marx's ideas with those of other prominent thinkers, including Max Weber, Sigmund Freud, and Laura Mulvey. Nonetheless, and due perhaps to the strength of his insights, Marx's observations about the operation of the free market remain the most influential, and this chapter therefore begins with an exploration of his

---

[6]Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1968), p. 83.

thoughts about commodities and commodification. From there, it investigates critically the writings of other commodification theorists, including Georg Lukács, Adorno and Horkheimer, Wolfgang Fritz Haug, and two contemporary American scholars: Anne McClintock and Abigail Solomon-Godeau. While specific problems emerge from these academics' diverse works—especially the misrepresentation of working consumers' participation in the free market and the male theorists' inattention to gender—the commodification tradition remains the best approach toward an understanding of why retailers, in both their employing and distributing guises, treat consuming workers in objectified and denigrating manners.

Not only did Marx believe that "the commodity" is "the economic cell-form" of "bourgeois society," but in his writings he demonstrates repeatedly that the existence of the commodity affects significantly social relations in capitalist economies.[7] It is in the first chapter of *Capital*, however, where he put forth his most encompassing critique of the phenomenon. Defining commodities as goods whose values are measured through the process of exchange, Marx distinguishes commodities from what he refers to as "use-values," or goods whose values are measured by considering individual goods' use-potential. Though labour-power produces both use-value and exchange-value, the labour-power contained within use-values is measured qualitatively while the labour-power contained within exchange-values is measured quantitatively. In other words, when one considers labour in relation to usage, one considers labour a qualitative activity: the integrated act of tailoring produces a coat. In contrast, when one considers

---

[7] Karl Marx, "Preface to the First German Edition," in "Capital. Volume One," trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling and ed. Friedrich Engels, *Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 295; "Capital," pp. 302-329. See also "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," pp. 70-105 and "Theories of Surplus Value," especially Chapter

labour in relation to exchange-value, one considers labour a quantitative activity: two hours of weaving produces a bolt of linen but four days of trimming and fitting produces a coat; therefore, the coat's value is higher than the bolt of linen's. For Marx, then, a commodity is an object whose value is determined through the exchange-process; in turn, the exchange-process consists of comparing the quantified and abstract labour-power contained within one object with that of another.[8]

The characteristics of exchange-value and abstract labour-power contribute to one of the most influential concepts presented in *Capital*: commodity fetishism. In an effort to explain what he refers to as "the enigmatical character of the product of labour," Marx demonstrates that when humans ponder the attributes of commodities, in their minds commodities' embodiment of exchange-value displaces commodities' embodiment of labour-power.[9] In other words, the "Fetishism of commodities" is the naturalisation of value.[10] This naturalisation occurs in economies predicated on the commodity-exchange because in these economies, value is manifested only at the point of exchange; therefore, an individual's specific labouring activity is rendered abstract and is solidified in the commodity-form. As Marx points out, during the act of exchange "[t]he relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things."[11] Commodity fetishism, therefore, represents a deep historical paradox: labour creates value but value obscures labour. As

---

Seventeen: "Crisis Theory," trans. Foreign Languages Publishing House, *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 443-452.

[8] Marx, "Capital," pp. 302-319. The coat and linen examples are Marx's: see pp. 308-312.

[9] Marx, "Capital," p. 320.

[10] Norman Geras, "Marx and the Critique of Political Economy," *Ideology in Social Science: Readings in Critical Social Theory*, ed. Robin Blackburn (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), pp. 296-7; Marx, pp. 319-324.

Marx notes, "Value ... does not stalk about with a label describing what it is. It is value, rather, that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic."[12]

From Marx's analysis, commodities may be defined as fetishised objects whose values are determined in the act of exchange by comparing quantified measurements of abstract labour-power. In Marx's understanding of commodification, however, goods are not the only entities that become commodified through the creation of exchange-value: so too is labour-power. In "The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," Marx writes that within political economy, "the worker sinks to the level of a commodity and becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities"; and in the sixth chapter of *Capital*, he provides an explanation of the historical conditions that lead to the commodification of labour-power.[13] Since value is the comparison of labour-power contained within commodities, those who wish to extract value through commodity-exchange "must be so lucky as to find ... in the market, a commodity [that] possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value[.]"[14] Such a value-producing commodity is the human being: within their bodies, humans contain both the "physical and mental capabilities" necessary for commodity-production.[15] Value-seekers, in fact, do find such commodities because within capitalist society, there exist propertyless people who have nothing to bring to the market but their labour.[16] In the act of selling their labour-power to a purchaser in exchange for wages, therefore, workers transform individual productive capacity into a commodity.

---

[11] Marx, "Capital," p. 321.
[12] Marx, "Capital," p. 322.
[13] Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," p. 70; "Capital," pp. 336-344.
[14] Marx, "Capital," p. 336.
[15] Marx, "Capital," p. 336.
[16] Marx, "Capital," pp. 336-7.

Since its publication in 1867, numerous critical theorists have drawn inspiration from Marx's exposition of commodification in *Capital*. By mixing Marx's ideas with those of other scholars, these thinkers have demonstrated both that commodification is central to capitalism and that commodification theory provides a rich and varied method of understanding modern social and cultural experience. One of the earliest works in this tradition appeared in 1921: Georg Lukács's "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat."[17] Written while a member of the leadership of the Hungarian Party in the Soviet Republic, this essay emerged from Lukács's attempt to reconcile what he viewed as the "pseudo-leftist," "sectarian," and day-to-day focus of the Soviet bureaucracy in Hungary with the growing radicalism of the Hungarian workers' movement.[18]

Beginning with the injunction that "the problem of commodities must not be considered in isolation or even regarded as the central problem in economics, but as the central, structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects," Lukács's essay blends Max Weber's ideas on rationalisation with Marx's ideas on commodification in order to argue that human consciousness in capitalist society is necessarily reified.[19] That is, the quantification of labour-power in the commodity-form, the incessant division of labour to which this quantification gives rise, and the commodification of labour on the free market cause workers and the bourgeoisie to view social experience in measured, abstract, and "atomised" forms.[20] Lukács describes this historical process thus: "the mathematical analysis of work-processes" sunders "the organic, irrational and qualitatively determined

---

[17] Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1968), p. 83.
[18] Lukács, "Preface to the New Edition (1967)," *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. *xiv-xvi*.
[19] Ross King, "Reification," *Encyclopedia of Literary Criticism: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*, ed. Irena R. Makaryk (University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 619; Lukács, "Reification," pp. 95-6.
[20] Lukács, "Reification," pp. 87-92.

unity of the product"; therefore, the "finished article ceases to be the object of the work-process [and] the latter turns into the objective synthesis of rationalised special systems whose unity is determined by pure calculation[.]"[21] Once the rationalisation of the labour process is achieved, the individual worker becomes a passive "mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system." Consequently, "his activity becomes less and less active and more and more *contemplative*."[22] For Lukács, this reification of consciousness means that people living in capitalist societies are unable to form coherent understandings of existing economic, social, and cultural conditions because their very understandings of their worlds is infused by the commodity-structure.[23] Commodification in "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" is therefore a systematic, all-encompassing, and profoundly alienating phenomenon.

Though Lukács's work may be faulted for its appeal to an ill-defined, "pre-capitalist" golden age when humans' selves were organic wholes in complete control of their own individual productive capabilities, his effort to historicise the modern fragmenting not only of work but of human consciousness by exploring the process of reification is nevertheless an ambitious attempt to understand the effects of the division of labour on humans' understandings of their environments.[24] In addition, just because Lukács romanticises the pre-capitalist past it does not follow that that his observations about twentieth-century social relations are invalid.

---

[21] Lukács, "Reification," p. 88.
[22] Lukács, "Reification," p. 89. I have not changed the male pronoun in this quotation because in Lukács's writings, workers are always imagined as male.
[23] Lukács, "Reification," pp. 103-110. It should be pointed out that Lukács believed that when the commodification and quantification of labour becomes particularly intense, workers will seek to overcome the reified system not by articulating critiques of this system but by attempting to reclaim control of their qualitative, "organic" humanity (p. 92).
[24] An example of Lukács's romanticisation of "pre-capitalism" occurs on pp. 90-2.

Similarly, though Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of the cultural industry is insensitive toward peoples' motivations for consuming, their work does provide a valuable contribution to the commodification tradition. After fleeing Nazi Germany and moving to New York in 1942, Adorno and Horkheimer not only became familiar with the American cultural industry but found that many similarities existed in the attempts at ideological manipulation between American mass-cultural industrialists and Fascists.[25] In "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," they give voice to their deep criticisms of these similarities and articulate the historical conditions that contributed to the philosophical connections between cultural industrialists' activities and Hitler's followers' activities. Arguing that the cultural industry is a hegemonic business predicated on the creation of exchange-value and dependent on workers-as-consumers' participation, they assert that mass culture is a totalising force that endeavours to pre-empt all possibilities for creativity, dignity, resistance, and free thought.[26] To support this argument, Adorno and Horkheimer first demonstrate how the cultural industry is an extension of the work-process; they afterwards illustrate the various ideological weapons that cultural industrialists utilise.

Like Lukács, Adorno and Horkheimer believe that the capitalist work-process is rationalised and reified: abstract labour-power is measured through mathematical calculation and separated into small capsules of production. The means of production therefore do not correspond to the ends, and the parts of production—that is, various specialised and repetitive tasks—usurp the importance of the whole.[27] Calling this

---

[25] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "Preface to the New Edition," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. *ix-x*; "The Culture Industry," pp. 164-7.
[26] Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," pp. 122-167.
[27] Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," pp. 123-131.

disjunction between the means and the ends of production "instrumentalization," Adorno and Horkheimer argue that, as in factory-production, the cultural industry is a business whose bottom line is the realisation of surplus-value, or profit, and cultural entrepreneurs therefore necessarily also engage in instrumentalisation.[28] This engagement is twofold: not only do cultural industrialists quantify consumers, but they also quantify cultural products.[29] Because consumers are sources of value, they are transformed into categorised objects through such activities as market segmentation; similarly, because the products of the cultural industry are representations of exchange-value, their parts usurp the importance of their wholes and they become structured, repetitive, and meaningless—that is, bereft of use-value—commodities.[30]

While, on the one hand, the cultural industry's formation stemmed from the severing of use-value from exchange-value under capitalism, it also, on the other hand, stemmed from capitalists' need to "recommend work to the masses."[31] Indeed, workers' desire to escape the instrumentalised work-process led to their seeking of amusements, and the capitalist class met workers' desire for respite with instrumentalised versions of art and leisure. Yet while instrumentalisation is one method of furthering workers' reification, so too are the specific activities in which cultural industrialists engage in their endeavours to turn America into an objectified "civilization of employees."[32] First, they destroy all possibilities of genuine creativity. Through the industry's regimented desire to achieve commercial success, all forms of art and leisure—for instance, movies—become

---

[28] Jameson's "Reification and Utopia" contains an excellent discussion of the Frankfurt School's concept of instrumentalisation: see pp. 124-5; Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," pp. 137, 144.
[29] Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," pp. 123-37.
[30] Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," pp. 123, 147, 158, 161.
[31] Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," p. 144.
[32] Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," p. 153.

formulaic plots in which structure is more important than content; correspondingly, for artists and intellectuals to achieve success under capitalism they must conform to the market's structures.[33] Second, cultural industrialists erase both human dignity and possibilities of political resistance. In movies, radio programs, and novels, the tragic heroes and heroines of the Renaissance are replaced with laughable Everymen who, though they suffer, find strength in being the objects of derision and thus submit to capitalist domination.[34] Additionally, the cultural industry uses a "gift-system" to reinforce workers-as-consumers subordinate social positions. Through such activities as well-publicised but rigged sweepstakes in which, for instance, a "typist" wins a "world trip," they demonstrate paradoxically that while success is attainable, it will never happen to individual members of the cultural audience. In this way, the cultural industry reinforces the spectator's social defeat.[35]

Finally, the existence of the cultural industry removes intellectual freedom. All cultural commodities are ultimately advertisements of capitalist domination, and therefore whatever choice the cultural industry offers—whether in product or in lifestyle—is not a choice at all. Rather, it is the "freedom to choose what is always the same."[36] It is this false sense of choice that ultimately obliterates the hope for true enlightenment within liberal capitalism; it is also in this false sense of choice that Adorno and Horkheimer see the strongest connection between the Third Reich and the cultural industry. Just as Fascism propels conformity—and therefore support of the Führer—

---

[33] Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," pp. 132-3. Naomi Klein makes this same argument regarding contemporary "brand bullies": *No Logo*, pp. 3-193.
[34] Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," pp. 139-44.
[35] Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," pp. 148, 161.
[36] Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," p. 167.

through propaganda, so too do cultural industrialists invoke conformity—and therefore support of capitalist domination—through torrents of publicity.

While Adorno and Horkheimer's essay may be faulted for being insensitive to the many nuances of mass consumption in America, including the differences that exist between American business and the Third Reich as well as the motivations workers have for consuming, their willingness to explore industrialists' ideological motivations and the regulation of the cultural industry is a significant contribution to the commodification tradition. They demonstrate that the reification of the work-process extends to forms of mass-produced art and leisure; they also show that the cultural industry was created to generate ideological support for capitalism. In addition, and unlike many Marxist writers, they do not sever workers and consumers into two opposing social groups. Rather, Adorno and Horkheimer demonstrate that workers are consumers, just as consumers are workers; moreover as both workers and consumers, they are objectified, quantified, and denigrated by capital.

Wolfgang Fritz Haug, another prominent German philosopher, also does not divide the propertyless citizens of the capitalist world into producers and consumers. As do Adorno and Horkheimer, Haug maintains that capitalists consider those who sell their labour on the free market as sources of exchange-value in their roles both as producers and as purchasers.[37] Founder of what Stuart Hall calls a "major intellectual/political project centred around the journal *Das Argument*," Haug and his students specialise in Marxist critical theory.[38] In 1971, Haug published an encompassing critique of the circulation of objects on the free market. Entitled *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics:*

---

[37] Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality, and Advertising in Capitalist Society*, trans. Robert Bock (London: Polity Press, 1986), pp. 101-5.

Appearance, Sexuality, and Advertising in Capitalist Society, his work is an attempt to understand the effects of commodity-exchange on the imaginations, actions, and socioeconomic positions of members of modern, industrialised nations. Inspired by Marx's observations about distribution and consumption contained in "The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts" and *Capital*, Haug argues that the existence of exchange-value has created a sexualised aesthetic in which commodities are sexually attractive and human existence is commodified.

Taking as his starting point the divorce of use- and exchange-value in the commodity-form, Haug asserts that since the entire capitalist economic system depends on the realisation of surplus-value, profit-seekers spend exorbitant amounts of time and energy ensuring that they extract as much capital from the commodity-form as they can.[39] The realisation of this extraction, of course, may only be achieved at the point of sale; therefore, it is precisely at this "moment," writes Haug, "when and where the merchandise casts its loving glances."[40] That is, to sell mass-produced goods, merchants infuse commodities with characteristics that pander to humanity's senses through such techniques as advertising and the manipulation of the environment in which commodities are sold. The aim of this pandering is to appeal to prospective customers' "longings, instincts, and hopes."[41] Using the pre-Foucauldian notion that under conditions of modernity, human sexuality is repressed, Haug maintains that merchants' endeavour to capitalise on sexual instincts more than on any other human desire.[42] Since the

---

[38] Stuart Hall, "Introduction," *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, pp. 2-3.
[39] Haug, pp. 16-38. For Marx on this point refer to "Theories of Surplus Value," chapter 17: "Crisis Theory," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 450-2.
[40] Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, p. 23.
[41] Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, p. 47.
[42] Though Foucault has demonstrated that the "repressive hypothesis" is a harmful myth, Haug is correct to assert that merchants pander to humans' sexual instincts in order to generate sales. At Eaton's during the

commodity's sexual appeal engages shoppers in acts of voyeurism, Haug argues that merchants present commodities as the objects of the voyeur's gaze.[43] This sexual attribute of goods produced for exchange, then, is the "commodity aesthetic."

Just as commodities are sexualised in a market economy, so too do merchants attempt to commodify human existence. First, they offer consumers such adornments for the body as clothes and cosmetics, thus treating their "human targets like commodities."[44] This commodification, according to Haug, takes two forms. First, merchants encourage customers to advertise their individual existences by investing in bodily adornments that will guarantee them success in attaining friends, prestige, and lovers.[45] Second, merchants encourage customers to purchase bodily adornments to market their labour-power successfully. Drawing from Marx, Haug asserts that labour-power is commodified on the free market. Therefore, in order that workers may sell their labour-power, merchants and employers alike assert that workers must make their appearances aesthetically-pleasing to satisfy prospective purchasers.[46]

Salesworkers, suggests Haug, are affected strongly by this commodification process. Like all other workers, merchants demand that salespeople make their appearances pleasing; yet, due to salespeople's unique position as at the point of

---

1940s and 1950s, for example, the advertising department relied heavily on "The Townsend Method of Mass Persuasion" in their promotional activities. According to a manual describing this method, "People buy to get satisfaction ... satisfaction for one or more of **the five basic urges.**" These urges are "For Life." "To Reproduce Life . . . Sex." "To be Comfortable." "To be Important." and "To Enjoy the Five Senses [Emphasis in original. ["The Townsend Method of Mass Persuasion and Advertising Evaluation, (1945). File 28, Series 162, Box 28, F 229, AO]." For Michel Foucault on the repressive hypothesis, see *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), pp. 15-49.

[43] Haug, pp. 48-52. Haug is not the only critical theorist to remark on this voyeurism. Walter Benjamin's description of the "flaneur," or the man who strolls down urban streets gazing at various spectacles of modernity, was derived from Benjamin's numerous and observatory visits to those spectacular predecessors of European department stores: the Parisian Arcades. See Susan Buck-Morss, "The Flaneur, the Sandwichman, and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering," *New German Critique*, 39 (Fall 1986), pp. 101-5.

[44] Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, p. 72.

[45] Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, pp. 72-6.

exchange, their commodification is doubly determined. Not only is their workplace an environment of commodities for sale, but the nature of their work is a personification of the commodity aesthetic.[47] In attempts to realise profit, merchants have developed selling techniques that encourage salespeople to exploit customers' desires for the promises that various commodities contain. When employing these sales techniques, therefore, salespeople give voice to the sensuality embodied in commodities. As well, merchants demand that their sales employees cultivate attractive appearances to enhance the pleasing qualities of the goods offered for sale. So that sales figures may be increased, these appearances must be pleasant and standardised to conform to "public taste." As Haug notes, "the correlation of public taste with the aesthetic stylization of the sales staff's appearance is a factor of immediate consequence for commerce."[48]

In *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, Haug draws from Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism to demonstrate how the existence of exchange-value both aestheticises commodities and commodifies human experience. Like Adorno and Horkheimer's, his work may be faulted for its notion that workers are agent-less victims who are deceived by the propaganda of the mass-distribution industry. He argues for instance that human beings, as "buyers," "cannot help but reach automatically for the goods ... because the promise and thus the illusion of a life superior to their own ... has been stolen from them [by capital]."[49] Despite the insight of this statement, which echoes Marx's contention that "[e]very product is a bait with which [the merchant] seduce[s] away the other's very being," Haug here, and unlike Marx, confuses marketers' visions of

---

[46] Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, pp. 76-87.
[47] Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, pp. 57-71.
[48] Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, p. 65.
[49] Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, p. 96.

an ideal commodity-saturated world with the motivations workers have for participating in mass consumption.[50] That is, just as do capitalists wish that workers are unthinking automatons for whom possibilities of resisting ideological domination do not exist, so does Haug portray them as such.[51] In drawing theoretical support from Haug, therefore, one must be careful to utilise his ideas carefully. Nevertheless, his contention that capitalism depends on the existence of the commodity-exchange and its attendant realisation of profit through value is sound. If his work should not be used to understand consumers' activities, it does provide insight into the actions of those who seek capital through the promulgation of mass consumption.

By expanding on Marx's ideas of commodification, Lukács, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Haug illustrate that the commodity-structure affects significantly social and cultural relations within the mass market's three economic spheres: production, distribution, and consumption. For all their insights, however, Lukács's, Adorno and Horkheimer's, and Haug's works lack conscious analysis in one crucial area: gender. As Victoria de Grazia points out, "feminist researchers have long been aware of the conventional association of women with consumption, as a consequence of their role in the household division of labour and as reified objects in the commodity exchange system."[52] From suffragettes who argued that women should be allowed to vote because they participated in the

---

[50] Marx. "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts." p. 94. While Marx recognizes that the hawking of wares by merchants has the potential to spark alienation among all those who come into the sphere of the market, nowhere does he suggest that people are deceived by capitalists' actions. He argues for instance in the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts" that "The increase in the quantity of objects is accompanied by an extension of the realm of the alien powers to which man is subjected, and every new product represents a new *potency* of mutual swindling and mutual plundering. Man becomes every poorer as man; his need for *money* becomes every greater if he wants to overpower hostile being ... [p. 93, emphasis his]." Here, the word "potency" is key: though merchants have the potential to induce alienation, it does not follow that people (or, more specifically in Marx's formulation, "men") are deceived by merchants' activities.

[51] Haug, pp. 119-122.

market as knowledgeable consumers, to bread riots caused by mothers demanding food for their families, to second-wave feminist tracts denouncing the mass-distribution industry's targeting and disparagement of housewives, women—both academics and otherwise—have since at least the nineteenth century indeed been cognizant of the fact that part of women's domestic labour involves procuring familial provisions within the marketplace—that is, consuming.[53] Feminists are also conscious of women's reification within the market: for instance, they have demonstrated that the pornographic industry is an enterprise whose commercial success depends on images of objectified women.[54] Moreover, though many liberal feminists like Betty Friedan and Naomi Wolf are critical of the fashion and beauty industry's emphasis on women's appearances, some social historians and poststructural feminists point, albeit in different ways, to the facts that working and bourgeois women alike have combined their consuming roles and

---

[52] Victoria de Grazia, "Introduction," *The Sex of Things*, p. 7.

[53] For suffragists and consuming, refer to Margaret Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). On direct political action and women's provisioning roles in the household, see especially Victoria de Grazia, "Empowering Women as Citizen-Consumers," *The Sex of Things*, pp. 275-286 and Belinda Davis, "Food Scarcity and the Empowerment of the Female Consumer in World War I Berlin," *The Sex of Things*, pp. 287-310. For Canadian Communist and socialist women's participation in the public political sphere as domestic consumers, see Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto: McClelland and Steward, 1989), pp. 185-8, 193-9. Polemical works on women's consuming roles and the mass market include Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963) and Ellen Willis, "'Consumerism' and Women," *Voices from Women's Liberation*, ed. Leslie B. Tanner (New York: New American Library, 1971), pp. 307-313. Selected critical histories of the mass-distribution's industry targeting of women are Gail Reekie, "Impulsive Women, Predictable Men: Psychological Constructions of Sexual Difference in Sales Literature to 1930," *Australian Historical Studies*, 24 (1991), pp. 359-377; Cynthia Wright, "'The Most Prominent Rendezvous of Feminine Toronto': Eaton's College Street and the Organization of Shopping in Toronto, 1920-1950" (PhD Thesis: OISE, University of Toronto, 1992); Parr, *Domestic Goods*; and the articles contained in *His and Hers: Gender, Consumption, and Technology*, ed. Roger Horowitz and Arwen Mohun (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

[54] Scholarly treatments of women's reification on the free market are less numerous than are those of women's domestic consumptive labour, but see Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Other Side of Venus: The Visual Economy of Feminine Display," *The Sex of Things*, pp. 113-150 and Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 73-158.

objectified positions in sometimes subversive and often empowering ways.[55] In short, while the opinions of feminists on women's consumption and reification diverge widely, among academics attentive to sexuality and gender the association of women and femininity with consuming and being consumed on the free market is a well-recognised historical development.

Since the mass market operates along the axis of not only class but gender, any analysis of commodification must therefore be attentive to both how capital attempts to reify and instrumentalise working consumers, and to how these reifying and instrumentalising attempts target men and women differently. Only by becoming aware of the gendered implications of Marx's, Lukács's, Adorno and Horkheimer's, and Haug's contributions to the commodification tradition can academics sensitive to the effects of sexual difference on historical events avoid making the same assumptions about commodification as do these male theorists.

While Marx does not address why the market mirrors the household division of labour in its creation of two separate spheres, in the *Grundisse* (1857-8) he does tackle the question of whether or not production or consumption—or what liberals refer to as 'supply' and 'demand'—is the dominant determinant of activity on the free market. In answering this question, he agrees with other political economists that there exists both "productive consumption," such as when humans eat to generate strength, and "consumptive production," such as when the tools of labour are depleted by constant

---

[55] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*; Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990). Social historians of women's participation in the fashion and beauty industry are Kathy Peiss, "Making Up, Making Over: Cosmetics, Consumer Culture, and Women's Identity," *The Sex of Things*, pp. 311-366 and *Hope in a Jar*, and Enstad, *Ladies of Labor*. Poststructural feminists who write about women, beauty, and fashion include Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). For a critique of poststructural celebrations of performance and subversive identity

use.[56] He also however asserts further that "whether production and consumption are viewed as the activity of one or of many individuals, they appear in any case as moments of one process, in which production is the real point of departure and hence also the predominant moment."[57] Production achieves this paramount position because, according to Marx, consumption as "urgency, as need," triggers the stimulation for production, but production is necessary to realise the satisfaction of consumption's demands. Moreover, the "individual produces an object and, by consuming it, returns to himself, but returns as a productive and self-producing individual."[58] Therefore, as with his repudiation of spiritual philosophy in favour of historical materialism, in considering the question of whether or not production or consumption rules the market Marx privileges production because it is the moment in which demands are made material. Giving further weight to this privileging, for Marx, is an appeal to biology: as the process of human reproduction demonstrates, humans are fundamentally productive individuals. In a non-capitalist economy, this distinction between production and consumption is irrelevant because people in non-capitalist economies both produce and consume for their own and others' direct social purposes; but in societies organised around the commodity-exchange, this distinction becomes "practically important" because "[*d*]*istribution* steps between the producers and the products, hence between production and consumption, to determine ... what the producer's share will be in the world of products."[59]

---

construction. see Lucinda Rosenfeld. *Diary of a Garterbelt Feminist* (Online: Word.com: http://www.word.com/desire/garterbelt/index.htm. Last accessed: 28 March 2001.)

[56] Marx. "The *Grundisse*," trans. Martin Nicolaus. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. p. 230.

[57] Marx. "The *Grundisse*." p. 231.

[58] Marx. "The *Grundisse*," pp. 231-2.

[59] The phrase "practically important" comes from Marx. "Capital." p. 321; "The *Grundisse*." p. 232. emphasis his.

Marx's contention that production is more important than consumption would be plausible to most feminists. In their arguments that consumption is integral to women's domestic labour, feminists imply both that consumption is productive and that in order for consumption to occur much productive activity must be sustained.[60] Consuming activities like eating, for instance, may occur only after domestic workers perform labouring activities like grocery-shopping—itself an act of consumption—and cooking. Other consumer-related actions, such as applying mass-produced cosmetics to one's face, are also viewed by some socialist-feminists as acts of productive labour that women perform for themselves and in which they take certain amounts of pride.[61] Moreover, pointing to the labour-intensive processes of giving birth and child-rearing, many feminists would also support Marx's biological argument that humans are fundamentally productive, not consumptive, individuals.[62]

Nevertheless, Marx's argument that production is more important than consumption is susceptible to both philosophical and gender-critical readings. In his appeal to biology to determine the productive nature of humankind, he chooses to ignore the processes of aging, illness, and dying. Besides the fact that many people refer to pulmonary tuberculosis as 'the consumption,' when the human body weakens it consumes the ingredients necessary for the sustenance of life at a faster rate than it produces them. Humans may therefore be considered just as much consuming beings as they are productive ones. Relatedly, by privileging production over consumption, Marx

---

[60] See for instance Parr, *Domestic Goods*, pp. 3-17, 84-100, 165-270.
[61] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, p. 182.
[62] For example, an American Communist, Mary Inman, published during the 1940s a book entitled *Woman Power* that according to Joan Sangster argued that "[h]ousework ... was socially productive and essential to capital accumulation, for women created their husbands' labour power by shopping, cooking, and cleaning; moreover, *women as mothers also reproduced new labourers* for capitalism [Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, p. 183]."

reinforces the widely-held belief among European males, which stretches back to the Middle Ages, that women are auxiliary consumers dependent upon men's provisionary, autonomous activities.[63] He therefore suggests that men's perceived positions in the marketplace, as producers and breadwinners, are more important than women's perceived positions as spenders and consumers.

Finally, in his assertion that men are, by nature, "productive and self-reproducing individual[s]," there is a suggestion that Marx believed that capitalist distribution was an unnatural, castrative force that threatens the centre of men's autonomous livelihoods. In his portrayal of the mass market as debilitating for otherwise vigorous and free men, Marx joins a long tradition of male Enlightenment thinkers, including the eighteenth-century Daniel Defoe, who perceive the distribution process and its participants as weak, feminine, and degenerative.[64] While Marx is clearly more concerned with the more important structural issue of how political economy affects social existence than with the often-subjective issue of identity-construction, and while his observations on capitalism in general and commodification in particular remain the most comprehensive scholarly critiques of political economy, his contrasting of autonomous production with emasculatory capitalist distribution creates a paradigm that is susceptible to being interpreted as an example of male castration anxiety. Further, by portraying capitalist

---

[63] On the history of this belief, refer to Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, pp. 1-15, 73-98; Jennifer Jones, "*Coquettes* and *Grisettes*: Women Buying and Selling in Ancien Regime Paris," *The Sex of Things*, pp. 11-24; and Leora Auslander, "The Gendering of Consumer Practices in Nineteenth-Century France," *The Sex of Things*, pp. 79-112.

[64] Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, pp. 1-15, 73-98. Kowaleski-Wallace's reference to Defoe occurs pp. 82-87, where she discusses the gendered ways he imagined shoppers and shopping in his *The Complete English Tradesmen in Familiar Letters*, 2 vols. (1726-7). Defoe, besides being a predecessor of Marx in terms of viewing the market as a gendered arena, is also an ancestor of the authors of Western twentieth-century sales literature who portray women as helpless, irrational, and impulsive individuals who need to be guided and taught by omniscient and omnipotent salesmen. See Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana:

distribution in this way, Marx's works invite subsequent writers to define workers within capitalist economies as masculine and vigorous; and women—who are the bearers of the castration fear, according Freud—to be, at best, dependent upon men and, at worst, debilitating and degenerative.[65]

Adorno and Horkheimer's "The Culture Industry," in fact, depends precisely on this distinction between masculinity and femininity. In their essay, consumption of the cultural industry is depicted as an emasculating and female activity. They describe, variously, the "'natural' faces of Texas girls" as striving to be "like the successful models by whom Hollywood has typecast them"; the "American girl" who watches films about Paris and is disappointingly driven into "the arms of the smart American boy"; and the "housewife" who "finds in the darkness of the movie theater a place of refuge where she can sit for a few hours with nobody watching."[66] Moreover, according to these two Marxist philosophers, "women's serials are an embarrassingly agreeable garnish" on the "mere twaddle" of the culture industry.[67] By defining passive, instrumentalised consumers as weakly and feminine, Adorno and Horkheimer imply that non-consumers are non-alienated, vigorous individuals in complete and dignified control of their

---

University of Illinois Press, 1986), pp. 75-123; Reekie, "Impulsive Women, Predictable Men," pp. 359-377; and Parr, *Domestic Goods*, pp. 199-217.

[65] For Freud's thoughts on castration anxiety, refer to Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1927), pp. 149-157. Interestingly, Freud's theory of the castration complex arose at the same time as did industrial capitalism. This temporal circumstance suggests that masculine identities are related intricately to the forces of the free market.

[66] Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," pp. 140, 148, 139. It is important to note that Adorno and Horkheimer also describe male consumer's activities; however, their descriptions of men's consumption occur less frequently and receive less criticism than do women's consumption activities; see pp. 133-149. Moreover, Adorno and Horkheimer end their work with an example of a commodified, passive, female consumer who, by a pat change in the sentence's subject's gender, becomes an emasculated male: "The way in which *a girl* accepts and keeps the obligatory date, the inflection on the telephone or in the most intimate situation, the choice of words in conversation, and the whole inner life as classified by the now somewhat devalued depth psychology, bear witness to *man's* attempt to make himself a proficient apparatus, similar (even in emotions) to the model served up by the cultural industry [167]." Emphasis added.

consciousnesses and activities. While there is much to be admired in these two Frankfurt School members' work, then, historians conscious of gender must be attentive to the ways in which commodification theory can be used to construct idealised masculine identities against denigrated feminine ones.[68]

As in Marx's understanding of the market and Adorno and Horkheimer's understanding of instrumentalisation, Lukács's portrayal of reification may also be read in a gender-critical manner. In "Reification and the Consciousness," he contends that the quantification of labour-power transforms the assertive, male labourer into a victim of reification. He argues, for instance, that:

> [T]he objectification of [workers'] labour-power into something opposed to their total personality ... is ... made [by capital] into the permanent ineluctable reality of [the individual worker's] daily life. ... the personality can do no more than look on helplessly while its own existence is reduced to an isolated particle and fed into an alien system.[69]

In Lukács's writings, workers are always imagined as male; indeed, as in most pre-1960s European and American scholarly tracts, in Lukács's work every impersonal pronoun is masculine. By portraying male workers' submission to capitalism as one that is helpless and without agency, therefore, Lukács implies along with Adorno and Horkheimer that surrendering to capitalism is a castrative act that removes workers' male virility. As he writes, "this fragmentation of the object of production necessarily entails the fragmentation of the subject."[70]

---

[67] Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry," p. 144.

[68] Andreas Huyssen also argues that the Frankfurt School relies on the privileging of masculinity over femininity in "Mass Culture as Women: Modernism's Other." *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 44-53.

[69] Lukács, "Reification," p. 90.

[70] Lukács, "Reification," p. 89. Interestingly, Lukács's notion that reification fragments the self finds its fullest expression in the agonized postmodern searches for the self that date from the 1960s through the present. Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1966) is an early example of this search. By demonstrating that reification is caused by the splintering of the capitalist work process,

In his depiction of reification as emasculating, Lukács does exhibit symptoms of castration anxiety, but there is something more significant in his work than this particular psychoanalytic insight. Marx also, in fact, makes connections between exchange-value and femininity, and in doing so, he demonstrates that modern gender identities and commodification are inseparable historical developments. In "The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," he makes an astonishing observation: "[The merchant] puts himself at the service of the [customer's] most depraved fantasies, *plays the pimp between him and his need*, excites in him morbid appetites...."[71] The quotation's explicit reference to prostitution suggests both that Haug's notion of the commodity aesthetic finds support in Marx's writings, and that Marx considers sellers and buyers to be masculine but the product of the exchange to be feminine. This statement therefore implies that Marx recognises—either consciously or subconsciously—that men commodify and objectify women in societies organised around the free market. By using prostitution as a metaphor for exchange-value, he points to a key means by which the market both creates and depends upon specific definitions of femininity and masculinity for its existence. As Walter Benjamin once observed, under conditions of modernity "the sex appeal of [every] woman is tinged to a greater or lesser degree with the appeal of the commodity."[72]

Though Marx's conflation of exchange-value with commodified female sexuality points to many promising methods of analysis, Marx himself does not, unfortunately, pursue these methods. At first glance, it appears that Haug's work does explore the

---

therefore, Lukács provides an historical, material explanation for the rise in popularity of postmodern and existential tracts. Indeed, the time frame of the postmodern age corresponds to the period that witnessed the expansion of the white-collar division of labour: the 1960s to the present.

[71] Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," p. 94. Emphasis added.

connections between women's reification and the free market, but again, as in the work of Lukács, Adorno, and Horkheimer, Haug does not examine in enough detail how commodification affects men and women differently. While he is attentive to the ways in which sexuality affects capitalist social relations—he explores not only the ways in which merchants appeal to differing definitions of gender to sell their products, but he also explains how businesspeople capitalise on saleswomen's attractive appearances to promote their industry's goods and services[73]—he does not seek to understand either why merchants define masculinity and femininity in specific ways or why saleswomen, as opposed to salesmen, are specific targets of businesspeople's capitalising actions. In other words, while Haug recognises that commodification is a gendered phenomenon, he neither indicates that this gendering is significant nor does he endeavour to understand the roots of this gendering.[74]

Although Marx, Lukács, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Haug, then, demonstrate superbly the ways in which commodification operates in societies organised by the free market, their work ignores the gendered aspects of commodification while indicating paradoxically that the commodification process is profoundly gendered. In their imagining of distribution as castrative, commodities as feminine, and non-commodified workers as virile males, they demonstrate that the existence of the mass market contributes to the modern construction of masculine identities. Relatedly, these theorists' work shows that though masculinity is defined in opposition to female weakness, passivity, and degeneration, it is the existence of the mass market that contributes to this

---

[72] As quoted in Solomon-Godeau, "The Other Side of Venus," p. 113.
[73] Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, pp. 57-86.
[74] Abigail Solomon-Godeau makes the same criticism of Haug's work in "The Other Side of Venus," pp. 113-5.

construction of the female identity by male thinkers. Due to the gendered implications of this male Marxist *oeuvre*, then, historians sensitive to gender differences should be skeptical of some of its conclusions.

Simply because these theorists are inattentive to gender, however, historians of commodification should not dismiss their insights. Their observations about reification, instrumentalisation, and aestheticisation, though sometimes tinged with specifically male fears, still offer valuable methods of analysing capital's commodifying activities. They link the market's processes directly to the ways in which these processes affect working consumers and consuming workers, and they offer sophisticated critiques of political economy. Moreover, while their work may reflect male psychological concerns, it does not follow that their work should not be applied toward an understanding of capitalism: both the discipline and practice of political economy are—created as they were by bourgeois males—themselves masculine enterprises. If historians are aware of the gendered implications of commodification theory, they can still use it to uncover many of the deep connections between the market, class formation, and modern social experience.

In fact, feminist Anne McClintock, an Associate Professor of English at Columbia University, has recently employed ideas about commodification for just these purposes. In *Imperial Leather* (1995), a book that uses textual analysis, psychoanalysis, and what she refers to as "social history" to explore the reasons causing the categories of race, gender, and sexuality to emerge in relatively the same period as imperialism and industrialisation, she blends Marxist and Freudian theories of fetishism to demonstrate that nationalised and sexualised commodity fetishes arrived on the historical scene as a result of the cultural collisions that occurred between Europeans and Africans during the

European conquest of Africa.[75] Like most commodification theorists' works, her analysis of fetishism pays little attention to why people purchase commodified goods: she assumes that culture may be, to borrow a useful phrase from Cynthia Wright, "'read off' the ads"; she thus makes dubious and generalised claims about an entire nation simply by interpreting the symbolic meaning of various advertisements.[76] She writes at the beginning of an analysis of soap fetishism, for instance, that this commodity "flourished [in nineteenth-century Britain] not only because it created and filled a spectacular gap in the domestic market but also because ... it could persuasively mediate the Victorian poetics of racial hygiene and imperial progress."[77] From this statement, one would expect that McClintock would expand on the reasons causing the "spectacular gap in the domestic market," but in fact her discussion of soap ignores the admittedly mundane exigencies of working-class households—whose members were working, as Engels has shown, in the often filthy conditions of an industrialising country.[78] Accordingly, though McClintock stresses that her book is a work of social history, her focus on the activities of the bourgeoisie limits her narrative of commodity fetishism.

Despite overlooking of working consumers as well as a tendency to overgeneralise, McClintock's theoretical innovations in fetishism do provide an important contribution to the commodification tradition. According to McClintock, both Marx's definition of the fetish and Freud's definition of the fetish rely on the notion that a "crisis in value" has occurred: in commodity fetishism, this crisis is the displacement of the labour-power in a commodity onto exchange-value; in psychoanalytic fetishism, this

---

[75] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 8, 181-231.
[76] Wright, "The Most Prominent Rendezvous," p. 12; McClintock, pp. 207-231.
[77] McClintock, p. 209.

crisis is displacement of the fear of castration—and therefore the value of the phallus—onto an object.[79] Hence, she believes that "[t]he fetish thus stands at the cross-roads of psychoanalysis and social history, inhabiting the threshold of both personal and historical memory."[80] In its willingness to use psychoanalysis as a legitimate method of inquiry, McClintock's version, unlike Marx's, offers an explanation as to why humans wish to accumulate specific goods: as she writes, by "manipulating the fetish, the individual gains symbolic control over what might otherwise be terrifying ambiguities."[81] By the same token, in her willingness to use Marx's ideas about fetishism, McClintock's understanding of the fetish expands the scope of what may be fetishised from the objects traditionally-recognised by psychoanalysts—mostly women's clothing and accessories—to "any object under the sun," including people.[82] She therefore debunks the Freudian and Lacanian arguments that only men may be fetishisers, and through her specific attention to the creation of gendered and sexual categories, she also dispels the masculine biases inherent in commodification analyses.

By developing a theory of fetishism that accommodates the social and psychic experiences of both women and men, McClintock provides commodification historians with methods through which to understand capitalists' often gendered commodifying efforts. Through her contention that fetishes embody historical and personal contradictions, as well her argument that fetishes may be both goods and people, she demonstrates that mass distributors may exploit various contradictions in their customers'

---

[78] Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London: Penguin, 1987).
[79] McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 185.
[80] McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 184.
[81] McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 184. According to Marx, in determining the nature of the commodity, it is not necessary to know why people desire commodities: "The nature of such wants [for commodities], whether, for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference ["Capital," p. 303]."

social and psychological histories to sell their goods. Since the market itself is gendered, an understanding of how fetishes operate on the mass market will reveal the historical connections among women's reification as objects and targeting as consumers by capital. Finally, in her extension of commodity fetishism to include psychological motivations for consuming and using commodities, McClintock offers a conceptual inroad into the reasons the agents of mass-distribution frame their selling pitches in ways that both deflect and reflect larger historical processes such as empire-building and industrialising.

Where McClintock's arguments are broad and far-reaching, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, an Associate Professor of Art at the University of California, Santa Barbara, provides a specific and detailed analysis of how exchange-value affects women's gender identities under conditions of capitalist modernity. In a 1996 article entitled "The Other Side of Venus: The Visual Economy of Feminine Display," she demonstrates that "the spectaclised female" became conflated with the commodity form in early-nineteenth-century French lithography.[83] Blending McClintock's notion of fetishism with theories of specularity put forward by Laura Mulvey, Luce Irigaray, and herself in other writings, Solomon-Godeau argues that the commodified "woman-as-image" operated as a fetish among the male members of the middle- and working-classes in France.[84] Representing a displacement of fears about modernisation, including urbanisation and industrialisation, the fetish of the commodified, passive female body came to prominence in lithography as a result of three simultaneous historical processes: artists were abandoning the male form and focusing exclusively on the female; a spectaclised commodity culture was on the

---

[82] McClintock. *Imperial Leather*. p. 185.
[83] Solomon-Godeau. "The Other Side of Venus." p. 117.
[84] Solomon-Godeau. "The Other Side of Venus." p. 128.

rise; and lithographic prints were becoming mass-distributed.[85] The coupling of commodity spectacle and images of women was the most significant occurrence in this period, and this coupling formed the beginning of a long line of associations between sexualised women and sexualised commodities, including the contemporary "bikinied model adorning a Harley Davidson."[86]

Like McClintock's work, Solomon-Godeau's article may be faulted for its overgeneralising tendencies. Simply because, for instance, lithographers in France were fetishising female figures because they were scared of modernity, it does not follow that contemporary American men also fetishise the female form for the same reasons. Nonetheless, in its historical tracing of women's reification on the commodity market, Solomon-Godeau's article flushes out the connections made by Marx among women, sexuality, and exchange-value; it also provides a feminist supplement to Haug's exposition of the commodity aesthetic. For historians, then, it provides a welcome addition to the commodification tradition. Expanding McClintock's ideas of fetishism, Solomon-Godeau shows that the objectification of women by male lithographers was a fetishised move that displaced fears about modernity onto the female body. In this sense, Solomon-Godeau's description of French lithographers echoes Lukács's and Adorno and Horkheimer's more specific portrayal of capitalism: both groups of men deem modernity as castrative; both groups of men turn to defining femininity as passive as a way of assuaging their fears. Most important, however, is that in her demonstration of how women are reified and fetishised, Solomon-Godeau connects concretely what Mulvey has

---

[85] Solomon-Godeau. "The Other Side of Venus." pp. 113-145.
[86] Solomon-Godeau, "The Other Side of Venus." p. 113.

identified as women's position as "the object[s] of the gaze" with Marx's idea that social relations under capitalism take material forms.[87]

As Solomon-Godeau's work demonstrates, after 130 years commodification theory returns, revised and expanded, to Marx's observations about the importance of the commodity-form to social relations within capitalist economies. Since the nineteenth century, numerous critical and feminist scholars have found inspiration in Marx's ideas of commodification, but six scholars in particular have contributed substantially to an understanding of the ways in which the free market orders both structural and subjective experience: Lukács, Adorno and Horkheimer, Haug, McClintock, and Solomon-Godeau. Though their works do not address peoples' motives for participating in the mass market, and though some of these theorists are inattentive to gender, they do enhance historians' understandings of how exchange-value affects class-formation and identity-construction. From Marx comes the ideas of exchange-value, commodity fetishism, and the commodification of labour; from Lukács, quantification and reification; from Adorno and Horkheimer, instrumentalisation and explanations for capitalism's disparagement of working consumers; from Haug, commodity aesthetics and the aestheticisation of workers; from McClintock, psychologised commodity fetishism; and from Solomon-Godeau, the linking of spectaclised women with the commodity spectacle. When combined into a whole, these scholars' works comprise a balanced methodological tool

---

[87] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 1994), p. 426; Marx, "Capital," p. 321.

that historians may use to understand how capitalism seeks to extract profit from workers—in both their productive and consumptive personas.

CHAPTER 2

"You Are Your Store": Commodifying Eaton's Employees

> [I]f you stop to think about it for a moment, you'll realize that you are your store (no matter what your job is) to many different people at many different times. Just as surely as though you wore a sandwich board proclaiming it!
>
> -- Eaton's Staff Magazine, 1953[1]

In 1867, Marx wrote that "the commodity-form" is the "economic cell-block of bourgeois society."[2] Two years later, and on the other side of the Atlantic, Timothy Eaton opened a dry-goods shop on the corner of Yonge and Queen Streets in Toronto. To annouce his store's opening to Torontonians, he placed a small advertisement in the Toronto *Globe*, which proclaimed: "'We propose to sell our goods for CASH ONLY – In selling goods, to have only one price.'"[3] With this statement, he implied to prospective customers that not only would he no longer barter with his patrons, as he had done in the two rural-Ontario emporiums he had owned before moving to Toronto, but he also would no longer trade his merchandise for locally-produced goods like eggs, milk, and flour. As one admiring historian of Eaton's notes, obtaining capital at the point of purchase would enable Timothy to "buy more largely and more advantageously"; it would also enable him to "extend his business" and eliminate "bad debts."[4] In other words,

---

[1] "You Are Eaton's," *Flash*, March 1953, p. 40.
[2] Karl Marx, "Preface to the First German Edition," in "Capital, Volume One," trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling and ed. Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978) p. 295.
[3] As quoted in "The Scribe," *Golden Jubilee: A Book to Commemorate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the T. Eaton Company, Ltd.* (Toronto: T. Eaton Company, 1919), p. 31.
[4] The Scribe, *Golden Jubilee*, p. 30.

therefore, when he opened his new store on the morning of December 8, 1869, Timothy Eaton declared his commitment to both the commodity-form and the free market.

Until its closure in 1999, extracting surplus-value from the commodity-exchange remained the chief reason for the T. Eaton Company's existence. Expanding across Canada and employing over 70,000 workers at the height of its commercial prominence in the 1960s, for 130 years Eaton's mass-purchased, mass-produced, mass-marketed and mass-distributed billions of goods and services. In return for its participation in the mass market, the Eaton family amassed over $1,000,000,000—together, its members were worth $1,600,000,000 in 1992—and transformed itself from an average, rural-Ontario family into one of the richest, most visible commercial "dynasties" in Canada.[5]

Since the existence of the enterprise depended on the successful realisation of the commodity-exchange, all of the company's policies, directions, and activities were oriented toward the selling of the firm's products. It is this orientation, combined with the firm's enormous success, that makes Eaton's of Canada such an excellent testing ground for the theories of commodification put forth in Chapter Two. In their own ways, Marx, Lukács, Adorno and Horkheimer, Haug, McClintock, and Solomon-Godeau trace their analyses back to the commmodity-form, and it is therefore appropriate that an application of commodification theory be directed toward Eaton's: "Canada's Greatest Store."

In applying commodification theory toward the T. Eaton Company, the historian may choose one of several approaches. One could, for instance, analyse the content of the catalogues directed toward Eaton's rural market to determine how Eaton's

---

[5] Rod McQueen, *The Eatons: The Rise and Fall of Canada's Royal Family*, rev. ed. (Toronto: Stoddart, 1999), pp. 5-6.

commodified its goods and services in ways thought appealing to rural customers.[6] Alternatively, one could examine the ways that Eaton's began to segment its market in the 1940s and 1950s to document the nationalised and gendered ways the company commodified its consuming public.[7] In their foci on advertising and market segmentation, such approaches to commodification at Eaton's would join other histories of commodity culture. Thomas Richards examines how British merchants presented their goods in various nineteenth-century advertisements to link the rise of the commodity spectacle with the rise to power of the English bourgeoisie. Similarly, in a study of "commodification, consumption, and cleanliness in modern Zimbabwe," Timothy Burke explores the connections between colonialism and consumerism by detailing how soap manufacturers broke successfully into the Zimbabwean market after World War II.[8]

Catalogues, advertisements, market research, and public-relations campaigns are important documents in the history of commodification. Analyses of these materials lend insights into how commercial enterprises commodify both their products and their

---

[6] Though their works are not about commodification, two historians have examined the catalogue in relation to inhabitants of the prairie provinces. See Thelma Dennis, "Eaton's Catalogue: Furnishings for Rural Alberta, 1886-1930" *Alberta History*, 37 (1989), pp. 21-31 and Janice Smith, "Content Analysis of Children's Clothing in Eaton's Catalogue and Selected Canadian Museums: 1890 to 1920" (MSC Thesis, University of Calgary: Department of Clothing and Textiles, 1991).

[7] Primary sources documenting the beginning of Eaton's market segmentation are numerous, but see especially "New Canadians" Committee, 1952-57, all items, F 229, Series 69, Box 27, AO; F 229, Series 151, Boxes 1-6, all items, especially those relating to the Business Girls' Council, the Junior Fashion Council, the Junior Executive Council, and the Mother's Council, AO. Also see F 229, Series 165, Boxes 1-5, all items, AO. Cynthia Wright has addressed the targeting of New Canadians by Eaton's in the postwar period in "Rewriting the Modern: Reflections on Race, Nation, and the Death of a Department Store," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 32 (May 2000), pp. 153-67.

[8] Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, & Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1996). For other influential histories of commodification that focus on advertisements and marketing strategies, see McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, pp. 204-232 and Frank Mort, *cultures of consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996). Older analyses of commodity culture include Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994) and Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1976).

customers. This chapter, however, chooses a different route by which to study commodification: through that of retail employees. Examinations of commodification that focus on advertisements, market research, and public relations tend to ignore the direct effects that commodification has on workers within the distribution industries. Instead, the targets of commodification within existing studies of commodification are viewed generally as an unarticulated mass that may be described as the 'purchasing public.' Certainly, it is true that some historians do not lump the members of this public together homogeneously: depending on their particular concerns, many historians focus on gender, race, ethnicity, or all three.[9] What an examination of retail employees does in the context of commodification, however, is bring into sharp relief the fact that retailers have commodified their workers' experiences as much, and even more so, as they have those of their potential customers.

The central argument of this chapter is that because Eaton's employees' were situated at the point of exchange, Eaton's customers and Eaton's managers commodified their bodies, identities, and experiences. As at all other businesses, Eaton's employees' labour-power was commodified because it was purchased by the department store. However, since the purpose of their labour was to orchestrate the distribution process, managers and customers viewed not only workers' labour-power but also workers' entire beings as inextricable from the realisation of profit.

As illustration of this argument, it is useful to refer to the "general formula for capital" that Marx presents in *Capital*. According to him, the creation of capital may be understood as a circuit that runs as follows: money to commodity to money. He

---

[9] In *cultures of consumption*, for instance, Mort focuses on masculinity; and in *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, Burke, for example, focuses on race.

represents this circuit as "M—C—M."[10] Importantly, Eaton's workers' occupational positions corresponded to the point of "C" in this circuit:

M—C—M
Eaton's—employees—customers

Thus, not only were Eaton's department stores places where the Eaton family sold goods to Canadian consumers, but they were also places where workers were directly implicated in the creation of value.

Eaton's employees' position at the point of exchange had an immediate effect on their class experience. When customers visited the department store, they projected an intense, consumerist gaze upon Eaton's employees. Through this gaze, they measured the worth of the T. Eaton Company and its products. Indirectly, they also objectified all of those employees with whom they came into contact. Though customers' commodification of Eaton's employees was important, Eaton's managers' commodifying efforts were even more significant. In order to better sell the firm's products, they instructed Eaton's employees to consider themselves extensions of the firm's commodities. As well, they demanded that employees adopt pleasing identities and aestheticised appearances so that they would boost the value of the department store. Finally, Eaton's managers commodified Eaton's employees by encouraging an ethos of avid consumption. Is so doing, they branded the department-store's workers as loyal consumers of Eaton's commodities.

The Consumerist Gaze

Eaton's workers' subjection to customers' objectifying consumerist gaze was the first manifestation of their commodification at Eaton's. During their trips to the

[10] Marx, "Capital, Volume One," p. 329.

department store, many customers assessed the value of Eaton's and its goods by scrutinising the behaviour, intelligence, and appearance of Eaton's employees. Although it was salespeople who were primarily affected by this gaze, numerous other employees were also the targets of Eaton's customers' attention. As *Flash* pointed out, "When [people] shop in Eaton's they will take or send merchandise to their homes[,] but also they will take with them some personal reaction to Eaton service and hospitality. They will remember the parking station attendant, waitress, elevator operator, sales person, in fact everyone they meet in Eaton's."[11]

One important component of Eaton's workers' beings that customers scrutinised was what Eaton's often referred to as "personality."[12] Specifically, in letters of both praise and complaint written to the company, Eaton's customers remarked positively on the "kindness," "courtesy," "friendliness" shown to them by the firm's customer-service staff. Such qualities as being "obliging," "cheerful," "helpful," "nice," and "jolly" were also appreciated.[13] In 1944, for instance, one customer wrote to compliment a Mrs. Rose Andrews, who was a waitress in the Georgian Room Restaurant:

> I have often felt I should draw your attention to the service "over and above the call of duty" rendered by one of your Georgian Room Staff. Her unfailing courtesy, her warm personality, and the all-round excellence of her service are outstanding, even where courtesy and service are the rule. I speak also for a great many friends, out-of-town and local, who feel that lunch with Mrs. Andrews serving is a high-light of the Georgian Room, and failure to secure one of her tables a corresponding let-down.[14]

---

[11] "Let Your Smile Say 'Hello!'" *Flash*, 30 March 1949, p. 32.
[12] See for instance *Flash*, 16 Feb 1942, p. 7.
[13] As quoted in *Flash*, 17 July 1941, p. 8; *Flash*, 7 Dec 1942, p. 7; *Flash*, 16 Feb 1942, p. 7; *Flash*, 17 June 1946, p. 16; *Flash*, 16 Feb 1942, p. 7; *Flash*, 11 Aug 1944, p. 4.
[14] As quoted in *Flash*, 24 April 1944, p. 3.

For this customer, Mrs. Andrews's waitressing skills and "warm personality" enhanced the value of the Georgian Room's foodstuffs and dining experience, and thus also enhanced the value of Eaton's itself.

Alternatively, when employees failed to show respect for customers, the value of the department store decreased. One customer wrote in 1946 to say:

> Through the war years as a purchaser I was sympathetic to all the problems that encompassed any employer... . However, possibly now a buyer may hope for some small measure of courtesy from your junior clerks. They are becoming increasingly indifferent to the point of insolence. The crowning episode that leads me to write this was the treatment of two clerks in the Lamp Department of the College Street Store. After having eventually captured the attention of one, she answered 'no' to my request and walked away. The Second did take a casual look for a minute but dismissed my request as too much effort and continued her writing of bills.[15]

For this shopper, who later in his letter mentioned that Simpson's clerks were always courteous, the value of Eaton's as a place of business was lessened due to the poor treatment he received from the store's employees.

A second component of Eaton's employees' beings that was subjected to the consumer's gaze was their knowledge about commodities and consumption. Specifically, shoppers expected that employees be knowledgeable both about the products they were working with and about the various needs customers may have. In 1940, one man wrote to Eaton's to say that one seller was "an outstanding salesman. He seemed completely sold on the product himself and had me sold on it just as completely[.]"[16] Similarly, in 1944, a saleswoman in the Main Store's Electrical Fixtures Department impressed one customer so much that he wrote to express his satisfaction: "the person who sold me a

---

[15] Robert Venning to Administration Office. 12 June 1951. F 229. Series 69. Box 16. File: 1949-1952. Complaints (Actual) (Except Contract and Interior Decorating). AO.
[16] As quoted in *Flash*. 6 Aug 1940, p. 3.

lamp and shade the other day is a very good saleswoman. She showed me exactly what I wanted without any fuss or delay and was able to advise me regarding difficulties I had been having with two other lamps."[17] For both customers, product knowledge was a crucial component of sellers' skills.

In contrast, when employees demonstrated ignorance about commodities and consumption, shoppers expressed their irritation. In 1950, a "secret shopper," or a regular customer paid by Eaton's to shop the stores and make reports about individual transactions, commented on the low level of knowledge demonstrated by a saleswoman in the College Street Store's Picture Department. According to the shopper, "I had a colour scheme, furnishings and budget which [the picture saleswoman] failed to consider, and [she] volunteered little or no information when I inquired about three different types of pictures...."[18] Though this particular customer's expectations of the saleswoman may have been raised because she was being paid by Eaton's to assess the sales staff's capabilities, the fact that she commented on the saleswoman's lack of knowledge about her consuming needs, including "colour scheme, furnishings and budget," as well as her lack of product knowledge, signifies that she expected Eaton's employees to be expert consumers who could offer sound product advice to shoppers.[19]

The consumerist gaze was also directed toward employees' demeanour. Many customers' letters demonstrated that a crucial component of a successful shopping experience was the pleasing appearance and behaviour of the service staff. A letter

---

[17] As quoted in *Flash*, 24 April 1944, p. 3.
[18] Jeanne Stamp to Mr. F. McEachren, "Picture Department," 29 Sept 1950, F 229, Series 69, Box 21, File: 1950-1951, Employees – Shopping Surveys on, AO.
[19] Joy Parr has also pointed to the consumerist expectation that sellers possess excellent product knowledge. See *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), pp. 200-217.

received in 1942, for instance, expressed satisfaction with the "gentlemanly demeanour" of a rug salesman:

> Purchasing furnishings for our new home my wife and I have been waited upon in the Oriental Rug Department of your College St. Store, by Mr. A. Rooney ... We desire to express to your firm our high appreciation of the courtesy and salesmanship he has shown. His gentlemanly demeanour, his understanding, and his patience made it a pleasure to do business with him. He has added to the prestige of the T. Eaton Co.[20]

For this customer, the rug salesman's demeanour was bound to his skills as salesperson, his gender, and his "courteous" personality. Moreover, and as the phrase "added to the prestige" demonstrates, the customer's assessment of the worth of the T. Eaton Company increased due to the salesman's deportment.

In the realm of demeanour, Eaton's received more complaints than letters of praise. The high rate of complaints in this regard echoed the fact that customers assessed their shopping experiences in part according to their assessment of the firm's service staff. One customer profoundly dissatisfied with the College Street's Bedroom Furniture Department, for instance, described her encounter with salesmen in the department thus:

> When I entered the bedroom furniture section ... I waited around about five minutes while four or five of your so busy salesmen were having a little conversation, not wanting to disturb them for the world I approached another salesm[a]n who was perched on top of a bureau and asked him if he would mind serving me. A young boy up there would not have looked so bad but a grown man of forty or forty five looked pretty bad. After a few minutes of his begrudging attitude I left in disgust.[21]

After criticising the behaviour and deportment of the furniture salesmen, this customer, like so many others who complained about sales staff, informed the T. Eaton Company that she went across the street to Simpson's and spent her money there. In her decision to

---

[20] Customer letters, *Flash*, 11 May 1942, p. 6.
[21] Mrs. V. E. Beriault to The T. Eaton Company Limited, 8 July 1946, F 229, Series 69, Box 16, File: 1943-1948, Complaints (Actual) (Except Contract and Interior Decorating), AO.

not purchase at Eaton's due to poor customer service and poor employee demeanour, this customer's complaint illustrates that Eaton's employees were crucial links in the commodity-exchange.

A final aspect of employees' beings that customers scrutinised were their bodies. Though consumers seldom wrote to congratulate the store for employing workers who were attractive, they did write to complain when employees' bodies were offensive to them. According to Mr. Robinson of the Staff Training Department, one customer complained in 1957 that "some of the staff [in the Main Store] are careless about personal hygiene—particularly their laxness in the use of deodorants. So much so, that it is impossible for the customer to remain long enough to make her purchases."[22] Similarly, in 1950 a secret shopper criticised one male seller in the Oriental Rugs Department in the College Street Store for being "untidy." According to the shopper, not only was the salesman "very much in need of a barber's attentions," but his "appearance" was "on the minus side of the ledger."[23] For both the regular customer and the secret shopper, unattractive employees decreased the value of the store. Moreover, though the secret shopper's expectations may have been affected by the fact that she was employed by the firm, her comparison of the rug salesman's appearance to a ledger indicates that at least some consumers explicitly connected employees' bodily appearances with exchange-value.

The shoppers' scrutinising gaze, then, was directed specifically toward employees' personalities, consuming skills, demeanour, and bodies. In part, this gaze was a function

---

[22] W. A. Robinson, Staff Training Department, Memo to Management, 10 Dec 1957, F 229, Series 69, Box 36, File: Staff Training – General, 1949-1960s, AO.
[23] Jeanne Stamp to Mr. F. McEachren, "Oriental Rugs," 8 June 1950, F 229, Series 69, Box 21, File: 1950-1951, Employees – Shopping Surveys on, AO.

of the fact that employees ranging from salespeople to delivery-truck drivers filled customers' shopping experiences. However, this gaze was also a function of the culture of commodity capitalism, in which individual customers measured the value of the department store and its goods by assessing the behaviour and appearance of the T. Eaton Company's employees.

Personifying the Commodity Aesthetic

If customers commodified Eaton's workers by projecting upon them a consumerist gaze, managers commodified workers by instructing them to actually become human extensions of the firm's goods and services. When Staff Trainers instructed its workers in the art of selling, they taught sales employees to give voice to the attractions of whatever commodity the customer happened to be examining. In 1948, Staff Trainers issued a pamphlet instructing workers how to best convince customers to purchase Eaton's goods. According to the pamphlet, when a customer examines a particular commodity, he or she has an unspoken question in his or her mind: "'What will this do for me?'" "Every piece of merchandise you sell," the Trainers remarked, "has certain qualities that will appeal directly to the customer. ... [Y]ou can lead your customer, step by step, to a successful sale by pointing out the desirable features of the merchandise in which she is interested."[24] Thus, through giving voice to the commodity's appeal, salesworkers could increase the value of the product and therefore successfully realise the commodity exchange.

Importantly, it was not only workers' speech that improved the value of the commodities they were selling. Eaton's also knew that salespeople's behaviour and

---

[24] "Do I point out to my customers *all the attractive features* of the merchandise I sell? [1949]," F 229, Series 162, Box 25, File 826, AO.

appearances were crucial to customers' assessments of the department store and its commodities. In training sessions, Eaton's Trainers and First Assistants constantly reminded salespeople that when they were at work, it was their job to "sell" themselves to Eaton's customers. In 1946, for instance, Eaton's purchased and showed to its sales staff a film entitled "Selling Your Personality." In this film, the behaviours, appearances, and selling techniques of two salespeople were contrasted in order to teach prospective sellers how to do their jobs well. The first saleswoman does not attempt to hide either her working-class cultural affiliation or her disinterest in her customers: she chews gum, yawns, leans on the counter, talks loudly about the dance she attended the night before, ignores her stock duties, does not present additional merchandise to customers, and ignores shoppers generally. Not surprisingly, she invokes customer irritation and does not make any sales. In contrast, the other saleswoman hides her working-class cultural identity. She makes her stock look fresh and neat, demonstrates interest in the customers she serves, does not slouch, does not engage in workplace gossip, suggests additional merchandise, and displays a polite smile at all times. For her efforts, she is rewarded with a high sales tally and is promoted to a buying position.[25] "Selling Your Personality" thus made it clear that Eaton's expected its salespeople to cultivate personalities, appearances, and selling strategies that would increase the store's profit-making potential. Specifically, sellers were to be polite, courteous, deferential, well-postured, eager, interested in customers, knowledgeable about the merchandise they were selling, and enthusiastic about Eaton's goods. Certainly, they were not to engage in any sorts of behaviour or display any identities that might tarnish Eaton's bourgeois reputation.

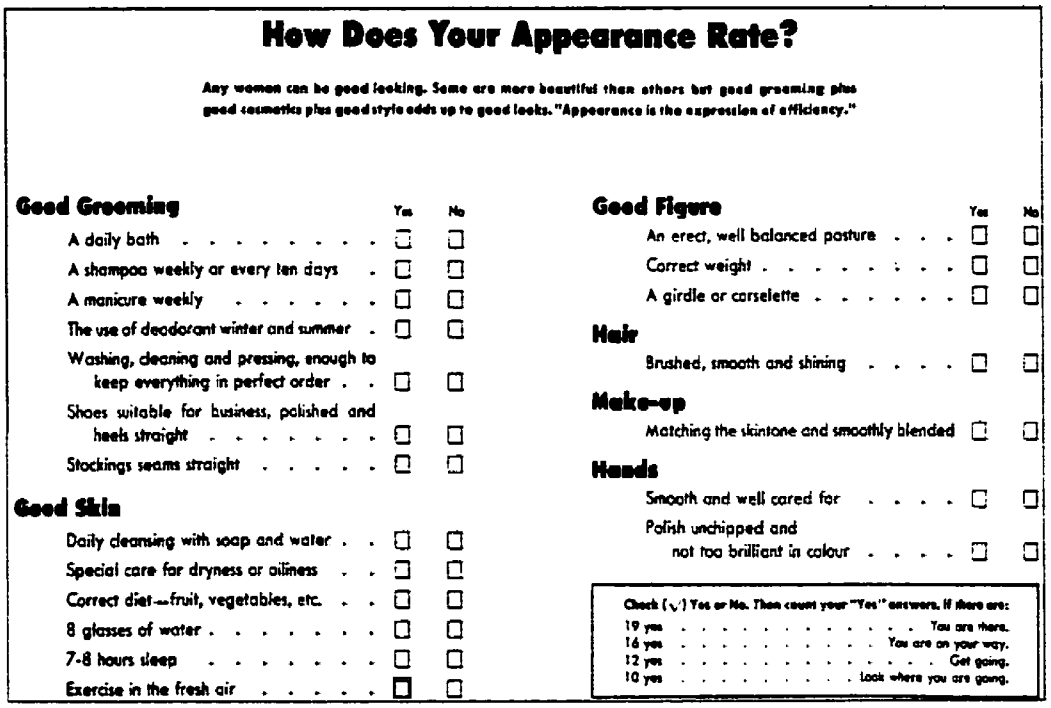
---

[25] "Selling Your Personality," 1946, F 229, Sound and Moving Images Collection, Series 403, AO.

If behaviour was one area of employee conduct on the salesfloor that Eaton's worried about, employee appearance was an even larger source of concern. In the late forties, Eaton's distributed two pamphlets to its sales personnel: "Through the looking glass" and "How Does Your Appearance Rate?" Each pamphlet consisted of quizzes for salespeople to take to determine whether or not their appearances 'measured up' to Eaton's standards. "Through the looking glass" was heavily imperative in tone, demanding individual workers for instance to "LOOK AT YOUR FACE!", "LOOK AT YOUR HAIR!" and "CHECK YOUR PERSONAL HABITS!" Good personal habits included bathing more than three times a week, using deodorant, and tooth-brushing twice daily. If individual employees did well on the quiz, they were rewarded with the phrase, "Your appearance is a credit to you."[26] As the word "credit" indicates, Eaton's salespeople's bodies were crucial components of the commodity transaction.

"How Does Your Appearance Rate," which was issued in different formats for male and female employees, also measured salespeople's bodies by quizzing them on their appearances. The quizzes for men and women were similar in nature, although the one for women was more extensive (fig. 2.1). The subtitle of the men's publication stated that "'Appearance is the expression of efficiency.'" The subtitle of the women's publication went further, asserting not only that "'Appearance is the expression of efficiency,'" but also that "Any woman can be good looking. Some are more beautiful than others but good grooming plus good cosmetics plus good style adds up to great looks."[27] Through these subtitles and their focus on efficiency, managers suggested that salespeople's appearances could be quantified into endless units of productivity. The

[26] "Through the looking glass," c. late 1940s, F 229, Series 162, Box 28, File 910, AO.



How Does Your Appearance Rate?

Any woman can be good looking. Some are more beautiful than others but good grooming plus good cosmetics plus good style adds up to good looks. "Appearance is the expression of efficiency."

Good Grooming — Yes / No

- A daily bath
- A shampoo weekly or every ten days
- A manicure weekly
- The use of deodorant winter and summer
- Washing, cleaning and pressing, enough to keep everything in perfect order
- Shoes suitable for business, polished and heels straight
- Stockings seams straight

Good Skin

- Daily cleansing with soap and water
- Special care for dryness or oiliness
- Correct diet—fruit, vegetables, etc.
- 8 glasses of water
- 7-8 hours sleep
- Exercise in the fresh air

Good Figure — Yes / No

- An erect, well balanced posture
- Correct weight
- A girdle or corselette

Hair

- Brushed, smooth and shining

Make-up

- Matching the skintone and smoothly blended

Hands

- Smooth and well cared for
- Polish unchipped and not too brilliant in colour

Check (✓) Yes or No. Then count your "Yes" answers. If there are:

19 yes . . . . . You are there.
16 yes . . . . . You are on your way.
12 yes . . . . . Get going.
10 yes . . . . . Look where you are going.

Figure 2.1: The Commodification of Appearance [From: "How Does Your Appearance Rate?" c1948. F 229. Series 162. Box 28. File 940. AO.] Used with permission. Sears Canada. Inc.

"adding" up of women's looks, combined with the idea that men's and women's appearances may be "rated," also demonstrates this quantification. Moreover, from their teeth to their hands, each unit of workers' appearances were aestheticised by the company to increase Eaton's chances of pleasing its customers. Because they were situated at the site of the commodity-exchange, then, Eaton's managers quantified and aestheticised workers' bodies and identities.

The Gender of Commodification

By quizzing employees on their appearances, Eaton's clearly demonstrated that employees' bodies were inextricably implicated in the creation of exchange value. These quizzes, however, are also significant because they demonstrate that commodification was a gendered process. That the women's version of "How Does Your Appearance

[27] "How Does Your Appearance Rate [for men]" and "How Does Your Appearance Rate [for women]," both 1947. F 229. Series 162. Box 28. File 910. AO.

Rate?" was more extensive than the men's illustrates that Eaton's trainers invested more meaning in women's appearances than they did in men's. Such a development is not surprising, for in fact, throughout the forties and fifties Eaton's was engaged in an ongoing project to objectify, aestheticise, sexualise, and spectaclise the bodies of all of Eaton's female employees. In part, this project was linked to the intensification of the cult of domesticity that occurred among the bourgeoisie during the war and postwar years. However, it was also linked to Eaton's managers' beliefs that female sexuality was an important component of exchange-value.

In several programs offered both jointly and separately by the Staff Training Department and the Recreational Activities Department, women were encouraged to shape their bodies into attractive ornaments that would capture the admiration of all those who viewed them, including customers and managers. One way that the Staff Training and Recreational Activities Departments encouraged women to become attractive was through offering "self-improvement" lessons at the Eaton Girls' Club.[28] In 1944, for instance, the Club gave a "Series of Four Lectures on 'You Can Be Beautiful,'" which were on the subjects, "Foods You Should Eat for the Good of Your Skin," "the proper care of the hair," "the care of the body, how to relax, and the care of the feet," and, finally, "the wearing of foundation garments in relation to health."[29] By 1954, the scope of the self-improvement lessons had expanded dramatically, with the Club offering courses in "nutrition, proper eating, dieting, posture, make-up, exercise and good grooming, personal hygiene, hair care and styling, clothes and voice training." As added

[28] "Forty-six Get Diplomas," *Flash*, January 1954, p. 11.
[29] "Series of Four Lectures on 'You Can Be Beautiful,'" *Flash*, 28 Feb 1944, p. 6; "Three More Lectures on 'You Can Be Beautiful,'" *Flash*, 13 March 1944, p. 2.

attractions, "personal counsel and advice was made available to all who enrolled," and certificates were extended to those who completed the courses successfully.[30]

On one level, these self-improvement lessons reflected Eaton's paternalist concern to purify female employees' sexualised bodies—if women were well-rested and well-fed, they would demonstrate to Eaton's British-Canadian consuming public that they were fit to become what Mariana Valverde has referred to as "Mothers of the Race."[31] In her doctoral thesis about recreation for women at the T. Eaton Company during the early years of the twentieth century, Susan L. Forbes shows that some members of the Eaton family were members of the social purity movement that swept through the Canadian bourgeoisie at the turn of the twentieth century. Thus, she argues, Eaton's provided recreation to female employees to uplift the physical and moral health of the company's women workers.[32] On another level, however, by offering such training plans Eaton's Recreation Department demonstrated that Eaton's wished its female employees to develop proper eating, grooming, and body care habits that would increase their ornamental value. Indeed, managers desired attractive women to work at Eaton's, for not only was it "nice to have [good looking girls] around," as a male Merchandise Head put it in an address he gave to First Assistants in 1956,[33] but, by being pleasing for customers to look at and listen to, they also bolstered the firm's corporate image. As a Miss

---

[30] "Improvement Course Popular New Project." *Flash*, May 1953, p. 17.

[31] Mariana Valverde, "'When the Mother of the Race is Free:' Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism," *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 3-26. See also Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 175-208.

[32] Susan L. Forbes, "The Influence of the Social Reform Movement and T. Eaton Company's Business Practices on the Leisure of Eaton's Female Employees During the Early Twentieth Century" (PhD Thesis, Department of Kinesiology, University of Western Ontario, 1998). For more on moral and social reform in Canada, see Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

Elisabeth MacDonnell of Staff Training stated in relation to voice training: "'Conversation is your own *advertisement* . . . make friends with your dictionary."[34] By using the word "advertisement" to describe workers' voices, MacDonnell made it clear that self-improvement lessons were offered to female employees to increase the value of the store.

A second way that Eaton's encouraged women to become attractive was through offering a range of athletic activities through the Eaton's Girls' Club and Eaton's summer camp for women, which was named Shadow Lake Camp and located near Stouffville, Ontario. Eaton's also offered men the opportunity to participate in sporting events, but the gendered nature of these events illustrates that sports for men and sports for women were intended to serve different purposes. Both men and women were offered basketball, badminton, and bowling. However, only men were offered softball, soccer, and hockey; and only women were offered fencing, gymnastics, swimming, archery, and ballet.[35] The differences in movement and pace of men's and women's activities suggests that women's activities were intended to develop grace and poise, but men's activities were intended to develop muscular strength and agility. Therefore, Eaton's Recreation managers encouraged women to view themselves as aestheticised objects of other people's attention, thus enhancing their decorative value; and they encouraged men to view themselves as aggressive, powerful agents in Eaton's department store, thus enhancing their productive value.[36] Hence, the gendered nature of Eaton's sports programs

---

[33] "Address Given By Mr. M. A. Robinson in the Toronto Stores – July 11th, 14th and 20th, 1955," p. 10, F 229-162-28, File: Employees – Staff Training – Management Speeches – 1955, AO.
[34] As quoted in "Forty-six Get Diplomas," *Flash*, January 1954, p. 11. Emphasis added.
[35] See Recreation Department Reports, 1935 to 1960, F 229, Series 183, Box 1, AO.
[36] Indeed, one of the swimming clubs organized by Eaton Girls' Club managers was called the "Ornamental Swim Club"—see "Eaton's Girls' Club, 1956-1957," p. 2, F 229, Series 183, Box 2, AO.

reinforces the fact that while both male and female employees' bodies were viewed by managers as representing exchange-value, women's bodies were even more objectified than were men's.[37]

A final type of activity offered to women by the Staff Training and Recreation Departments that illustrates the historical connection between women workers' ornamental sexuality and Eaton's attempts to increase workers' exchange-value was the orchestrating of various sexualised performances for audiences consisting of co-workers, Eaton's executives, various Eaton's managers, and members of Toronto's consuming public. Fashion shows were the first of these performances. Eaton's produced fashion shows for its employees for several reasons, including staff training and the encouragement of a consumerist ethos, of which more will be discussed shortly. However, fashion shows also signified moments of intense aestheticisation, in which women's bodies became the explicit targets of both a consumerist and a male gaze.[38] Importantly, throughout the war and postwar years only one fashion show featured men.[39]

---

[37] In its use of market discourse, an advertisement for the Eaton Girls' Club, which appeared in *Flash* in January of 1945, illustrates well the links between exchange-value and women's sports:

> A New Year is like a new *shining silver dollar*. ...
> It may be well spent—or squandered.
> The same is true of our recreation time in the new year.
> Leisure is *too precious to waste*. ...
> THAT's where the Eaton Girls' Club fits in. ... it offers what is most important of all—games and exercises to help keep one fit.
> —Swing exercises and other gymnastics make you *feel like a million dollars*. ...
> —Archery for poise and accuracy. .... ["Eaton Girls' Club is Unique in the Entertainment and Benefits it Provides," *Flash*, 15 Jan 1945, pp. 6-7. Emphasis added.]

[38] Of course, women participated in fashion shows for their own reasons, and not for Eaton's ones: see Chapter Three.

[39] A description of the men's fashion show appears in "Now the Men Have Their Innings," *Flash*, 11 March 1940," p. 1.

In contrast, during this period there were over four fashion shows held annually that featured women.[40]

In one fashion show held in the Georgian Room in February of 1940, 25 women who worked in departments ranging from Main Store Neckwear to Sales Audit to General Office modeled evening gowns. A simulated wedding, in which women workers modeled wedding attire, was this show's finale. *Flash* describes the scene thus:

> Then, to the strains of the wedding march ..., walking demurely two by two, came four sweet bridesmaids in exquisite frocks of filmy pink and blue net .. their curls crowned with little flower hats. And last, like that breathless moment in a real wedding, the raven-haired bride, regal, in a long, flowing white satin gown, the train carried by two small boys in Eton suits, her misty veil floating behind her . . . . And WAS there applause!

After the show, according to *Flash*, "votes for the favourite dress [were] counted, and the model, **Miss Parish** of College Inspectors (who thereby wins a dress), again appeared on the runway in the gown, so picturesquely described on the programme as 'chiffon floating about you in turquoise clouds, wonderfully draped and molded.'"[41] From *Flash*'s description of this fashion show, it is clear that Eaton's trained women to consider themselves the objects of an admiring consumerist gaze. Not only was the audience encouraged to vote for their favourite dress, and hence their favourite model, but the models themselves were also encouraged to view their identities as bound to what they were wearing. The bridesmaids were considered to be "demure" and "sweet" because they were magical-looking maids, and the winning model of the chiffon dress, Miss Parish, was likened to an angel, framed as she was by "'chiffon clouds.'"

---

[40] Two of these annual shows were previews of the elaborate fashion shows the company put on for Toronto's consuming public; these were held in the Eaton's Auditorium and the Georgian Room. The other shows were held alternatively at the Eaton's Girls' Club and on the department store selling floor.
[41] "Last Fashion Tea Had Bridal Group," *Flash*, 4 March 1940, pp. 2-3. Emphasis in original.

The consumerist gaze was not the only gaze projected upon female fashion-show models. In February 1945, the Staff training Department held an "Employees' Fashion Forum" in the Georgian Room, in which professional models displayed the newest trends for the benefits of an audience comprised of employees from all of Eaton's fashion-related departments. Significantly, show spectators also included Company President John David Eaton, four male Company Directors, and the male Managers of the Canadian Department Stores. (The Canadian Department Stores, or CDS, were owned by the T. Eaton Company). According to *Flash*, audience participation was stressed throughout the Forum and ... many helped ... in picking out the 'Fashion Girl of the Season[.]'" However, a "handsome young sailor stole the show ... when he stubbornly refused to choose any one model, but sang, 'A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody' to show how he felt about them all!"[42]

Both the presence of the Company's executive at this forum and the sailors' complimenting of all the models on their prettiness are noteworthy. The Directors' and CDS Managers' spectating of the show suggests that women's objectified bodies are tied to exchange-value. The CDS managers, in fact, were visiting Eaton's the week of the fashion show to get their annual directives from the Company's executives.[43] That the executives took them to a fashion show suggests that the executives were training them in the season's newest styles; however, it is also likely that the executives brought the managers to the show for entertainment purposes. According to Rod McQueen, "John David liked to lunch in the Round Room at College Street or the Georgian Room at

---

[42] "Capacity Crowds Attend the Employees' Fashion Forum." *Flash*, 26 Feb 1945. pp. 6-7.
[43] Managers from throughout Ontario met in Toronto every February: see "Ontario Branch Stores' Managers Attend Annual Toronto Meeting," *Flash*, Feb 1955. p. 21.

Queen Street when there were fashion shows."[44] Apparently, the president liked also to flirt with the parading women: in 1977, a former Eaton's model recalled that she had once modeled in the Round Room "'in a hooded red coat.'" One day, she "'did [a] pirourette beside a table crowded with men. [John David] smiled at [her] and said ..., 'This must be Little Red Riding Hood.'"[45] When one considers this anecdotal evidence in combination with the fact that a sailor attending the Forum was chosen to pick the most charming model and fashion, it becomes apparent that both the clothes the models were wearing and the models themselves were the targets of a masculine and a consumerist gaze. The models were also the objects of what can only be called a "capitalist gaze," since John David brought the CDS Managers to the fashion show to teach them how to increase the selling power of their stores.

Besides fashion shows, Military Hospital Visiting Groups constituted another type of sexualised performance that was, perhaps, even more explicit in its demonstrating of the historical links between exchange value and women's decorative sexuality. Beginning in 1941, and under the aegis of the Eaton's Employees' War Auxiliary,[46] these visiting groups—comprised usually of about 100 female employees each—traveled monthly to Toronto's military hospitals to entertain wounded Servicemen. Bringing candy, fruit, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and cigarettes, all courtesy of Eaton's, they visited hundreds of men, often serving them snacks, tea, and even full-course meals. They also put on entertaining shows for the soldiers, which usually consisted of skits, dance numbers, and musical performances. In 1944, according to *Flash*, no less than "9960

---

[44] McQueen, *The Eatons*, p. 156.
[45] As quoted in McQueen, *The Eatons*, p. 156.
[46] The War Auxiliary was founded by Lady Eaton in 1941 and operated through the Eaton Girls' Club.

girl visits were made."[47] After the war, the visiting groups continued their activities, for, as Recreation Manager James Pryce put it in 1952, "[w]ith added casualities among the troops coming back from Korea, along with those confined to hospital as a result of the first and second world wars, there is no let up in the need for these groups and their good work among the sick, the disabled, and the lonely."[48]

Ostensibly, these visitation groups were simply one more philanthropic campaign bestowed by Eaton's on Toronto's unfortunates. Yet, they also served to implicate Eaton's "girls" in Eaton's philanthropy, and more specifically, they acted as occasions on which Eaton's endeavoured to put youthful female workers' decorative sexuality on display for the department store's consuming public. Certainly, Eaton's employees participated in military hospital visits for reasons which may or may not have coincided with those held by their employer. Nonetheless, the fact that women workers not only brought Eaton's commodities to the hospitals but also entertained patients with numerous alluring performances demonstrates that Eaton's was attempting to heighten its corporate profile by tying the value of both the company's corporate image and the company's commodities to the attractive bodies of its female workforce.

The Consumerist Ethos

So far, this chapter has demonstrated that Eaton's employees' position at the point of exchange subjected them to customers' consumerist gaze, to managers' attempts to make them personify the commodity aesthetic, and to managers' efforts to sell the department store through the promoting of female employees' sexuality. A final consequence of workers' situation at the centre of the capitalist marketplace was Eaton's

---

[47] ". . . FIVE YEARS WITH THE EATON EMPLOYEES' WAR AUXILIARY." *Flash*. 16 July 1945. p. 4. See also "War Auxiliary Members Visit Hospitals." *Flash*. 26 Feb 1945. p. 9.

attempts to brand them as loyal consumers. If workers genuinely enjoyed participating as consumers in Eaton's commodified world, managers believed, then both the profile of the department store and the value of its goods would rise.

By the 1940s, several strategies were in place at Eaton's designed to persuade employees to become consumers of Eaton's products. First, managers presented the company's wares appealingly to employees by placing advertisements regularly around the workplace. As well, the company offered 'exclusive' promotions that were available for employees' purchasing dollars only. *Flash* was an especially popular means of advertising the store's wares and services, and almost every issue marketed Eaton's products toward employees. In 1945, for example, the magazine carried an advertisement for Eaton's tailoring services, declaring that "As Eatonians we are lucky ...[The] Ladies' Tailoring Department is offering employees very special reduced prices on custom made coats and suits."[49] Similarly, in 1946, the magazine targeted employees with an article entitled "Wonderful Things for Sale in Sporting Goods Department," which announced that "there shouldn't be any disappointed men in your life come Christmas morning if you present them all with something from the [Sports Department]," including "Norwegian skis," "English bicycles," "and "fishing tackle."[50] Other services that Eaton's offered frequently to employees were those of the Travel Bureau and Hair and Beauty Salons.[51]

Flash also had a regular feature entitled "Around Our Stores." Started in the thirties and continuing into the fifties, this feature attempted to acquaint Eaton's workers

---

[48] Recreation Department Report, 1952, p. 14, F 229, Series 182, Box 1, AO.
[49] *Flash*, 31 Dec 1945, p. 11.
[50] "Wonderful Things for Sale In Sporting Goods Department," *Flash*, 2 Dec 1946, p. 12.
[51] "Planning Your Holidays?" *Flash*, 12 April 1943, p. 12.

with the various goods, services, and special promotions Eaton's was offering to the public. One average wartime issue, that of 10 April 1944, for instance, informed employees of promotions occurring in dress departments, infants' wear departments, flower departments, boys' clothing departments, and Toyland. It also mentioned that College Street was having a "Brighten the Home Week" in which various spring-related home items were featured, and that the Aisle of Ideas in the Main Store (a row of mannequins whose clothes were changed weekly) displayed "youthful fashions selected by our Junior Fashion Council."[52] By detailing to employees the various goods-related happenings of the stores, *Flash* hoped not only to keep employees' abreast of the store's happenings, but also to create excitement among employees' in Eaton's offerings, thus inciting them to make purchases.

To aid employees in their buying of Eaton's commodities, managers offered exclusive programs and payment plans for the company's workers. These included an Employees' Allowance that entailed 10% off on Eaton's goods during the year and 20% off at Christmas; an Employees' Charge Account that cost 25 cents a month and charged 5% interest per item; an Employees' Deposit Account that cost 24 cents a month and charged 2% interest annually; and a Budget Plan that allowed employees to make down payments on specific goods and then to pay the difference over a period of weeks.[53] Though these plans suggested exclusivisity for workers, in their charging of interest and promotion of purchase, they also generated profit for the store.

Managers further acquainted workers with Eaton's products and encouraged them to become consumers of the firm's commodities by giving gifts of Eaton's merchandise to

---

[52] "Around Our Stores," *Flash*, 10 April 1944, p. 4.
[53] "Eaton's and You," c1945, F 229, Series 171, Box 1, File: Notices to Employees, 1941 to 1950, AO.

employees on what the firm's managers considered to be special occasions. When female employees were engaged to be married, the firm gave them such wedding gifts as "Crystal, Flatware, Silver Tea Service, Entrée Dishes, etc., [and] Table Linen."[54] Between the nineteenth century and 1940, these wedding gifts were meant to double as retirement gifts, for the firm had a strict policy against allowing married women to work in waged employment. However, even though the firm relaxed its anti-marriage policies in the postwar years, it continued its practice of providing wedding gifts to females. It also—and accompanying the postwar emphasis on the nuclear family—expanded this wedding-gift practice to include male employees. In 1946, male employees began to receive wedding gifts that were "worth," according to one welfare manager, "one weeks' salary or $30, whichever is larger, plus $1.25 for each year of service, plus $10.00 if ten years or more."[55]

Other occasions that warranted gift-granting were Christmases, anniversaries, and retirements. The company held an annual Veteran's Christmas Party, at which it handed out the company's goods to veterans' children.[56] When employees reached twenty-five years of working with the company, the firm presented them with a gold watch, membership in the Quarter Century Club, flowers, an anniversary dinner party, and even sometimes a traveling case to take on the two-week vacation granted to every new Quarter Century Club member.[57] Every ten years after their Quarter Century anniversary,

---

[54] H. F. Switzer to Employment Office, 1 Dec 1952, F 229, Series 170, Box 11, File: P2-14, AO.
[55] January to June, 1946, F 229, Series 61, Vol. 60.
[56] "Christmas Tree Party for Veterans' Children," *Flash*, 30 Dec 1946, p. 3; "500 Youngsters Guests at Eaton Vets' Party," *Flash*, 17 Jan 1949; "The Eaton Veterans' Children's Christmas Tree," *Flash*, 8 Jan 1951, p. 9; "Eight Hundred Children Attend Veterans' Christmas Party," *Flash*, Jan 1953, pp. 12-3; "Veterans' Christmas Party," *Flash*, Jan 1955, p. 9.
[57] Every single issue of *Flash* contains Quarter Century Club news, but see for instance "Presentation Made in Annex Dress Department," *Flash*, 21 April 1947, p. 13; "Dinner Held for Quarter-Century Eatonian," *Flash*, 10 March 1947, p. 9; "Many Careers Developed at Eaton's," *Flash*, June 1955, p. 7.

and then every five years after their fortieth, workers also received small gifts like cosmetic cases and flower arrangements.[58] Finally, when long-term employees retired, the firm offered them gifts that varied according to their occupational status. While managers received presents of mahogany desks and paintings, waged employees received such gifts as lamps and clocks.[59]

Just as managers used gift-granting to saturate Eaton's workers' lives with Eaton's products and to encourage workers to be consumers, they also hoped to attain these ends by offering prizes to employees. At sporting events, managers usually offered such items as the John David Eaton Trophy, but sometimes, sports prizes consisted of several consumer goods sold by the company. At the annual New Year's Day Bowling Tournament in 1948, for instance, the company handed out four gold watches—two for female winners and two for male winners.[60] Occasionally, bingos were held in which employees competed for such items as lamps, rugs, and tables.[61] As well, at the numerous dances, fashion shows, teas, carnivals, club exhibitions, picnics, and other entertainment events offered by the firm, various draws for prizes were held. At the Victory Fair of 1944, which was a fundraiser for Eaton's Employees' War Auxiliary, no less than sixteen "grand prizes" were offered for the "Big Draw." These included a washer, a bicycle, a kitchen utensil set, a mantel clock, and a beauty kit.[62] Finally, every

---

[58] Again, though almost every issue contains news about 35th Century "Eatonians" and several issues contain news about 45th anniversaries, see for instance "35 Year Man is Honoured." *Flash*, 8 Dec 1947; "45 Years Here: Lamp is Gift," *Flash*, 15 March 1948, p. 16.

[59] As with anniversaries, *Flash* reported in every issue on retirements. See especially "Reception Honours 8 Men of Furniture and Bedding Departments." *Flash*, 17 June 1946, pp. 8-9; "Bon Voyage Party for Mrs. M. Rhooney," *Flash*, 7 April 1947, p. 12; "Retiring Eatonians Receive Gifts from Department." *Flash*, 10 March 1947, p. 9; "Recent Retirements," *Flash*, June 1950.

[60] "500 Enter New Year's Day Bowling Tournament: Gold Watch Prizes," *Flash*, 19 Jan 1948, pp. 6-7.

[61] "Eaton's-College Street 'Staff Nite' Monster Bingo," *Flash*, 8 Nov 1943, p. 9.

[62] "It's Coming! Victory Fair," *Flash*, 25 Sept 1944, p. 3.

year the company sponsored a Christmas Draw. In 1948, prizes offered in the draw were 15 turkeys, five chickens, three baskets of fruit, and two two-pound Christmas cakes.[63]

While advertising, "Around Our Stores," employee purchasing incentives, gifts, and prizes were directed toward all employees, there was one group of employees who were situated more closely to commodities at Eaton's than were all others: salespeople. Therefore, several techniques were designed to acquaint salespeople intimately with commodities, including staff information sessions, elaborate fashion shows, and product information manuals.[64] Yet, sellers were not only supposed to become knowledgeable about the goods they sold, they were also encouraged to become enthusiastic about them. In other words, they were to learn to consider themselves expert consumers to become expert sellers. Thus, all of Eaton's product training efforts directed toward salespeople not only acted as lessons in consumerism but also operated as advertisements for the firm's goods. To cite one example of thousands: in July of 1949, the Main Store's Drug Department gave a course to its female employees about how to use and sell cosmetics properly. According to the instructors from the Cosmetic School of Beauty Fashion, "'The precious products with millions of dollars in research, manufacture and advertising behind them are entrusted to you.'" After "an intensive eight-week course," budding beauty consultants "spent two weeks preparing for exams" to become "expert cosmeticians." The article that *Flash* printed of the event was direct in its message that sellers consider themselves both workers and consumers. Not only was it titled "Put

---

[63] "Get Your Tickets for Huge Christmas Draw." *Flash*, 6 Dec 1943, p. 10.

[64] On staff information sessions regarding product knowledge, refer to various articles in *Flash*, including an untitled article about fluorescent lighting, *Flash*, 14 April 1945, p. 5; "Piece Goods Holds Staff Dinner," *Flash*, 1 April 1940, p. 4; "Special Course Given in Textiles," *Flash*, 22 Dec 1947, p. 7. On fashion shows, see every March and September issue of *Flash*, which featured the events of various staff fashion shows. Product information manuals include AO, TEP, Series 162, Box 24, File 805, Items: "Toys" (1954); Merchandise Manual: Boys' Clothes and Furnishings" (1957); "So You're Selling Bedding!" (1954).

Your Best 'Face' Forward," but it instructed workers that enthusiastic consumption and the wearing of consumer articles were job requirements: "'A customer receives her impressions, favorable or otherwise, by the way she looks at you. Poise and appearance, attitude toward the customer, manner in which merchandise is presented, are all of utmost importance.'"[65]

In several ways, then, managers at Eaton's saturated their employees' working experiences with commodities and encouraged them to be consumers of Eaton's wares and services. In part, this saturation may be read as a function of Eaton's paternalism. In his study of late nineteenth-century factory life in England, Patrick Joyce finds that employers granted "faithful" workers such gifts as "easy chair[s]" to cement the "chain of authority in the factory."[66] It is apparent that Eaton's, as a highly paternalist organisation, also used the occasion of gift-giving to dampen class conflict and solidify the personnel hierarchy at the firm.

The descriptions in *Flash* of moments when employees received gifts, prizes, and other special commodity-related favours from the company provide one analytical window into the relationship between gift-giving and paternalism. When offering special discounts to employees on Eaton's goods and services, for example, managers phrased the offering of these discounts in ways suggesting that the firm extended these favours because Eaton's was an infinitely benevolent institution. In 1942, *Flash* announced that Eaton's was offering "Special Christmas Rates to Employees Only," therefore implying that Eatonians were privileged recipients of regal acts of kindness.[67] Similarly, in 1946,

---

[65] "Put Your Best 'Face' Forward." *Flash*, 25 July 1949, p. 9.
[66] Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: The culture of the factory in later Victorian England* (London: The Harvester Press, 1980), pp. 170, 176.
[67] "Special Christmas Rates to Employees Only," *Flash*, 23 Nov 1942, p. 5.

Flash notified workers that "Portraits by Violet Keene [Are] Specially Priced for Employees During Month of June."[68] In case Eaton's employees did not receive the message that these favours and discounts were meant to invoke gratitude, *Flash* often interpreted employees' sentiments for the employees, and in doing so implied that the only correct response to the firm's benevolence was gratitude. Following the annual Turkey Dinner of 1948, for which employees could attend for the low price of twenty-five cents, the editors typed up a letter from a fictional employee "Ann X," which stated: "To-day ... the writer partook of the annual Christmas Dinner ... It was delicious ... Our thanks to the Management for their thoughtfulness and gracious action."[69] By invoking gratitude, managers both cast the firm in a providerly role and intimated that, without Eaton's largesse, workers would 'go without' many privileges. Gifting was thus a linchpin of paternalism, with managerial initiatives in this area meant to remind employees that they were inferior to and dependent upon Eaton's.

However, to interpret Eaton's saturation of its employees' experiences with commodities solely as an outgrowth of Eaton's paternalism would be to miss the fact that Eaton's was building and supporting a culture of commodity consumption. As the numerous attempts to encourage workers' consumption of Eaton's commodities indicates, it is apparent that Eaton's paternalism was only one component of Eaton's overarching attempt to create a profitable, commodified work environment that celebrated workers' consumerist identities. Within this environment, Eaton's employees were branded not only as Eaton's workers but also as Eaton's consumers, and in both guises, they were loyal to the T. Eaton Company.

---

[68] "Portraits by Violet Keene." *Flash*, 3 June 1946, p. 6.
[69] "That Turkey Dinner!" *Flash*, 2 Jan 1949, p. 6.

An excerpt from a biography included in *Flash* about a female employee reaching her thirty-fifth anniversary with the firm articulates how this branding operated. According to the biography, "Miss Irene Carthy ... is another Eatonian who has spent all her years in the Mail Order." When she arrived at her desk on the day of her anniversary, "she found it covered with gifts—a vase of lovely yellow roses, bottles of perfume and cologne, and a leather handbag—all from her associates in the Mail Order Exchange." Though *Flash* does not state that Eaton's always paid for the majority of anniversary gifts given to Eaton's employees, it does state that these gifts are evidence of how "fond" her associates are of her. The most significant part of the biography, though, is *Flash*'s description of the years Carthy spent at Eaton's: "As a young girl in her teens, she gave up her ambitions to attend the University when her father died, and ever since has carried on with her work here, until now she is so thoroughly an Eatonian, [one] can almost see the diamond ◈ [an Eaton's trademark] on her face."[70]

In this excerpt, both the references to the gifts that Carthy received by Eaton's and the metaphorical stamping of an Eaton trademark on Carthy's body demonstrate that Eaton's blended paternalism with consumption in an attempt to create a commodified corporate ethos that cast workers not only as workers but also as consumers.[71] Such a practice was potentially immensely profitable. Not only would employees who were enthusiastic about the firm be hesitant to articulate grievances about Eaton's low salaries and arbitrary employment practices, but they would they would also increase the store's profile as Canada's leading retailer. Indeed, the employment of consuming workers

---

[70] "Four Eatonians Celebrate 35th Anniversaries." *Flash*. 19 June 1944. p. 2.

[71] In Chapter Three, this thesis demonstrates that workers participated as consumers in Eaton's commodity culture for reasons that stemmed from their own class experience.

generated massive amounts of free advertising for the company. When potential customers encountered Eaton's employees who were enthusiastic about the store's wares and services, Eaton's employees took on the role of promoters for the store and its goods.[72]

On the salesfloor, of course, workers being genuinely enthusiastic about Eaton's goods and services were even more profitable than those being enthusiastic about the company elsewhere. Not surprisingly, numerous selling guides emphasised the importance of enthusing about products. One manual issued in 1948 declared that "A good salesman realises that the things he offers for sale are inanimate things until he puts life into them by his own enthusiasm, knowledge, and interest."[73] Blending paternalism with commercialism, managers created a commodified world in which workers were encouraged to participate as both loyal workers and loyal consumers.

Conclusion

Applying commodification theory to an analysis of Eaton's workers' experiences, this chapter has demonstrated that Eaton's workers' class experience was structured by their central position in the market economy. When they were at work, they were subject to an intense consumerist gaze that was projected upon them by Eaton's shoppers. In training programs, their personalities and appearances were treated by managers as quantified and aestheticised vessels of exchange-value. If they were women, they faced numerous attempts by managers to sexualise and spectaclise their bodies and identities.

---

[72] Susan Porter Benson, in her work on saleswomen, managers, and customers in American department stores, has also pointed to this phenomenon: in 1929, a Filene's saleswoman "languishing in a hospital" "persuaded" a "fellow-patient" to go to Filene's and buy a new handbag. See Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 239.

[73] "Who Sells Eaton's to Them?" (1948), F 229 Series 170, Box 7, File H1-2, AO.

Finally, both on the job and in Eaton's personnel management schemes, their experiences were saturated with Eaton's commodities.

By focusing on Eaton's retail workers' encounters with commodity culture, this chapter has brought new insights to the field of commodification history. First, it demonstrates that consumers' actions in retail environments significantly affect retail workers' class experience. With the exception of Susan Porter Benson, most consumer historians tend to minimise the class dynamics of their subjects' consumerist activities.[74] Joy Parr, who does touch on shoppers' interactions with salespeople in her history of Canadian women's domestic consumption in the postwar years, portrays her consuming subjects as victims of male stove sellers' sexism and ignorance.[75] While it is important to trace the gendered inequalities between female consumers' and male salespeople's interactions, it is equally important to demonstrate that the relationship between these two groups of people was wrought with tensions deriving from class conflict. By exploring consumers' tendencies to scrutinise retail workers' bodies and identities, this chapter demonstrates that shoppers' activities have affected retail workers in more ways than consumer historians have articulated.

Second, in its demonstration that managers expected retail workers to personify the department store's commodities by, first, voicing the commodities' appeals to customers; second, fashioning pleasing personalities; and third, making their bodies appear as attractive as possible, this chapter has shown that the commodification of labour under capitalism often extends to the commodification of workers' entire beings. Not only did Eaton's commodify workers by purchasing their labour-power on the free

---

[74] Benson, *Counter Cultures*, pp. 258-265.
[75] Parr, *Domestic Goods*, pp. 200-2.

market, they also commodified workers by aestheticising their identities and appearances. In addition, the chapter's exposition of how Eaton's endeavoured to make its retail workers personify the commodity aesthetic also demonstrates that the quantification of value under market capitalism has had more effects on workers' lives than has been previously demonstrated by labour historians. Numerous academics have pointed out that quantification leads to the 'taylorisation' and specialisation of the work process.[76] As this chapter's discussion of the quantification of retail workers' appearances indicates, however, the quantification of value under capitalism not only affects the structures of the capitalist workplace, it also causes the segmentation of individual workers' bodies.

Third, by showing that women workers' sexuality was more inextricably bound to exchange-value than was men's, this chapter has illustrated that value is not a neutral, abstract entity. Like the market itself, which organised around the sexual division of labour, exchange-value is deeply affected by gendered processes that relegate women as secondary to men. As well, the links between value and female sexuality uncovered by this chapter provide historical evidence for Anne McClintock's assertion that commodity fetishism and psychoanalytic fetishism are related. Indeed, by depicting women as sexualised objects of men's gaze to sell commodities, Eaton's managers explicitly demonstrated that the desire for value and sexual desire are connected historical phenomena.

Fourth, by demonstrating that Eaton's created a commodified department-store environment in which workers were depicted as loyal, avid consumers, this chapter illustrates that the T. Eaton Company comfortably meshed the older, paternalist system of

---

[76] Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *The Jameson Reader*, eds. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks (New York: Blackwell, 2000), p. 124.

class relations with a newer, consumerist system of class relations. This meshing indicates that paternalism remained an effective means of employee control well into the twentieth century; it also demonstrates that the current business practice of awarding employees with commodities to spark an enthusiastic corporate ethos has a history firmly rooted in paternalism. In an unpublished undergraduate essay, for instance, Alison Howell shows that Dylex, owner of such retailing chains as Suzy Shier and La Senza, provides employees with apparel sold in its stores to engender identification with and loyalty to the company.[77]

Finally, the chapter reveals that studies of consumer culture should not be isolated from studies of commodity capitalism. Currently, there is a strand in consumption history that celebrates consumers' agency in the marketplace but tends to ignore the power of capital to shape people's consuming practices.[78] While it is important to illustrate that people consume for reasons that may be quite separate from the reasons imagined by retailers, detailing the agency of individual consumers without studying the agency of capital risks artificially separating the consumer from the social processes that arise from the free market. As this chapter demonstrates, capital exerts a tremendous influence on those who participate in commodity culture. Whether through the customer, whose economic power resided in his or her ability to purchase goods, or through the

---

[77] Alison Howell, "Retail Unionisation: An Historical Approach to the Suzy Shier Case," (Undergraduate Honours Thesis, Department of History, Trent University, 2000), p. 34.

[78] Many of these consumer historians have been influenced by the work of popular cultural theorist, John Fiske, especially his *Reading the Popular* (Boston: Unwin and Hyman, 1989) and *Understanding Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989).

employer, whose economic power resided in his position as the president of Canada's largest department store, the market economy profoundly shaped Eaton's workers' experiences in mid-twentieth-century Toronto.

CHAPTER 3

Performing Consumption: Participating in Eaton's Commodified World

In their introductory essay to *International Labor and Working-Class History*'s issue on "Class and Consumption," Lizabeth Cohen and Victoria de Grazia argue that it is necessary to "clarify the problematic relationship of class to consumption."[1] For historians acquainted with the recent bourgeoning of interest in consumer history, such a remark may seem surprising. In the last six years, at least five edited volumes on the history of consumer society have appeared,[2] and numerous scholars have turned their attention toward mapping the origins of contemporary consumer culture.[3] This explosion of work has produced many valuable insights into modern consumerism, especially the

---

Note: All issues of *Unionize* referred to in this chapter are located at the National Archives of Canada, in MG 31 B 31, Vol. 1.

Note: All issues of *Flash* referred to in this chapter are located at the Archives of Ontario, in the T. Eaton Papers (F 229), Series 141, microfilms 6767 through 6770.

[1] Lizabeth Cohen and Victorian de Grazia, "Class and Consumption: Introduction," *International Labor and Working Class History*, 55 (Spring 1999), p. 2.

[2] Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough, eds., *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Susan Strasser et. al., eds., *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Roger Horowitz & Arwen Mohun, eds., *His and Hers: Gender, Consumption, and Technology* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998); Lawrence B. Glickman, ed., *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999); Jennifer Scanlon, ed., *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

[3] In the United States, influential scholars are Lizabeth Cohen, Victoria de Grazia, and Kathy Peiss: see especially Cohen, "A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Consumption in Postwar America: An Interview With Lizabeth Cohen," Conducted by Lisa Kannenberg and Lisa Phillips, *The Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries*, 57 (1995), pp. 6-23; de Grazia, "Introduction" to *The Sex of Things*, pp. 1-11; and Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Owl Books, 1998). In Britain, Frank Mort is a leading consumption historian: see Mort, *cultures of consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996). In Canada, Joy Parr, Cynthia Wright, and Valerie Korinek have devoted substantial attention to consumer history. See Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Wright, "'The Most Prominent Rendezvous of the Feminine Toronto': Eaton's College Street and the Organization of Shopping in Toronto, 1920-1950," (PhD Thesis, Graduate

demonstration that people enter the mass market for complex reasons rooted in the exigencies of life within modern, patriarchal, and industrialised nations. Many consumer historians have thus provided welcome correctives to previous historiographical forays into consumption, such as T. J. Jackson Lears's *No Place of Grace*, which contends that modern consumers are passive historical agents in a meaningless commodity-filled world.[4]

A review of the majority of the literature devoted to consumption history, however, suggests that some of the gains in this field are being made at the expense of crucial insights derived from older analyses of the topic, especially those generated by critical theorists working in the commodification tradition.[5] In particular, by celebrating consumers' creative and subversive activities, some scholars have moved away from examining the economic and social structures that have given rise to many people's consuming actions.[6] Yet, just as the market engenders the creation of producerly identities, so too does it engender the creation of "consumerly" identities. Moreover, as John Clarke points out, there is a conceptual danger in placing too much emphasis on consumers' creative agency:

> [T]his view of [consumption as] cultural creativity highlights consumption as an active social practice and relegates exchange and commodity relations to the background. .... The effect, ironically, is to replicate that view of capitalism which capitalism would most like us to see: the richness of the marketplace and the freely-choosing consumer."[7]

Department of Education, University of Toronto, 1992); and Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

[4] T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), pp. 54-6.

[5] Chapter Two is an extended discussion of the commodification tradition and its proponents.

[6] Early and influential examples of this move are Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, *Resistance Through Rituals* (London: Hutchinson, 1976) and Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

[7] John Clarke, "'Mine eyes dazzle'" cultures of consumption," *New Times and Old Enemies: Essays on Cultural Studies and America* (London: HarperCollins*Academic*, 1991), p. 85.

By tracing the reasons causing Eaton's employees to participate in the T. Eaton Company's commodified world in mid-twentieth-century Toronto, this chapter joins other recent analyses of consumption history that focus on consumers' activities. However, by situating Eaton's employees' consuming interests within the free market, it also demonstrates that Eaton's workers' constructing of consumer identities was related to their experiences within commodity capitalism. Exploring documents contained in the T. Eaton Company's and the Department Store Employees' Union's archival collections, the chapter argues that Eaton's workers' position at the point of exchange prodded them to adopt consumerist and performative personas. In turn, these personas enabled Eaton's workers to take pride in their skills as retail labourers, to challenge managers' and customers' commodifying efforts, to alleviate their material concerns, to escape the routine of department-store work, and to express a tentative yearning for social change. Although their participation in the department store's commodified world did not lead Eaton's employees to articulate a collective critique of their marginal socioeconomic positions, their consuming activities were nevertheless shaped by their social and occupational experiences.

Due to their location on the salesfloor, salespeople were among the most commodifed of workers at Eaton's. They faced customers' scrutinising consumerist gazes, and they were instructed by managers to adopt appearances and personalities that would help the retailing firm sell its goods. Importantly, these commodifying efforts had a significant impact on sellers' working lives. First, to be a successful seller at the T. Eaton Company one needed also to be an expert consumer. At staff meetings, in sales training literature, and in *Flash*, salespeople were constantly reminded of the importance

of knowing intimately the make, quality, and uses of the various products around which they worked to convince customers to buy Eaton's goods.[8] Yet, though Eaton's clearly wanted salespeople to become expert consumers to increase their selling potential, it is also apparent that salespeople acquired knowledge of Eaton's products and communicated this knowledge to customers to achieve job satisfaction and to feel proud of their labour. In numerous letters of praise written to Eaton's, shoppers noted that salespeople's product knowledge was a key component of their decision to purchase the T. Eaton Company's goods. In 1944, one customer wrote to the firm expressing his appreciation for a certain shoe salesman. According to the customer, he never had comfortable feet until he "went to Mr. Thomas Marshall of Men's Shoes and got the Arch Preserver Shoe." Further, said the customer, Marshall "was very thorough in his efforts to see that I was properly fitted."[9] For this particular customer, Marshall's product knowledge enabled him to have comfortable feet. Though Marshall's own voice is missing in this letter, it is probable that he derived a measure of job satisfaction from applying his knowledge about Eaton's merchandise.

Being an expert in the details of the merchandise they were selling also helped many salespeople to assert respect in the face of customer's scrutinising consumerist gazes. One seller in the Paint Department, for instance, was able to command a secret shopper's approval in 1950 by demonstrating her intimate knowledge of the merchandise

---

[8] One sales training manual printed circa 1948, entitled "Keys to Selling Men's and Boy's Wear at Eaton's," informed sellers that "[f]ew customers are experts on clothing fabrics, therefore most of them rely on the knowledge and integrity of the store and its sales staff. Ready and accurate information which you can provide helps create customer confidence." After introducing the main types of fibres used in the making of men's and boy's clothing, the manual's authors presented a forty-entry "glossary of textile terms" ranging from "alpaca" to "worsted." Sellers were to learn the meanings of these terms, for, as the booklet pointed out, "the more you know about the merchandise you sell, the more fascinating and challenging your work becomes." ["Keys to Selling Men's and Boys' Wear at Eaton's," c1948, pp. 5-6, F 229, Series 162, Box 24, File 805, Archives of Ontario (hereafter AO).]

she was selling. "The department was particularly busy but ... there was no feeling of being rushed at any time. The saleslady guided my choice as to colour and told me the exact requirements for a room described. ... I would certainly return to this ... saleslady for any paint needs," wrote the secret shopper appreciatively.[10] Though the historian can never be sure of the origins of the Paint saleswoman's helpfulness, Stamp's description of her encounter with this particular seller suggests that her competent manner and her detailed product knowledge inspired Stamp to feel admiration and respect for her. Thus, by illustrating her position as an expert in Eaton's various paints, this Paint saleswoman was able to command respect from the customer.

Knowing the merits of the merchandise that Eaton's was peddling was not the only way salesworkers used their consumerist skills to enhance their workplace experiences. Just as shoppers measured Eaton's worth by assessing salespeople's behaviour and appearance, so too did salesworkers assess customers' behaviour and appearances to measure their abilities to purchase Eaton's goods. In the autumn of 1949, the Merchandise Managers at College Street hired Jan Chamberlain, a wealthy socialite, to shop Eaton's College Street to determine the quality of service salespeople were offering. On October 7, she delivered a seventeen-page typed speech to these managers describing her shopping experiences. In parts of her speech, she made suggestions on how to improve College Street's services. For the most part, however, she criticised College Street's salespeople's ineptitude, discourteousness, and unworthiness. Her description of a salesman in the Men's Shop was no exception:

---

[9] As quoted in *Flash*, 24 April 1944, p. 3.
[10] Jeanne Stamp to H. M. McEachren, "Paint," 21 Sept 1950, F 229, Series 69, Box 21, File: Employees, Shopping Surveys on, 1950-1, AO.

> Experiences in the Men's Shop are usually on the credit side. But in one instance I think the action of the salesman was typical of a somewhat general attitude throughout the store. That is – the assumption that the customer cannot afford the article in question.
> A friend of mine, from out of town, wanted a sweater. Naturally I brought him to this store. We visited the men's shop. 'I want a very light weight sweater, blue, button down the front,' my friend said. As he spoke the salesman began to reach up to a shelf behind him. My friend added – 'and not TOO expensive'. The salesman's hand stopped in mid air and came down empty. 'We haven't any,' he said.
> 'Do you mean you haven't any sweaters – or you just haven't any blue ones,' I questioned.
> 'We haven't any inexpensive ones in blue.'
> 'What were you about to show us?'
> 'That's cashmere'.
> If the salesman had been observant he would have notices that [my] friend was wearing a cashmere sports coat – and a very handsome one.
> 'How much is it?' my friend asked.
> 'Twenty-five dollars'. (with still no move to take the sweater down from the shelf.)
> 'May we look at it?' I suggested.
> THEN he brought it down. Now it seems to me anyone knows the way to sell cashmere is to let the customer feel it. ... But the salesman didn't unfold it – in fact he didn't ever let go of it. My friend remarked to me[,] 'The trouble with cashmere is – it's inclined to fluff a little.' It was merely a remark to me - - but before he had finished saying the words - - the sweater was back on the shelf.
> I am firmly convinced if that salesman had simply said; 'Would you like to try the sweater on, sir?' - - he would have sold it. As it was, we bought nothing.[11]

In Chamberlain's opinion, the salesman's haughty manner was indicative of his poor salesmanship abilities. He did not know how to accurately assess shoppers' spending power, he was too lazy to unfold the cashmere sweater, and he was not willing to serve his customers. However, if one views this anecdote not from Chamberlain's point of view but from the Men's Shop salesman's, a different picture emerges. For some reason unstated by Chamberlain, this seller had determined soon after he started serving Chamberlain and her friend that they could not afford cashmere—even though the male

shopper had been wearing a cashmere sports coat. He thus decided not to waste his time folding, unfolding, and selling merchandise to customers who would not make any purchases.

Though such a motive may strike the historian as trivial, for salespeople it made perfect sense because their productivity was measured by how many dollars and units they could move through the store each day. In a speech he gave to all the First Assistants in Toronto, Eaton's Head Merchandise Manager articulated clearly Eaton's determination of sales employees' value through how many sales they could make:

> Another large Expense item is our staff. We should only have staff that is commensurate with the volume of business done. It isn't difficult to determine how many you should have. Just yesterday, I was after a department for high staff with no justification. I was trying to find out why the count was up. I heard the manager had said that it was nice to have them around. Now it is nice to have people around – I guess they were good looking girls, I don't know, but at the end of six months, it would be nice to have a profit. As I recall, the department's staff was up six people. The transactions were up slightly, but not sufficiently to warrant the increased staff the department had hired.[12]

For this high-ranking manager, salespeople's worth derived from how much profit they could make for the department store. Thus, for sellers interested in demonstrating to Eaton's that they should be able to keep their jobs, it made economic sense to pay little attention to patrons who looked as though they would not be able to afford Eaton's goods.

Using one's consumerist skills to measure customers' spending power also enabled salespeople to heighten their selling skills and job performance. By determining the price range individual customers' could afford, salespeople were able to offer them goods that would suit both their customers' tastes and their pocketbooks. There is

---

[11] "Evaluation of Selling Service," "Address by Jan Chamberlain to Store Supervisors, Eaton's College Street, Friday, October 7th, 1949," pp. 4-5, F 229, Series 165, Box 4, File 08-10-02, AO.

evidence in several letters written by customers to the T. Eaton Company that shoppers appreciated salespeople's ability to show them goods that they could afford. One customer wrote in 1945, for instance, to thank a saleswoman in the Main Store Shoe Department for helping her with "an inexpensive item."[13]

Further, salespeople used their skills to assess customers' abilities to purchase Eaton's goods to assert power on the salesfloor. By suggesting to customers through body language and voice inflections that they were not worth salespeople's time, salespeople were able to control their working environments. In 1951, one male shopper wrote a lengthy letter to the College Street Store to complain about the treatment he received when he dared to go shopping at the establishment "minus [his] coat, it being a warm day, and [his] office being close by." According to the shopper, Eaton's may as well have posted at its entrances signs that stated, "'Abandon hope all ye who (not wealthy) enter here,'" for throughout the store he was met with disdain by the salesclerks. Even more irksome, every employee he encountered endeavoured to escape waiting on him. According to this customer, his lack of proper attire put him at the mercy of the College Street salespeople, who in turn treated him snobbishly because he looked as though he could not afford to purchase any commodities.[14]

Though in this shopper's opinion, employees were treating him poorly simply out of spite, a closer examination of his letter reveals that salespeople were acting out of reasons that grew from their own experiences on the salesfloor. By deciding who they would serve, as well as when and how, salespeople demonstrated that they were not

---

[12] "Address Given By Mr. M. A. Robinson in the Toronto Stores – July 11th, 14th and 20th, 1955," pp. 9-10. F 229, Series 162, Box 28, File: Employees – Staff Training – Management Speeches – 1955, AO.
[13] As quoted in *Flash*, 15 Jan 1945, p. 11.

employed by Eaton's solely to serve willingly all people who walked through the T. Eaton Company's doors. In this way, they intimated to customers that simply because they were on the purchasing side of the counter while workers were on the serving side, salespeople still considered themselves to be the equal of browsers and buyers.

Finally, and as the letter written by the angry male shopper suggests, salespeople used their skills as astute consumers to attack the class position of those whom they were serving. In 1957, a Staff Trainer sent a "Memo to Management" outlining one customer's written complaint that was "so serious" he urged Eaton's Directors to take "Store-wide action." In his memo, he quoted the customer's letter:

> [I overheard one salesperson] loudly voicing her opinions about customers in general—and all of her opinions were offensively critical to those waiting, who were in no way responsible for them, and yet who perforce had to listen to this dialogue of impertinent and, at the time at least, uncalled-for comment. Customers' buying habits, their buying and charging because they hadn't the money to pay for good[s] bought—these were some of the subjects that called forth suppressed laughter and sarcastic comments. As a Canadian, and a customer (with a Charge Account which used as a convenience) and not as a means of buying what one cannot pay for, as these women said, I am zealous of Eaton's reputation. It is not helped by such things as I have described.[15]

This customer was angry because saleswomen were attacking the very reason causing customers to be on one side of the counter and workers to be on the other: her ownership of money. By criticising customers' rights and abilities to spend, these saleswomen publicly voiced their disapproval of those who thought they had the right to demand service from salesworkers. By extension, they were also drawing customers' attention to the fact that they recognised that shoppers' social power derived from their

---

[14] Robert Venning to Administration Office, 12 June 1951, F 229, Series 69, Box 16, File: "1949-1952, Complaints (Actual) (Except Contract and Interior Decorating)," AO.

[15] W. A. Robinson to Management, 10 Dec 1957. F 229, Series 69, Box 36, File: "Staff Training, General, 1949-mid 60," AO. Emphasis in original.

economic privilege. This drawing of attention toward the customer's ownership of capital was what caused this complaining customer to become upset. In Canada, a nation that promised equality and justice to all, here were salespeople—the very people who were supposed to serve the customer obligingly and silently—loudly deflating this customer's claim to status. Salespeople's ability to measure customers' spending power was thus a disconcerting mode of class expression. As workers situated at the heart of the free market, salespeople understood only too well how some people's access to money gave them power over those without such access. By stating that customers did not have the ability to make purchases, these saleswomen diminished their customers' right to power through belittling them in the place where it had the potential to hurt them the most: their wallets.

Thus, salespeople used their identities as expert consumers to assert pride in their labour, to develop their selling skills, and to assert a class-based sense of power in relation to Eaton's customers. A review of their behaviour on the salesfloor, however, indicates the adoption of consuming skills was not the only way they could meet these ends. In Chapter Two, this thesis illustrated that Staff Trainers were commodifying salespeople's bodies and personalities by encouraging them to be obliging, well-mannered, and well-behaved. However, if one examines salespeople's actual adoption of selling strategies, it becomes equally clear that Eaton's salespeople's viewed their skills not through the lens of exchange-value but rather through the lens of performance. While Eaton's treated salespeople and saleswork in commodified terms, salespeople viewed themselves and their work in performative terms. This performative aspect of saleswork allowed sellers to negotiate the commodifying efforts of customers and managers.

First, sellers often exaggerated managers' expectations of their behaviour on the salesfloor. In several training programs, Eaton's intimated that one of the key tenets of customer service at Eaton's was to be genuinely interested in shoppers. One 1949 sales manual, for example, instructed workers to "Give the customer your undivided attention."[16] Judging from letters of praise written to Eaton's about salespeople's behaviour, it is clear that numerous workers were attentive to shoppers. In 1943, a customer wrote to thank a man in the Optical Department for "your attention, your kindness and consideration to me when calling on you regarding my hearing aid[.]"[17]

It is equally clear, however, that Eaton's salespeople sometimes chose to exaggerate this attention. Secret Shopper Jeanne Stamp reported in 1950 of her visit to the Fire Screens Department at College Street that:

> This was my second purchase in this department and my second impression was similar to my first—one of confusion. The salesman who looked after me had a very high handed manner—whether he surmised that I was not a regular customer or not I do not know, but he was inquisitive to the point of embarrassment.[18]

Thus, by being "inquisitive to the point of embarrassment," this Fire Screens seller chose to exaggerate the attention that he was supposed to give to customers. In so doing, he made the Secret Shopper feel uncomfortable, and he therefore also asserted a sense of power over his customer. He also suggested to his customer that he would perform his job not how the secret shopper expected him to, but instead according to how he felt it should be performed. Though the secret shopper was unsure whether or not the salesman knew of her true reason of being in the department—which was to "snoop," as one

---

[16] "NOW is the time ... to ask yourself ... 'Do I Arouse the Customer's Interest in the Merchandise I Sell?'" 1949, p. 1, F 229, Series 62, Box 25, File 826, AO.
[17] As quoted in *Flash*, 1 March 1943, p. 9.

contributor to the Department Store Employees' Union's weekly newsletter characterised secret shopping 1949[19]—it is possible that the salesman figured out her role in the store from the way she behaved and from any questions that she may have asked him. At any rate, his exaggeration of Eaton's demand that he pay full attention to the customer signals that he considered his time on the job as a performance that could be altered in ways that suited his needs.

Just as salespeople exaggerated the attention they were to give to customers, they also exaggerated the politeness, cheerfulness, and deference that managers and customers expected them to display at work. As one sales training manual put it in 1949, "Remember—there are three things you can sell to every customer; the merchandise in your own department, Eaton's friendly service, and your own reputation for courtesy and consideration!"[20] Certainly, many salespeople did demonstrate these qualities to customers: one customer wrote to congratulate Eaton's for employing Mary Duncan, whom the customer considered an "excellent salesgirl" because she "was very pleasant in her manner, friendly, and very interested in suiting [the customer's] needs."[21] However, it is also apparent that sellers could freely distort their supposedly inherent personal charm through exaggerated performances of this charm. Around 1950, Eaton's issued a sales booklet that instructed sellers to:

> Be friendly but not fresh; cordial but not cheeky; never chatty unless your customer likes a free flow of talk. Most customers dislike it. ... .
> Tact is needed as much in selling as it is in every other relation of life. So is courtesy. They will keep you from making those back-handed

---

[18] "Fire Screens." Jeanne Stamp to F. McEachren, 11 Nov 1950, F 229, Series 69, Box 21, File: Employees. Shopping Surveys on, 1950-1, AO.
[19] "Hep," as quoted in "Letter to the Editor," *Unionize*, 2 (19 April 1949), p. 4.
[20] "NOW is the time ... to ask yourself: 'Am I doing everything I can to make my customers want to come back—to me?'" 1949, p. 1, F 229, Series 162, Box 25, File 826, AO.
[21] As quoted in *Flash*, 6 Aug 1940, p. 3.

> compliments such as 'It makes you look much slimmer', or 'So becoming – it does something for you.'
> Professional brightness is tiresome. No one wants a Pollyana to wait on her. Be enthusiastic but don't overdo it.[22]

Presumably, instructions to avoid being "fresh," "cheeky," "chatty," tactless, discourteous, professionally bright, and "Pollyana"-like would not be necessary if sales employees did not actually behave in these ways on some occasions. By reprimanding employees for such behaviour, this manual suggests to historians that salespeople purposefully exaggerated their conduct on the salesfloor. These exaggerations are thus indicators of latent class tensions in the department store: by exaggerating management's expectations, workers asserted power over customers and subverted Eaton's push for profit. These exaggerations are also evidence that sales employees considered their selling activities as performances. By inflating the demands placed upon them by managers, salespeople turned their conduct on the salesfloor into a performance that mocked Eaton's standards and customers' expectations.

By exaggerating their behaviour on the salesfloor, employees navigated customers' and managers' commodifying efforts by turning their workplaces into performative arenas. This performative atmosphere dovetailed neatly with a third aspect of salespeople's consumer personas: their presentation of a stylish and attractive appearance to Eaton's consuming public. As Chapter Two demonstrated, Eaton's instructed salespeople to cultivate fashionable and attractive appearances. In the minds of Eaton's managers, a standardised level of attractiveness increased the exchange-value contained in salesworkers' bodies; it also therefore increased Eaton's chances of selling goods to its customers.

A review of both Eaton's and the Department Store Employees' Union archival records does indicate that salespeople were interested in both fashion and personal grooming. Photographs of salespeople in *Flash* and *Unionize*, for instance, consistently portray sellers as well-groomed, being interested in fashion, and wearing stylish clothing. Nonetheless, salespeople did not cultivate stylish appearances simply to aid Eaton's profit-motive. First, for many salespeople, being stylish and maintaining a well-kept appearance was a crucial component of their workplace skill. In Autumn 1952, Eaton's ran a contest entitled "What Makes A Person Good in His Job?" After the contest, the editors of *Flash* published what they considered to be some of the more notable entries. Three different saleswomen responded that "a neat appearance," "personal neatness," and "[a]ppearance" were integral to one's occupational skills.[23]

Though an acquaintance with fashion and knowledge of stylish grooming habits were important, being knowledgeable about grooming and fashion trends also enabled salespeople to take pride in their skills. One self-described "'salesclerk'" was quoted in an August 1948 issue of *Unionize* as saying, "'I like meeting customers and get a kick out of selling them clothes they really like. My customers like to be waited on by a girl who is friendly, courteous, and gay, not by a sad sack who is worrying about room rent and the cost of meals. But jeepers, who can help worrying on Eaton's salaries?'"[24]

Though this seller did not explicitly state that she liked knowing about changing fashion trends, it is probable that she did. Certainly, it would be hard to be skilful in the art of selling clothing without being cognizant of women's fashion. Moreover, a close-up

---

[22] "SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SELLING," c1950, p. 3, F 229, Series 162, Box 25, File 816, AO.
[23] "What Makes A Person Good in His Job?" *Flash*, January 1953, p. 17.
[24] As quoted in "I'm Joining Local 1000 Because . . .." *Unionize*, 22 (31 Aug 1948), p. 1.

photograph of this saleswoman accompanied her statement, and from this photograph it is possible to determine that she herself had a stylish and well-groomed appearance. On her head she is sporting a "casquette hat," which *Flash* once described as a "combination of cap and beret."[25] This hat was considered by leaders in the fashion industry to be very stylish through 1947 and 1948, and it appeared in several of Eaton's fashion shows as well as in fashion instruction articles in *Flash*.[26] Since the editors of *Unionize* placed a "censor strip" across this saleswoman's eyes, it is impossible to determine if she wore eye make-up, but it is nevertheless apparent from the photograph that she wore lipstick.

When one considers this saleswomen's quotation together with her photograph, it becomes clear that not only did she enjoy selling clothes, but she herself was an active participant in the world of fashion and beauty. Furthermore, her self-assured tone and willingness to appear in *Unionize* during the beginning months of the drive—a period when numerous workers were scared of being fired for demonstrating interest in Local 1000—suggests that she was confident in her status as a skilled seller. Such evidence shows that, at least for this salesclerk, being knowledgeable about fashion and grooming were integral components of retail labourers' identities.

Being fashionable and well-groomed also served as an avenue through which Eaton's workers could claim respect from Eaton's customers. In 1953, Eaton's interviewed several sales employees about what working conditions they would like to improve at Eaton's. According to the report drawn up for the Staff Superintendent by the leaders of the campaign,

---

[25] "Lavish current Fashions Passport to Feminine Poise." *Flash*. 29 Sept 1949. p. 9.
[26] "Lavish current Fashions Passport to Feminine Poise." pp. 8-9; "Points to Remember About Spring Millinery." *Flash*. 24 Feb 1947. p. 11; "Why Women Wear Hats." *Flash*. Christmas 1948. p. 23.

> hundreds of employees find it most difficult to practise their natural ability to be courteous after having spent the opening hours of the day in filthy and/or hot receiving or stock rooms. This situation of soiled, perspiring employees returning to the sales floor to contact customers applies to both sexes.[27]

Though this quotation's focus is on salespeople's inability to be courteous due to having to perform stockwork, the quotation also implies that "hundreds of employees" did not wish to greet customers if their appearances had been spoiled by hours of physical exertion. For them, maintaining an attractive appearance was a crucial component of customer-service work.

While many salespeople asserted respect from their customers by dressing well and appearing attractive on the job, some salespeople even intimidated their customers by being more stylish and attractive than were the customers themselves. In 1946, a customer who called herself "Very Much Disgruntled" wrote to the T. Eaton Company to complain about the treatment she received from some hosiery salesclerks at College Street. "The day previous," she related,

> "I lined up at the stocking bull ring [hosiery counter] for 35 min. when the *Duchess* came out with about a dozen boxes of Nylons, were sold, the sales clerks looking at the customers patronizingly with raised eyebrows and put the sign 'No Nylon or Rayons' today. Now I ask you, in this day and age do we have to put up with this kind of treatment? [Emphasis added.]

After suggesting that the hosiery department adopt a new system of selling hosiery, she continued,

> During war days it was extremely nauseating to watch that *grinning bunch of hyenas* in the hosiery counter doing nothing when the people in the lunch rooms couldn't get waited on ... . [Also] It is very noticeable when

---

[27] Leaders of the Courtesy and Service Campaign to I. W. Ford, Staff Superintendent, 1 May 1953, F 229, Series 69, Box 36, File: Staff Training, General, 1949 to 1960, AO.

> a man looms up at a counter the girls ignore the women who are waiting and wait on the men. It is simply disgusting.[28] [Emphasis added.]

Though Very Much Disgruntled does not specifically state that she felt intimidated by the "hyenas" in the Hosiery Department, her tone and word choices, which are simultaneously defensive and angry, does suggest that she felt disconcerted by the sales employees. To begin with, hyenas figure in the popular imagination as both predators and laughers. By using this animal as a metaphor for sales employees, Very Much Disgruntled implied that she was both hounded and ridiculed by the hosiery workers. And, though Very Much Disgruntled did not explicitly refer to the fact that Eaton's stocking sellers were well-dressed or attractive, there are several indications in her letter that do point to her belief that they were. By choosing to call the saleswoman who brought out a limited quantity of hosiery a "Duchess," Very Much Disgruntled intimated that this saleswoman has affected a higher social standing than that of her customers. Since Duchesses are usually associated in the popular imagination with beauty, fashion, and royalty—one needs only to consider the Duchess of York—it is also likely that Very Much Disgruntled believed that the saleswoman's superior attitude arose from her attractive and stylish appearance combined with an exalted sense of status. Similarly, though the hyena metaphor implied that the customer felt intimidated by the salesworkers, it also suggests that the root of this intimidation was the salespeople's stylish self-assurance. In the popular imagination, hyenas are usually associated with dogs, but they are uglier than are their domesticated cousins.[29] By calling the salespeople

---

[28] "Very Much Disgruntled" to T. Eaton Co. Ltd., 23 March 1946, F 229, Series 69, Box 16, File: 1943-1948, Complaints (Actual) (Except Contract and Interior Decorating), AO.

[29] See for instance Disney's *The Lion King*, in which ugly and ruthless hyenas pose a constant threat to the well-being of a heroic and virtuous lion clan.

hyenas, this customer attacked the root of what she felt gave the salespeople their haughtiness; that is, their superior attractiveness.

In her letter, Very Much Disgruntled provides historical evidence that at least some sellers at Eaton's used their knowledge of fashion as well as their stylish appearances to assert power over customers. Yet, it is also apparent that this phenomenon was not limited to hosiery salesclerks, for a 1948 sales manual entitled "SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SELLING" berated all sales employees for appearing more fashionable than Eaton's patrons. Under the heading "APPEARANCE," it instructed, "The accepted dress for good salesmanship is definitely inconspicuous. No gaudy jewelry or accessories; no flashy neckties. Any oddity of appearance distracts the attention of the customer. ... Hair should be neat and well-groomed looking. A fantastic hair-do is definitely out of the picture."[30] By asking sales employees to tone down their stylistic appearances so as to not discombobulate customers, "SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SELLING" illustrates that many sales employees did indeed intimidate customers with their skilful knowledge of fashion and grooming.

As a result of their commodified experiences at the point of exchange, Eaton's sales employees developed consumerist, performative, and stylish personas. In turn, these personas enabled salesworkers to derive small measures of job satisfaction, to claim respect in their status as retail labourers, and to assert power over those who commodified them. Salespeople, however, were not the only group of workers at Eaton's who were commodified. As Chapter Two points out, Eaton's managers also heavily aestheticised the bodies and identities of all of the T. Eaton Company's female employees. By training women to be active participants in fashion and beauty culture, by

encouraging women to form their bodies into ornamental shapes through participating in Recreational Activities, and by sending Military Hospital Visitation groups to entertain Canada's wounded male soldiers, Eaton's encouraged its women workers to view themselves as sexualised and attractive objects of a masculine, capitalist, and consumerist gaze.

Though the elucidation of women's commodification at Eaton's is important, it nevertheless presents an incomplete picture of Eaton's female employees' experiences. To understand the full significance of women's aestheticisation under the conditions of the free market, the historian must not only understand why business seeks to objectify women but also understand why women participate in their own aestheticisation. For this reason, it is necessary to explain women's beautifying practices in the context of women's historical conditions and structural opportunities.[31]

To begin with, women's economic and social status at Eaton's was determined by their biological status as females. Viewed as mothers and daughters, they were understood by management to be the metaphorical dependents of the Eaton family and the actual dependents of their fathers and husbands. This arrangement caused women's occupational security at Eaton's to be tenuous at best. Though the lack of a union at the department store meant that management was able to hire, fire, and promote both males and females as freely as they wished, women employees were viewed by management as even more expendable than were men. Against direct evidence to the contrary, management pretended that all of Eaton's female workers—as wives and daughters—did

---

[30] "SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SELLING," p. 2, F 229, Series 162, Box 24, File 816, AO.
[31] In "'Consumerism' and Women," *Voices from Women's Liberation*, ed. Leslie B. Tanner (New York: New American Library, 1971), pp. 307-313, Ellen Willis also argues for this analytical approach to working women's participation in the fashion and beauty industries.

not rely on their income for sustenance,[32] and they therefore felt justified for firing women without cause or compensation when labour costs grew too high.

A second consequence of Eaton's division of labour was that management believed that female employees' bodies and identities served an ornamental function that simultaneously enhanced the value of the department store and provided a sexualised and aesthetically-pleasing distraction for both management and potential customers. This belief, its origins, and its manifestations are discussed in Chapter Two, but suffice it to say here that whether they were at work, participating in Recreational Activities, reading *Flash*, or attending Eaton's numerous training and social events, Eaton's female employees were faced at every turn with the demand that they appear attractive for the benefits of those who could be watching them.

Further, not only were women workers encouraged to view themselves as objects of a commodifying gaze, they were also told by management that their occupational success rested on their abilities to make themselves appear desirable and unthreatening. A *Flash* article of 1950 titled "Introducing 'Jackie' and 'Peggy,'" which described for *Flash*'s readers the two newest additions to the Eaton Girls' Club staff, provides a good example of Eaton's linking of job security and mobility with women's appearances. Underneath close-up photographs of Jackie and Peggy appeared the following text:

> ... Peggy graduated from the Arts course [at Queen's] in 1949 and went on to graduate in Physical Education in 1950. She is small, about 5 ft. 3 ins., brown hair and brown eyes. These qualifications as well as her pleasant personality won her a place on the Queen's Cheerleading team. ... . Jackie is 5 ft. 6 ins. Tall, blonde hair, blue eyes, this along with her grand personality won her the title "Sweetheart of Sigma Chi" at the University [of Toronto] last year.[33]

---

[32] The Wages Statistics Office, for instance, contained records indicating that four percent of Eaton's total workforce were widowed women. See Table 5 in the Appendix.
[33] "Introducing 'Jackie' and 'Peggy,'" *Flash*, 16 Oct 1950, p. 16.

In "Introducing 'Jackie' and 'Peggy,' Eaton's message to its female staff was clear. As a direct result of their abilities to present their appearances and personalities in pleasing ways to Queen's University, the University of Toronto, and the T. Eaton Company, Eaton's personnel managers awarded Jackie and Peggy with high-profile, salaried jobs in the Recreational Department. What was not stated, but which was just as important, was the suggestion that women whom Eaton's did not consider to possess attractive appearances and personalities were not qualified for prestigious positions at the firm.

When one considers management's expectation that Eaton's female employees conform to an ideal of objectified femininity in conjunction with the lack of occupational security that women faced at the department store in mid-century, it is understandable that many working women would construct aestheticised versions of themselves. Indeed, if women wanted to feel secure in their jobs, there is no way that they could have missed Eaton's clear message that looking good while at work was a prerequisite.[34] As important

---

[34] Indeed, that Eaton's expected women to perform decorative functions was so ingrained in the department-store's cultural world that *Flash*'s editors felt it was entirely appropriate to regularly include jokes in the magazine about women's sexualized roles. Underneath a column that ran between 1947 and 1949, entitled "Strictly for the Girls!", for instance, the following anecdote appeared:

> *We needed a new secretary in the office and were interviewing applicants for the job. There was a nice looking brunette whose references were in good shape. She was asked how much salary she expected.*
> *"Forty dollars a week," she answered.*
> *"Forty dollars take home pay, or does that include withholding?"*
> *She thought for a moment and then answered, "With holding, it'll be fifty!* [*Flash*, 25 July 1949, p. 31.]"

The success of this joke's punchline is its referral to women's ornamental and sexualized roles in Eaton's offices: the "nice looking brunette" fully expected that managers would want to "hold" her. The joke thus plays on the sexualized tension apparent in Eaton's offices. As well, its referral to the job applicant's references as being "in good shape," the (presumably male) narrator of the joke displaces his interest in the applicant's body onto her references. Moreover, the joke underlines women's incompetence when it comes to brainwork: clearly, the man is the more intelligent of the joke's subjects. This joke thus reinforces the sexualized division of labour at the firm, namely, that men are smart and productive, and that women are stupid and attractive. Finally, and most significantly, this joke infuses the job application process with sexual meaning. Such infusion implicitly equates women's abilities to earn money with their abilities to be attractive to Eaton's male managers. That the "nice looking brunette" predicted that managers would want

as their needs to keep their jobs were, however, there were other reasons that caused female employees to be interested in making themselves appear attractive. First, it afforded them the opportunity for upward mobility. The only positions at the T. Eaton Company that were recognised as skilled and were open to women were those designated by management as feminine, including upper-level restaurant managers, dieticians, hairdressers, beauty consultants, Buyers of women's and children's clothes, interior decorators, and Eaton Girls' Club coordinators.[35] Though not directly related to women's sexualised appearances, being knowledgeable about beauty and fashion was an asset to female managers and dieticians in Restaurants because due to women's supposed domestic skills, their ability to appear feminine reinforced their status as being knowledgeable about food. Indeed, *Flash* commented at least once on the appearance of Eaton's dieticians: in an article about a male Time Office employee's retirement, the magazine included a picture of two women lunching with several men. According to the caption of the photo, "[t]he two pretty dieticians at the left escorted [the retiring Eatonian] to lunch the other day[.]"[36]

Though the dieticians gained upward mobility through appearing attractive, those women who were able to obtain upper-level Beauty and Merchandise positions gained the most prestige of all of Eaton's female workers. Claire Dreier, for instance, became one of Eaton's most famous female employees by founding Eaton's Wedding Bureau in 1937, which by 1954 "handle[d] upwards of 900 weddings annually, plus countless

---

to "hold" her therefore inadvertently demonstrates that she—and her female readers—well-recognized the conflation of work and sexuality at the workplace.

[35] Management Signature Lists. 1940-1956. F 229, Box 3. Series 59. AO.

[36] "Best Wishes to Retiring Eatonians." *Flash*, Aug 1949. p. 8.

inquiries concerning weddings."[37] Starting out as telephone solicitor in Wisconsin, by her twenties she was a Sales Manager at a toy company in New York. In 1929, Eaton's hired Dreier as an "'adviser'" in the Toy Department, and from there, Dreier eventually became one of Toronto's most sought-after wedding consultants. Crucial to Dreier's success was a combination of three factors. The first was her flair with fashion: she was "the authority on what's worn for a formal evening wedding." Second was her understanding of traditional women's culture: "[s]he's also a favourite godmother to many of her customers' children." And third was her confidence in her merchandising abilities: before she became the Wedding Planner she threatened to quit Eaton's when they did not allow her to perform her merchandising job in Toy Department the way she thought best. Dreier herself was the epitome of stylish sophistication, appearing in pictures in *Flash* as perfectly coiffed and dressed.[38]

Dreier's success, then, depended on her cultivation of skills considered feminine by both Eaton's management and Eaton's customers. The careers of other prestigious Eaton's female employees also indicate the links between appearing attractive and attaining occupational mobility. Fashion Consultant Dora Matthews, who was named twice by the *Toronto Telegram* as one of Toronto's ten "'Best Dressed,'" was considered during the forties and fifties to be Eaton's foremost fashion expert. In this position, she traveled yearly to fashion shows in Paris and New York, offered advice to Eaton's wealthiest customers, and hosted the company's bi-annual fashion shows.[39]

Though Connie Vernon's position as a handbag buyer was less prestigious than was Matthews's position as a Fashion Consultant, her unique rise to occupational success

---

[37] "Wedding Bureau Her Brain Child," *Flash*, Jan 1954, p. 7.
[38] "Wedding Bureau," p. 7.

at the company is also suggestive of the ways that women could attain job security and mobility through developing skills related to women's aestheticisation. Starting out at Eaton's as a saleswoman in Main Store Handbags, Vernon took a leave of absence from the company in Fall 1944 to work as a "comedienne" with the "Canadian Army Overseas entertaining troops."[40] In this position, she gained prestige in the Company's eyes by impressing her male audiences and becoming a local celebrity in Toronto. Many of Eaton's male employees in the Army wrote to *Flash* to praise Vernon's performative talents. One letter-writer stated that he "was fortunate enough to see one of the Canadian Army shows and one of the headliners was our own Connie Vernon. She was super. It was a great pleasure to see her, and all the G. I. Joes thought she was marvellous."[41] Similarly, another soldier wrote to say that "it was good, hearing a real live Canadian girl."[42] Further enhancing Vernon's status was the fact that *The Globe and Mail* frequently featured reports, which *Flash* unabashedly reprinted, on Vernon's adventurous and glamourous travels through Europe.[43]

When Vernon returned to Eaton's after the war, she moved up Eaton's occupational ladder from handbag saleswoman to handbag buyer.[44] Though there is no concrete evidence in Eaton's archival records that suggests that Vernon's leap in pay and status was connected to her Army experience, it is likely that her skills as an attractive and charming female performer contributed directly to her job success. Indeed, through speaking lessons and sports demonstrations, the Eaton Girls' Club consistently trained its

---

[39] "Eaton's Fashion Co-ordinator Named One of Toronto's Ten 'Best Dressed.'" *Flash*, April 1953, p. 15.
[40] Connie Vernon, as quoted in *Flash*, 25 Sept 1944, p. 7.
[41] As quoted in *Flash*, 4 Dec 1944, p. 13.
[42] As quoted in *Flash*, 10 Oct 1944, p. 7.
[43] See *Flash*, 7 May 1945, p. 11.
[44] "More About Eaton's." *Flash*, Feb 1953, p. 12.

female employees to become adept and pleasing performers. Though she demonstrated her performative talents in the Army and not in the Girls' Club, Eaton's rewarding her with a Buying position nevertheless indicates that there were links between women's abilities to cultivate aesthetically-pleasing performative skills and their occupational mobility.

In a world of limited occupational opportunities, some women at Eaton's were therefore able to carve out careers at the department store through acquiring skills relating to women's aestheticisation. However, there was more to participating in Eaton's aestheticising world than the simple desire to achieve career mobility. Much evidence exists that indicates that several woman took pleasure in acquiring and applying skills relating to cosmetic usage and fashionable clothing. In June of 1952, Irene Kent, who worked in the College Street Beauty Salon, left Eaton's to take a one-month-long "CBS make-up course" in New York. In an interview with *Flash*, she related that "I crammed for all I was worth, to get everything I could out of that course." For Kent, learning about cosmetic usage was a type of labour from which she could derive satisfaction. Indeed, upon returning to Canada she was hired by a local television network as a make-up artist, a job that, according to *Flash*, she found "very interesting and enjoyable."[45]

Even more telling of the pride and satisfaction women derived from their fashion-related skills are the several anecdotes contained in *Flash* describing female workers making their own clothes and then wearing them. Every year, between 200 and 300 women enrolled in sewing classes at the Eaton's Girls' Club, where they learned how to

[45] "Irene Kent Canada's Only Girl Make-up Artist on CBLT." *Flash*. Jan 1953. p. 14.

make their "own creations."[46] At the end of the Club year in May, the sewing class put on a fashion show, in which the seamstresses modeled their handmade fashions in front of hundreds of "interested spectators."[47] Pictures in *Flash* accompanying articles describing the shows indicate that many women were proud of both their clothing and their abilities to look good while wearing the clothes they made. One woman at a 1947 show, for example, glides proudly and confidently down the fashion runway in a plaid summer dress.[48] Thus, though Eaton's sexual division of labour denied women status as skilled workers, Eaton's female employees were nevertheless able to find enjoyment and pleasure in their acts of productive and performative labour. In addition, by being proud of their abilities to create and model their own clothes, these female workers demonstrated that though Eaton's managers may have cast women into the role of the sexualised object, women often did not perceive their own acts of aestheticisation as merely a sexual performance. Instead, for many women, fashion shows were opportunities to showcase the few talents they were able to develop within Eaton's sexually-stratified and commodified world.

In fact, there is evidence that at least some of Eaton's female workers' enjoyment of beauty and fashion activities was intimately connected to their identities as working-class, female labourers. Significantly, although many women at Eaton's did dress in ways considered respectable and appropriate by Eaton's Staff Trainers, many others rejected Eaton's instructions to appear discreet while at work. In 1957, Eaton's Staff

---

[46] "Eaton Girls' Club Members Model Own Creations," *Flash*, May 1954, p. 22. In 1948, for instance, 278 women participated. Recreation Department Reports, 1940-1960, F 229 Series 183, Box 1, AO. The 1948 figure comes from the last page of the 1948 report.
[47] "Sewing Group Has Fashion Show at Club," *Flash*, 19 May 1947, p. 10; "Girls Show Own Fashions," *Flash*, May 1955, p. 21.
[48] "Sewing Group," p. 10.

Trainers distributed to female employees a pamphlet entitled "that band box look" (fig. 3.1). Inside the pamphlet were depicted two women: the one on the left was wearing a "party dress," lots of rouge, and a high-fashion hairstyle; the one on the right was wearing a business dress, no discernable makeup, and a conservative hairstyle. According to the pamphlet, Eaton's female employees should strive to look like the latter woman, for being too flashy in one's appearance constituted "POOR BUSINESS FASHION." Undoubtedly, Eaton's felt the need to print this pamphlet because some female employees at Eaton's did actually dress like the woman on the left, and hence they appeared inappropriate to the Staff Trainers.

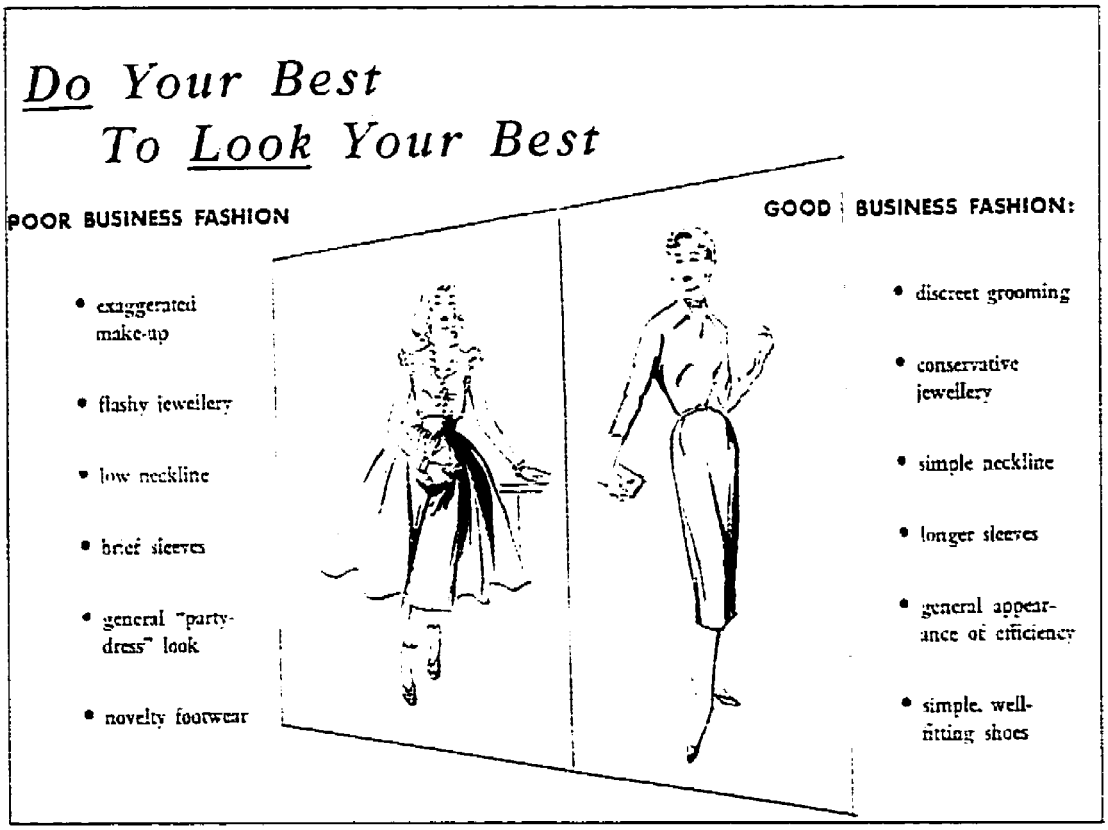


Figure 3.1: The Style of Class [From: "that band box look." 1957. pp. 2-3. F 229. Series 162. Box 25 File 825: Training Kit, 1957.] Used with permission, Sears Canada, Inc.

For historians, "that band box look" speaks to Eaton's wishes that its employees reflect a subdued, unthreatening appearance. However, it is also possible to read the pamphlet against the grain and determine how and why many working-class women at Eaton's actually presented themselves at work. First, the woman on the left's wearing of "exaggerated makeup" resembles some of the working-class cosmetic practices described by Kathy Peiss in her 1998 book, *Hope in a Jar*, a history of the American beauty industry.[1] "Young working women in particular," writes Peiss, "often embraced a flamboyant and conspicuous look. They not only wore ruby lipstick ... , but regularly accented their eyes with eye shadow and mascara, products few women used in the daytime, if at all."[2] For Peiss, working women's adoption of the "theatrical aesthetic of makeup" enabled them to proclaim "social and sexuality maturity."[3] Like the women Peiss describes, the working-class women represented in "that band box look" also adopted the theatrical uses of cosmetics to assert their own oppositional sense of identity.

Indeed, in her choosing to wear many symbols of sensational femininity, including "novelty footwear," "low neckline," and "flashy jewellery," this woman and the workers whom she represents rejected the label of "business girl"—a term used often by Eaton's to describe white-collar working women—in favour of an identity associated less with the world of white-collar work and more with the world of high fashion. That this woman's hairstyle more resembles those adopted by such 1950s celebrity figures as Marilyn Monroe and less by many sensible middle-class women illustrates that many of Eaton's employees were more interested in appearing glamourous than in appearing

---

[1] Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998).
[2] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, p. 186.
[3] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, pp. 186, 188.

"discreet," "conservative," and "efficient." Thus, this woman's wearing of unbusinesslike makeup and fashion suggests that some working women at Eaton's escaped the monotonous and confining routine of department-store labour by deflecting their creative skills into constructing glamourous and attractive images of themselves. In this sense, Eaton's female employees' flashy appearances can be identified as a gesture of working-class self-expression.

Moreover, Eaton's women workers' occupational position at the point of exchange contributed directly to this particular mode of expression. As employees of Canada's largest department store, they regularly witnessed people buying prestigious fashion items. In addition, many of Eaton's female sales employees, especially those situated in the Jewellery, Fur, and Specialty Shops, daily helped wealthy people to choose expensive pieces of merchandise. They therefore knew full well that those who can afford high-status goods had more power than those who could not. Thus, female workers' participation in the fashion and beauty industries is not to be considered *embourgeoisement*, for these women did not adopt middle-class items to fit in with the bourgeoisie. Rather, they adopted low-priced imitations of the signifiers of wealth that surrounded them daily to claim a privileged status of their own.[4]

Hence, it is possible that some of Eaton's female employees chose to wear makeup and fashionable clothing to work because through these mediums, they were able to escape the routinised and confining world of the department store and to assert pride in their status as consumption-industry workers. These same forces were at work when

---

[4] This interpretation of Eaton's female employees' interest in fashion and glamour draws in part from Nan Enstad's excellent analysis of female garmentworkers' culture: *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

Eaton's working women chose to act as models in the numerous fashion demonstrations the Staff Training Department orchestrated. In 1940, for instance, 25 women who worked in departments ranging from General Office to Infants' Wear to Reserve Staff modeled evening dresses during a Staff Training fashion show.[5] By performing in the show, working women commanded respect from their spectators and took pride in their glamourous appearances. While Eaton's objectification of the company's female employees stemmed from a sexualised form of commodity fetishism, female workers themselves participated in Eaton's commodifying efforts not only to attain job security and mobility but to claim pride in their performative working-class identities.

Although both Eaton's and the Department Store Employees' Union archival records suggest that it was mostly women workers who constructed aestheticised versions of themselves, there is also evidence that at least some male salesworkers at Eaton's also constructed attractive and stylish personas. This evidence is immensely significant, for it demonstrates that men who experience commodification are just as apt to develop stylised appearances as are women. By extension, it also illustrates that the commodity-structure is integrally related to both women's and men's participation in the fashion and beauty industries.

In 1982, the head organiser of the Department Store Employees' Union, Eileen Tallman Sufrin, wrote a memoir of the organising drive that occurred at Eaton's between 1948 and 1952.[6] According to Sufrin, the Assistant Vice-President of Local 1000 was a salesman named Fred Tinker who worked in the Main Store Bedding and Linens Department. In her memoir, Sufrin provides some biographical details of Tinker to flesh

---

[5] "Last Fashion Tea Had Bridal Group," *Flash*, 4 March 1940, p. 3.

out the reasons causing him to join Local 1000. If one reads these details with the existence of workers' commodification in mind, it becomes apparent that Tinker's experience at the point of exchange prodded him to construct a stylised and performative persona.

To begin with, both customers' scrutinising consumerist gazes and managers' instructions that salesworkers personify the commodity aesthetic caused Tinker to view saleswork as a performance. Sufrin states that "[u]nlike many who perfected a great sales pitch, but in fact sold their own personality to the employer, Fred did not allow himself to be manipulated."[7] In fact, on the salesfloor he had developed his performative skills to the point where he had become able to sell almost any item to critical shoppers. As Sufrin relates, "a customer who kept insisting on a 'thicker' towel, just might end up with a bath mat."[8]

As well, just as many of Eaton's female employees consistently exaggerated Eaton's fashion and beauty advice for women, so too did Tinker exaggerate elements of Eaton's fashion and grooming advice for men. According to Sufrin, Tinker fitted the "'image'" of the salesman well: "tall, suave, greying hair, and dress a little on the flashy side (he sported a 'skimmer' [fashionable men's hat] in the summer.)"[9] On the one hand, Tinker's interest in presenting a "suave" and "flashy" appearance originated in his need to appear fashionable and attractive at work. On the other hand, though, Tinker's exaggeration of men's fashion and grooming also derived from his adoption of a pseudo-aristocratic and "sporting" persona.

---

[6] Eileen Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive: The Campaign to Organize Canada's Largest Department Store, 1948-1952* (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1982).
[7] Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, p. 151.
[8] Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, p. 151.

In the early 1980s, Sufrin wrote a letter to Tinker asking him why he joined the Eaton Drive. He responded:

> Unionizing was the second item of the list for [my co-worker] and me. Our first was to get a numbers racket going so we could retire at 50 and become, as the papers say, prominent sportsmen, with horses and baseball teams and yachts. Unfortunately, Toronto was still The Good, and our dreams did not materialize.[10]

From this quotation, it is possible to ascertain that although Tinker was a salesman in an unprestigious department at Eaton's, he nevertheless constructed an image of himself and his co-worker as aristocratic "sportsmen." Even if Tinker was joking in his assertion that he and his co-worker wished to "get a numbers racket going," his desires to own horses, baseball teams, and yachts are significant. In his history of sports in Canada, Colin D. Howell notes that owning horses, baseball teams, and yachts were all expensive endeavours, pursued chiefly by cosmopolitan, upper-class, male urbanites.[11] Tinker's desire to participate in this realm of male sporting culture, combined with his adoption of a fashionable identity and his joining of the Department Store Employees' Union, therefore indicates that he worked through customers' and managers' commodifying efforts by investing in a leisured identity that allowed him to simultaneously escape the routine of department-store labour and express pride in his status as a skilled retail worker.

Thus, for both working men and women at Eaton's, the construction of consumerist, performative, and stylish personas were influenced by their experiences at the point of the commodity exchange in mid-twentieth-century Toronto. Because they

---

[9] Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, p. 151.
[10] As quoted in Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, p. 151.
[11] Colin D. Howell, *Blood, Sweat, and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 19, 24, 68.

faced numerous commodifying efforts by Eaton's customers and Eaton's managers, and because they occupied insecure occupational positions, Eaton's employees participated in Eaton's commodified world. Nevertheless, this participation often took place on their own terms; and through this participation, they were able to build workplace skills, claim pride in their status as retail labourers, engage in minor forms of class conflict, attain job security and job mobility, and escape the routinised and confining department-store work environment.

However, while it is important to recognise the causes and manifestations of Eaton's employees' participation in commodification, it is equally important to avoid over-celebrating Eaton's employees' consumerist and performative agency. Their adoption of consuming skills and stylised appearances did enable them to confront and even challenge many of the customers' and managers' commodifying efforts, but this adoption did not lead them to articulate a broad-based and coherent critique of their restrictive socioeconomic statuses. Instead, their acts of resistance took limited forms. A salesperson asserting power over her customer through her consumer skills may have been a muted form of class conflict, but such conflict occurred in an isolated context. Similarly, the enjoyment workers derived from participating in the fashion and beauty industries may have granted them an avenue of self-expression, but it must also be remembered that Eaton's extracted profit from this enjoyment.

Nevertheless, the limitations surrounding consumption must also be considered in the context of Eaton's employee management strategies. As a paternalist organisation, the T. Eaton Company exerted extremely high levels of control over its workers' actions. Recreation, Training, and individual department managers supervised workers' every

moves; they were also quick to extinguish any overt forms of worker solidarity that challenged Eaton's authority. When one considers this overwhelming managerial power and the devastating effects it wrought on workers' material lives, it is unsurprising that workers' consuming personas did not lead Eaton's employees to develop coherent critiques of their marginal positions at the department store.

In 1947, however, two outside organisations—the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL)—decided to join forces to unionise all 15,000 of Eaton's Toronto employees. In their organising efforts, they sometimes appealed to workers' commodified personas to help them challenge Eaton's paternalist employment practices. To understand the relationship between formal organising and Eaton's workers' participation in consumer culture, therefore, it is critical to understand the drive to unionisation that dominated the social relations of Eaton's at mid-century.

CHAPTER 4

Consumerist Workers and Socialist Organisers: Building Local 1000

> Unionized workers have substantially increased their purchasing power. This is YOUR Opportunity Day to do so by joining Local 1000.
>
> --From a broadside handed out to Eaton's Toronto employees by the Department Store Employees' Union, 1950[1]

In a 1989 essay entitled "The Politics of Consumption," British Marxist historian and Labour Party member Frank Mort roundly condemns socialists for ignoring workers' consumer identities. "Despite their profound contradictions," he asserts, "ideologies of affluence have had very real effects on large sections of the population. Some of these have been potentially liberating—consuming as a source of power and pleasure. They will need to find a place within our vision of new times."[2] According to Mort, socialists have evaded the topic of working-class consumption because they over-idealise production and view consumerism as "a moral evil, [with capital] buying off working people with an orgy of goodies[.]"[3] Such activities as lifestyle shopping, attending mass-cultural events, and relaxing at home with the aid of numerous electronic devices are often perceived on the left as the results of workers' disillusionment with formal socialist politics. Mass consumption may not be a utopic panacea, but a quick comparison

---

Note: All union broadsides and issues of *Unionize* referred to in this chapter are located at the National Archives of Canada, in MG 31 B 31, Vol. 1.
Note: All issues of *Flash* referred to in this chapter are located at the Archives of Ontario, in the T. Eaton Papers (F 229), Series 141, microfilms 6767 through 6770.
[1] "Employees' Opportunity Day," Broadside, 26 July 1950.
[2] Frank Mort, "The Politics of Consumption," *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s*, ed. Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p. 161.
[3] Mort, "The Politics," pp. 164-5.

between the apathy that characterises workers' political involvement and the enthusiasm that characterises workers' involvement in mass consumption demonstrates that mass consumption is clearly offering workers something that socialism currently does not.[4]

Though directed at members of the British Labour Party, Mort's argument has immediate relevance for historians of the Canadian working class. In contemporary Canada, it is clear that vast numbers of workers participate in mass consumption: shopping malls, dance clubs, movie theatres, highways, and the interiors of working-class homes are full of reminders that members of the working class are consumers, just as they are producers. However, it is less clear if the majority of these same consuming workers are interested in the activities of their unions or in supporting progressive political parties. To explain this apparent link between consumerism and apathy, the historian of the Canadian working class may refer to two related arguments. Some academics see working-class consumption as a manifestation of false consciousness: when they purchase signifiers of wealth, workers begin to consider themselves members of the bourgeoisie.[5] Others assert that apathy toward unions and socialism springs from the individualism that accompanies participation in mass consumption. The spending of money on lifestyle products, the hoarding of money to save for big consumer purchases, and the buying of domestic goods that support the insularity of the nuclear family all contribute to an ethos of individualism. This ethos encourages the worker to consider herself or himself as a competitor within and not a member of a larger stratified society.[6]

---

[4] Mort. "The Politics," pp. 165-172.

[5] Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working-Class Consciousness* (Duke: Duke University Press, 1992); Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[6] Mort. "The Politics," pp. 166-170. On the relationship between domestic insularity and commodity consumption, see especially Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), pp. 162-182.

Both the false consciousness thesis and the individualism thesis contain grains of truth. Workers who consider themselves members of the privileged class and workers who subscribe to an ethos of consumerist individualism are both unlikely to support organisations that promise the emancipation of all labourers. However, although it is plausible to surmise that *embourgeoisement* and individualism cause working-class political apathy, it is less plausible to assert that these developments are the sole causes of consumerist workers' indifference to unions and socialist movements. As Mort demonstrates, if one wants to understand why working consumers are apathetic to organisations that ostensibly exist for their benefit, it is necessary to consider not only the motivations behind working-class consumption but also various organisations' appeals to working consumers. In other words, only by turning the analytical lens on themselves can those interested in labour's empowerment begin to understand the problematic politics of working-class consumption.

To investigate the relationship between workers' consumerism and formal organising, this chapter undertakes an analysis of primary documents generated between 1948 and 1952 by the Department Store Employees' Union, affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL), during its unsuccessful campaign to organise all 15,000 Eaton's employees in Toronto.[7] Heading the Eaton Drive was Eileen Tallman, an active member of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and a noted organiser with the Steelworkers. At various times, members of her staff included Lynn Williams, Angus Sumner, Ernest

[7] The CIO's Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union (RWDSU) began the Eaton Drive, but in spring of 1949 the CIO suspended the RWDSU and put the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (ACW) in charge of organising the retail field. The ACW chose not to sponsor the Eaton Drive and from 1949 on, Eaton Drive organisers referred to their union as the Department Store Employees' Union.

Arnold, Marjorie Gow, Wally Ross, and Olive Richardson. All of these organisers had previously worked either with the CCF or the Steelworkers; most had worked with both.

The CCL's efforts to organise Eaton's workers were extensive. Weekly leaflets, emblazoned *Unionize*, were distributed; a radio series called *Eaton's Goes Union* was aired on a popular Toronto radio station; a social committee that organised dances, Christmas parties, corn and wiener roasts, picnics, banquets, and bowling tournaments, was set up; numerous demonstrations, including a mock fashion show, were held outside the three stores; organisers canvassed workers' homes; and Eaton's workers were invited to the union office to help out with the drive and to discuss their concerns with the organisers of what eventually became known as Local 1000. Through a combination of their organising efforts and workers' own desires to unionise, Local 1000 managed to win the confidence of 9,000 Eaton's employees. Besides signing membership cards, they helped out with the membership drive by canvassing potential members' homes, distributing leaflets, working in the union offices, creating posters, participating in Toronto's Labour Day Parades, and doing other kinds of recruiting work.

In December of 1951, a vote was held to determine whether or not the majority of Eaton's workers desired Local 1000 to become certified. The issue was tremendously important to Eaton's employees, and 94% of those eligible cast ballots. The union lost the vote, but by a narrow margin: 45.1% voted for the union, and 54.9% voted against.[8] The defeat was devastating not only for Tallman and her staff but also for the members of the Local who had helped to build the 6,000-member strong union. Not taking their defeat lightly, these workers continued to organise throughout 1952 and 1953, hoping to secure enough support to again apply for certification. They were not able to sustain the

momentum built between 1948 and 1950, however, and Local 1000 eventually dissipated. Not until the early 1980s did Eaton's employees in Toronto again attempt to organise.[9]

Given the energy that the CCL's organisers and many Eaton's workers invested in the Eaton Drive, it is not surprising that so many workers cast votes regarding Local 1000's certification. What is surprising is that almost 55% voted against the union. Eaton's workers' fears about what would happen once the union was established were the most significant reason causing them to vote against certification. Due to the effectiveness of Eaton's union-busting tactics, including on-the-job intimidation, printing anti-union literature, and spreading false rumours about unionisation, numerous workers became scared that if they organised they would lose either their jobs or their opportunities for occupational mobility. Exacerbating these fears was the fact that the union was always short-staffed, thus making it difficult for organisers to contact each employee about the benefits of unionisation. In a company where turnover exceeded 35% annually, this inability to communicate with individual workers was an important hindrance to successful organising.[10]

Another major factor contributing to workers' decisions to vote against the union was the effectiveness of Eaton's paternalism. Sufrin notes that "those who had personally received generous treatment during illness or in other circumstances" were more likely to be hostile to the union than those who had not.[11] For Sufrin, evidence of such paternalism was explanation enough for these employees' indifference to Local 1000, but if one goes a little deeper into the roots of this type of loyalty, a more complex

---

[8] Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, p. 186; *Unionize*, all fall 1951 issues.
[9] Sandra Aylward, "Experiencing Patriarchy: Women, Work, and Trade Unionism at Eaton's." (PhD Thesis, Department of Sociology, McMaster University, 1991).
[10] Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, pp. 184-190; 204-213.

explanation emerges. In almost every issue of *Flash*, Eaton's included a brief biography of all those workers who had reached thirty-five years of service with the company. Most of these workers had received personal assistance from Eaton's at some time in their lives, and significantly, most of these workers came from unstable, penniless backgrounds. Moreover, most of them were from either Ontario or the British Isles, many of them were Protestant, many of them were women, and most of them were unmarried.[12] When this evidence is considered in relation to their loyalty to the Eaton family, it becomes highly plausible that the ethnic similarities between these workers and Eaton's corporate image, combined with their own material and social insecurity, led them to seek out a lifelong job with the Eaton firm. By the time the union arrived at the department store, these workers had developed strong—if one-sided—emotional bonds with the corporate Eaton family, and they would have been hesitant to join an unfamiliar organisation. Such sentiments were not heroic, but they are understandable.

Even more important than employee loyalty to Eaton's may have been the affection that many workers seemed to possess for members of the Eaton family. In her doctoral thesis about the Eaton drives of the 1980s, Sandra Aylward demonstrates that employee hostility to the T. Eaton Company was directed solely toward department managers, and in employees' minds, the Eaton family itself was external to all employees' problems. Some employees even felt that if the Eaton family became aware of the injustices meted out to them, they would have rectified the situation immediately.[13] No

---

[11] Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, p. 207.
[12] *Flash*, 35th Anniversaries, all issues. For samples, see: "Miss Helen Levick's Anniversary," *Flash*, 11 May 1942, p. 2; "Loyal Eaton Men Have 35th Anniversaries," *Flash*, 25 May 1943, p. 2; "35th Anniversaries Bring Happy Memories," *Flash*, 23 Sept 1946, p. 13; "Congratulations to Four 35-Year People," *Flash* 1 March 1948, p. 4; "Thirty-five Years With Eaton's," *Flash*, 26 June 1950, p. 7.
[13] Aylward, "Experiencing Patriarchy," pp. 264-273.

doubt, these feelings toward the Eaton firm as family were amplified by the public image of regal benevolence that Eaton's owners cultivated. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, it is apparent that these same forces were at work. Not one employee wrote to *Unionize* to complain about either Lady Eaton or John David Eaton; instead, all grievances were directed toward the firm's department managers.[14] In the weeks leading up to the vote, the Eaton family itself began handing out anti-union leaflets to workers, and this tactic may have served to convince workers that by unionising they were somehow injuring the Eaton family. For this reason, many workers may have changed their minds about joining the union.

Finally, it is apparent that the union's inability to appeal to salesworkers' pride in their occupational identities was another major obstacle to unionization's success. Salesworkers constituted 50% of the total number of Eaton's workers eligible for organisation, and almost 80% of salesworkers were women. As Chapter Three demonstrated, sellers took considerable pride in their occupational skills. Thus, one would expect that the union would devote some effort to appealing to this pride. Such an appeal would have triggered an identification among salespeople with their occupational identities and would likely have encouraged them to join Local 1000.

On the one hand, the organisers' decision to not appeal to salesworkers' occupational identities was caused by the union's industrial approach. By appealing to workers' specific occupational skills, the union would have been resorting to the tactics of craft unionism, in which skilled workers were privileged over non-skilled workers. On the other hand, though, the union's refusal to appeal to salesworkers' pride in their skills was also caused by its belief that the skill of male workers was more valuable than that of

---

[14] *Unionize*, all issues.

female workers. In her dissertation, Aylward analyses Local 1000's archival documents. Noting that Eaton's based its pay rates on gender, age, marital status and skill level, a scheme in which young single women received the least amount of pay while married men received the most, she observes that the union did not challenge the discriminatory assumptions behind this salary stratification. Though the union argued for equal pay for equal work, nowhere did it propose that the occupations that were held traditionally by women at Eaton's—secretarial work, waitressing, saleswork—were equal to the jobs held by "tradesmen," including painters and chefs. Thus, women's jobs were classified both by Eaton's and the union as being less skilled than men's, and those who performed them were therefore deserving of less pay.[15] If Local 1000 had asserted that salesworkers were skilled workers, it would have had to re-evaluate Eaton's job classification system and to suggest that occupations held traditionally by women were comparable in skill-level to those work sections that were largely male.

Instead of appealing to workers' pride in their occupational skills, the union focused on issues that would concern all of Eaton's employees: the disparity between retail salaries and those in unionised industries, the lack of a pension plan at Eaton's, the lack of job security at Eaton's, and managers' arbitrary favouritism.[16] Importantly, workers' consumption was also a topic to which organisers alluded. Sometimes, consumption was referred to in an abstract way, with organisers stating that if workers joined the union, they could increase their "purchasing power."[17] On other occasions, organisers referred to specific goods and services that workers could buy if they

---

[15] Aylward, "Experiencing Patriarchy," pp. 205-40.
[16] Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, pp. 46-50; 56-85.
[17] "Employees' Opportunity Day," Broadside, 26 July 1950.

increased their pay through unionisation. Finally, the union attempted to spark workers' class consciousness by appealing to their interests in the fashion and beauty industries.

Since there are only scattered pieces of evidence in the union's archival papers that give voice to the thoughts of Eaton's rank and file, it is difficult to determine exactly how workers reacted to the union's allusions to consumption. It is apparent, though, that some workers' consumer interests did cause them to participate in the Eaton Drive. As well, the union recognised that there were class-based yearnings behind workers' consumerist activities. Yet at the same time, the relationship among consumption, unionisation, and working-class empowerment was problematic. At times, consumption was cast in individualist and disempowering terms. Moreover, organisers often presented consumption not as a class phenomenon but as a gendered phenomenon. In so doing, they rejected class-based arguments surrounding working-class consumerism in favour of arguments that supported the sexual division of labour and the insularity of the nuclear family.

A review of Local 1000's primary documents suggests that the main reason causing union organisers to send mixed messages about consumption to Eaton's workers was their adherence to four related ideologies that stemmed from the masculine side of the sexual division of labour. These included masculine producerism, rationalism, respectability, and male providerhood. To begin with, it is clear that organisers considered the union a masculine entity. In fact, the five allegorical illustrations that Local 1000's organisers used during the campaign to symbolize the union always depicted men. In three of these illustrations, the union was portrayed as a muscular male body (see for example fig. 4.1); and in two of these, the union was represented simply as

strong male arms.[18] Nowhere in the union literature is there an image that equates the union with either a less-muscular male worker or a female worker of any shape. Thus, illustrations of the personified union demonstrated that organisers not only imagined the union to be aggressively masculine, they also imagined the typical producer to be male.[19]

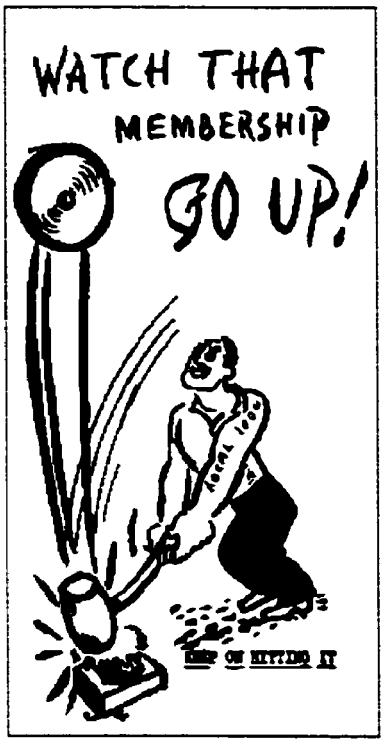


Figure 4.1: The Masculine Identity of Local 1000 [From: "Watch that Membership Go Up!" *Unionize*, 1 (30 Nov 1948), p. 4.]

Further, the physical strength displayed in these pictures indicates that Local 1000's organisers drew links between men's producerist identities and the union's political clout. Undoubtedly, the muscles in the pictures are meant to symbolise men's productive power, especially if one considers the fact that every time organisers drew a picture of John David Eaton and the company executives, they depicted them as fat and lazy.[20] This identification of masculinity with production signifies that union organisers were rooting men's identities in the sexual division of labour that characterises the capitalist marketplace. Organisers were attempting to give power to working men because they believed that men were capitalism's primary producers. Though this belief was not only false but disempowering for female employees at Eaton's, it must be pointed out that the

---

[18] See also "Many Gains Have Been Made," Broadside, Jan 1949; "6000 – Mark Reached." *Unionize*, 3 (1 Aug 1950), p. 1; "Nail it Down!" Broadside, 27 Nov 1951.

[19] In her history of the Minneapolis labour movement between 1915 and 1945, Elizabeth Faue also finds that union organisers imagined both unions and workers to be aggressively masculine: see Faue, *Community of Suffering: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 68-99; 168-188.

[20] See for instance "$500,000,000 – And You," in Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, p. 192.

union's identification with men and masculinity did not stem from any simple desire to oppress women. Rather, it was rooted in the fact that the market itself was organised around a sexual division of labour. The masculine illustration of work thus reproduced visually the ideologies of gender and labour current at the time.

While organisers considered the union and its preferred members to be masculine, they also imagined the union and its preferred members to be rational and enlightened. The first leaflet distributed to Eaton's employees by the organisers stated that "Unionization is modern – efficient. It is the up-to-date way of approaching management for increased salaries and improved working conditions. ... Union membership makes for better workers and better citizens. ... A union is DEMOCRACY IN ACTION."[21] By stressing modernity, efficiency, and citizenship, this leaflet suggested to Eaton's employees that the firm's paternalism was outdated. More importantly, the broadside also implied that unionisation signified the rational and enlightened progression of humanity. As numerous scholars have demonstrated, the twin concepts of rationalism and citizenship were developed by European male philosophers during the Enlightenment. Equating reason with progress, they defined men's rational participation in the public sphere against women's emotional participation in the private sphere. Thus, masculinity became associated with public rationality while femininity became associated with domestic irrationality.[22] Local 1000's organisers' emphasis on the

---

[21] "For a HAPPIER new year," Broadside, January 1948.

[22] See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parsley (New York: Knopf, 1953).

rationalist and progressive nature of their union illustrates that they were defining unionisation as a masculine enterprise.

If the union portrayed itself and its prospective members as masculine and rational, so too did it characterise itself and its prospective members as respectable. Throughout the campaign, words like "self-respect" and "decency" appeared frequently in appeals to workers to join the union.[23] This image of respectability corresponded to the union's emphasis on rationalism: if workers were rational and democratic participants in the public sphere, it seemed to follow that they would also be considered as respectable. However, the union's desire to appear respectable also derived from its organisers' sensitivity about appearing to employees and interested onlookers as too left-wing.[24] From the late 1930s through the 1950s, the CCL, and especially the Steelworkers, pursued a ruthless campaign to oust all Communists from leadership positions in unions affiliated with the Congress. According to historian Irving Abella, this ousting was related to the fact that the leader of the Steelworkers, Charlie Millard, was an adamant CCF supporter, and he and his followers wanted to secure a broad working-class base of support for their party.[25] Tallman and most of her staff members were dedicated CCFers and fervent anti-Communists, and prior to the Eaton Drive, Tallman herself had worked with Millard's staff in Vancouver to help put an "end to the domination of the B.C. labour movement by [Communists]."[26] By stressing the respectable nature of the union, Local 1000's organisers were denying the radical side of their union and were supporting the

---

[23] See for instance "Too Close to the Danger Line Isn't Healthy!" *Unionize*, 1 (27 April 1948), p. 1.
[24] Indeed, in *The Eaton Drive* Sufrin responded to an attack on the "class warfare" approach of Local 1000 launched by *The Globe and Mail* by saying, "As for the 'class war' approach of our leaflets, it raised the question of whether the G & M editor ever set eyes on them[.] [Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, p. 185]."
[25] Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour, 1935-1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), pp. 73-4.
[26] Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive*, p. 39.

CCF's bid to dampen left-wing radicalism through the implementation of social democracy.

Given the union's envisioning of itself as male and its emphases on producerism, rationalism, citizenship, and respectability, it is not surprising that the Local's organisers idealised the image of respectable male providerhood. Although the union claimed to be an industrial union, it is clear that the union was most interested in organising male breadwinners. In a 1949 article about post-Christmas lay-offs, for example, the union drew attention to the fact that while employees expected that seasonal help would be let go, they did not expect that "people with some years' service" would be laid off. The union did not point out that most seasonal employees were women, but it did point out that the regular employees who were losing their jobs were men: the article included a picture of a newly-fired man leaving the Time Office. Further, according to the article, "This callous lack of consideration [in being laid off] is causing a good deal of hardship, *particularly when married men with families are let out with practically no notice*. Their income has been budgeted to the last cent and they have not been able to save enough out of their meagre salaries to provide for even a few days' unemployment" [emphasis added].[27] In this quotation, the image of the noble and rational male breadwinner is clear. Even though thousands of seasonal female employees were being fired daily by the company, it was the conscientious, laid-off man with a family at home who was presented as the victim of Eaton's perniciousness. As this example demonstrates, the union was less concerned with articulating the circumstances that structured women into seasonal saleswork and more concerned with defending the employment of respectable and male household heads.

Importantly, Local 1000's privileging of masculine, providerly labour over all other types of work also caused the labour organisation to send ambivalent messages to potential union members about commodity consumption. As Chapters Two and Three suggest, several of Eaton's workers purchased Eaton's goods and services. Though there is not enough evidence either in Eaton's records or in the union's records to advance a full explanation of why workers did make these purchases, it is evident that at least some of these purchases stemmed from reasons originating in workers' class experience. Buying household gifts for one's co-workers on the occasions of wedding showers held at the Eaton Girls' Club, for instance, indicates that an informal support system existed among Eaton's female workers.[28] Similarly, purchasing a vacation package from Eaton's Travel Bureau, as many of Eaton's higher-paid workers did, may have enabled some workers to take time away from the routine of department-store labour.

In fact, the importance that workers placed in their consumption of Eaton's commodified goods and services caused at least some of them to participate in the Eaton Drive. Early in the campaign, one worker wrote to *Unionize* to say that:

> A lot of us in Eaton's have a beef against the managers. Some of them are good enough guys and almost human, but some of them burn us up, especially those birds who have other managers for personal friends and they run around each other's departments buying stuff at considerably more than a 10% discount – often for much more than an employee in that particular department could get the goods for.[29]

---

[27] "'But They Can't Do that to Me!'" *Unionize*. 2 (18 Jan 1949), pp. 1 and 4.

[28] Suzanne Morton and Joan Sangster have also noted that working women bought wedding shower gifts for their co-workers: see Morton, "The June Bride as the Working-Class Bride: Getting Married in a Halifax Working-Class Neighbourhood in the 1920s," *Canadian Family History: Selected Readings*, ed. Bettina Bradbury (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1992), p. 368; and Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 98-9.

[29] "Fed Up," as quoted in "Letters to the Editor," *Unionize*, 1 (17 Aug 1948), p. 2.

In this excerpt, a complicated discourse of consumer entitlement emerges. The worker is clearly interested in being able to consume Eaton's commodities, but what is important in this quotation is her or his anger at managers for subverting Eaton's policies and buying commodities at prices lower those available to employees. The writer thus seems to be suggesting that employees should be entitled to the same discount privileges as managers. On the one hand, such a suggestion seems a petty grievance: the union is pushing for higher wages and a pension plan, and all she or he can think about is obtaining cheaper goods. On the other hand, when one considers that salespeople are constantly helping wealthy people to purchase more goods and services than they themselves can afford, this suggestion becomes more significant. The department store is a place where the most powerful also have the most goods. This worker's complaint about managers' spending habits therefore indicates that she or he believes that workers are entitled to the same power as managers and customers.

Whatever the reasons behind various workers' consumerist yearnings and identities, it is important to note that the union recognised that workers did consider themselves consumers. It even appealed to workers' consumer identities to convince Eaton's employees to join Local 1000.[30] One broadside handed out to workers in July of 1950 provides an especially good example of this appeal.[31] Entitled "EMPLOYEES' OPPORTUNITY DAY," the leaflet was a parody of an advertisement flyer (fig. 4.2). Featuring descriptions of the various consumer goods that workers could buy once they unionised, the leaflet declared to Eaton's rank and file that "Unionized workers have

---

[30] "What is an Employee?" *Unionize*, 5 (8 May 1952), p. 3.

[31] For other indications that the union recognised employees' consumer yearnings, see "Eaton Employees who have AN EYE FOR VALUE," *Unionize*, 3 (6 Feb 1950), p. 4; "Shopping?" *Unionize*, 3 (16 May 1950), p. 4; "Be Union – Buy Union," *Unionize*, 4 (23 Oct 1951), p. 2.

substantially increased their purchasing power. This is YOUR Opportunity Day to do so by joining Local 1000."

In this broadside, numerous arguments regarding workers' consumption are

Figure 4.2: Appealing to Workers' Consumer Interests [From: Broadside. 26 July 1950.] *Note*: The "Mugwump" was a character invented by Local 1000's organisers in order to signify those employees who were hesitant about joining the union: they sat on the fence with their "mug" on one side and their "wump" on the other.

present. Most notable is the language of consumer entitlement. "Working people should have access to the newest inventions," the leaflet declared. Similarly, an electric refrigerator is a "modern convenience that every home should have." The broadside also emphasised commodity consumption as offering workers an opportunity to escape from the drudgery of department-store labour. The message that "TRAVEL should not be a luxury beyond your reach" appeals to workers' desires to escape the routine of labour through purchasing leisure activities—in this case, an airplane ticket to "BERMUDA." The depiction of a "housewife" standing beside an automatic washer carries a similar message of emancipation from labour, though in this example the labour to be escaped from is that of housework. Finally, the broadside touched on working women's desires to appear fashionable: "It's the EXTRAS that make your wardrobe distinctive."

"Employees' Opportunity Day" suggests that workers' consumer identities were related to their class experience. In other appeals to working consumers, however, Tallman and her staff dulled the class-based origins of labourers' wishes to consume goods and services in favour of casting these wishes in individualist terms that supported the gendered division of labour and the nuclear family's insularity. In countless articles and illustrations in *Unionize*, Local 1000's organisers depicted men as rational breadwinners who provided money and goods to his needy dependents, that is, his wife and children. One of the earliest broadsides handed out to Eaton's employees stated: "Your Wife's Expecting You to Bring Home the Bacon—Not Your Beefs."[32] Other broadsides carried similar messages. "[I]t's going to take more than a dollar or two [raise] to keep the little woman from squawking (but loud) when she negotiates with the

[32] "Your Wife's Expecting ...." cWinter 1948.

butcher for the Sunday roast," declared *Unionize* in August, 1948.[33] Another issue was even more straightforward in its support of the connections between male breadwinner ideology and domestic consumption. In an article describing how deductions cut into a male worker's take-home pay, the broadside included a picture of a man angrily showing his paycheque to his wife, who in turn was dreaming of a refrigerator, a radio, and an iron flying away from her (fig 4.3). Moreover, while it was mostly wives who demanded money and goods of working men, children were also viewed as demanders of commodities. The front page of a 1949 *Unionize* depicted a child and his mother waiting outside Eaton's for their husband and father. After hearing his mother say, "'Be patient dear, Daddy will be through at one o'clock,'" the child replied, "'Gee, and it's payday too, mebee Daddy will buy me my bike today.'"[34]

Figure 4.3: Furnishing the Postwar Working-Class Home [From: *Unionize*, 1 (16 Nov 1948), p. 1.]

The union recognised the class-based desires behind workers' consumerism, then, but it was quick to cover up these desires with images of commodity consumption that supported the ideal of the male breadwinner. In this way, the union dulled any radical, class-based messages that may have existed behind workers' commodity consumption and conveyed the message that men's heroic labouring activities are performed to provide for the needs and whims of home-based women and children. Such a message supported the union's appeal to male breadwinners to join the union, but it also implicitly denied the

[33] "Hush Money...." *Unionize*, 1 (24 Aug 1948), p. 1.
[34] "Without Warning," *Unionize*, 2 (1 March 1949), p. 1.

possibility that men could be skilled consumers and that women could be skilled producers.

In the union's appeals to workers who participated in the fashion and beauty industries, the same contradictions caused by the intersections of class, gender, and domesticity are evident. In Chapter Three, this thesis demonstrated that thousands of Eaton's workers—both men and women—had invested considerable pride and meaning in their abilities to appear as attractive and as fashionable as possible. Given the fact that Local 1000's organisers were in close contact with Eaton's employees, it would have been impossible for them to miss the value that many workers placed in their stylish appearances. In order to bring these workers into the union's fold, organisers therefore sometimes made appeals to workers who were glamourous and interested in fashion and grooming. Nonetheless, the union could not escape its dependency on the ideologies of rationalism, respectability, and male providerhood. Thus, many of the class-based arguments present in the union's appeals to working-class consumers of fashion and beauty products often rang hollow.

If one considers Tallman and her staff's rationalist outlook, it is not surprising that the main motivation they gave for workers' cultivation of attractive and fashionable appearances was that such appearances were job requirements at Eaton's—especially for salesclerks. In a leaflet distributed to Main Store workers in September 1949, the union argued that "Today [selling] is far below [factory work] on the salary scale, yet store employees must pay much more for appearance on the job than any other type of worker."[35] Many sellers responded with enthusiasm to the union's assertion that salesworkers should receive higher pay because they had to be stylish and attractive at

work. In June 1948, a salesperson who referred to him or herself as "One who has gone through the Mill" wrote a letter to *Unionize*'s editor, stating:

> Dear People:
> Glad you are taking an interest in the Big Store. Do try and get us a weekly pay, as every other week we are half starved – no money to go shopping. It certainly is a drag to live on Eaton's meagre wage and keep up an appearance before the public with clothes and food prices the way they are. ...
> The way the price of meals is soaring up it's no wonder the employees look as if they had T. B. or tapeworm.[36]

A few months later, *Unionize* ran a quotation from a self-described "'white-collar worker'" that reiterated One who has gone through the Mill's sentiments. According to this white-collar worker, he was joining the union and pressing for a higher salary not only because he had a wife and two children to support, but also because "'we have to dress up for the job, which makes it all the harder to make ends meet[.]'"[37] Thus, by referring to salespeople's cultivation of stylish appearances as being due to Eaton's expectation that they appear attractive while at work, the union was able to gain support among some of the Company's white-collar workers.

While the organisers recognised that both male and female salesclerks needed to look good on the job, they also knew that attractive appearances were especially important for saleswomen. In a broadside entitled "Union Maid," which was one of the first distributed during the Eaton Drive, the union wrote:

> Sally Smith is a slick chick. From her Firm Form Foundation to her slim black gown with bustle drapery in the rear, from her ankle strap slippers to her shining, sculptured hair-do, Sally is sleek perfection.

---

[35] "This is Organize Main Store Week." Broadside. 12 Sept 1949.
[36] "One who has gone through the Mill." as quoted in "Letters to the Editor." *Unionize*. 19 (7 June 1948). p. 2.
[37] As quoted in "I'm Joining Local 1000 Because . . .." *Unionize*. 22 (31 Aug 1948). p. 1. I use the masculine pronoun in this case because there is a photo of this worker. who is sporting a suit and tie—thus indicating his masculine identity—beside his quotation.

> You'd be surprised at the number of tired lady customers who take one look at Sally and immediately become acutely dissatisfied with their own looks. What happens? The customer takes the nearest elevator to the dress department, buys a new dress or suit – then needs shoes, gloves, hair styling and manicure to match. Such is the power of suggestion. A well-dressed salesgirl is a very good advertisement for a department store. Unfortunately for Sally, all these things, clothing, hair-dressing, complexion aids and manicures, come out of the salesgirl's weekly salary. ... And the worst of it is that everything she buys ... has gone up in price. Sally's budget is taking a beating.
> BUT.....Sally is as smart as she is beautiful. She has signed a card in the RWDSU. ...[38]

In this excerpt, the union explicitly connects Eaton's saleswomen's "beautiful" image with the need to appear attractive on the job, as the line "A well-dressed salesgirl is a very good advertisement for a department store" indicates. Yet, the union is also offering saleswomen the opportunity to take pride in their stylish appearances. The phrases "Sally is sleek perfection" and "Sally is as smart as she is beautiful" both pay homage to the pride that many female workers at Eaton's take in their attractive looks. Indirectly, too, the union is granting saleswomen respect for their consumer skills. A "well-dressed salesgirl" is one who knows the fashion world well, and who also knows how to borrow from it for her own advantage.

Besides paying homage to saleswomen's attractive appearances, "Union Maid" carries another message for saleswomen. By casting saleswomen as better-looking than customers, organisers were drawing attention to the fact that women's consumerist appearances enabled them to assert power over female shoppers. When a customer felt inadequate after noticing an attractive saleswoman, the saleswoman won something of a minor class skirmish, albeit one that enriched her employer. Through "Union Maid,"

---

[38] "Union Maid." Broadside. Spring 1948.

then, organisers attempted to demonstrate that working women's pride in their attractive appearances was compatible with unionisation.

While the organisers recognised salespeople's consumer and performative identities as being related to occupational exigencies, they also recognised workers' desires to transcend class oppression through the cultivation of fashionable and attractive appearances. As Chapter Three points out, through the wearing of fashionable goods some working men at Eaton's constructed flamboyant and pseudo-aristocratic images of themselves. Similarly, some working women at Eaton's participated in a consumer culture of glamour. Both men's and women's presentations of stylised and stylish selves enabled their adherents to escape from the routinised and disempowering world of the T. Eaton Company. In *Unionize*, organisers printed images of attractive working men and women, and through the Social Committee, it offered entertainment events that bolstered these images and offered a theatre of self-presentation. Through such activities, the union attempted to give dignity to those workers whose appearances had become commodified but who had, in turn,

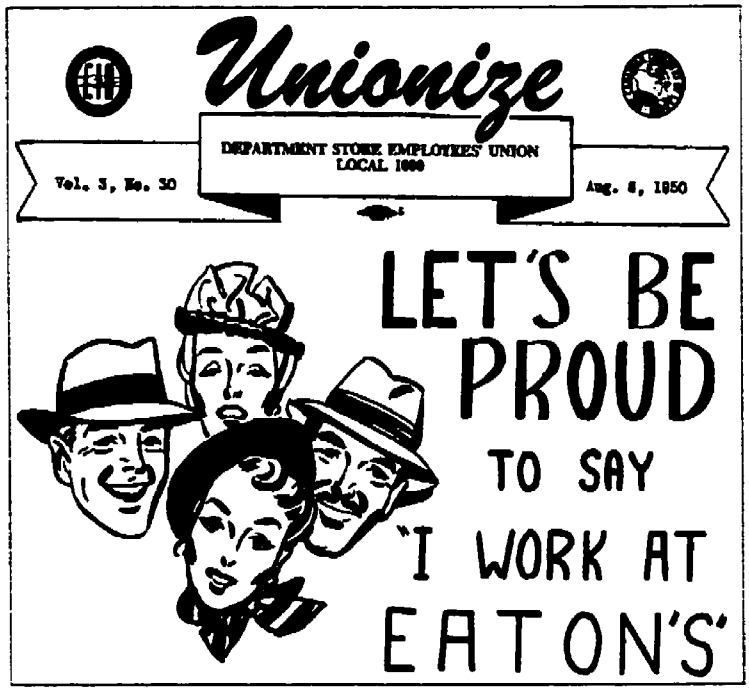


Figure 4.4: Giving Dignity to Stylish Appearances [From: *Unionize*, 3 (8 Aug 1950), p. 1.]

created themselves anew within this corporate-orchestrated push for style. Organisers thus attempted to demonstrate that stylish and consumer personas were compatible with collective action.

To begin with, organisers sometimes included illustrations of fashionable men and women in *Unionize*. On 8 August 1950, the front page of *Unionize* was devoted to such employees (fig. 4.4). Under an illustrated picture of the faces of four stylish men and women, the union urged all employees to join Local 1000: "Eaton employees can unite in their own organisation, Local 1000, one which they have built themselves and will run themselves. In Local 1000 there is a place for every Eaton employee and a means to make Eaton's a place where you will be proud to work."[39] By placing pictures of fashionable men and women together in *Unionize*, the union urged workers to join across the lines of gender to help build Local 1000; they also acknowledged that men, as well as women, were interested in the worlds of fashion and grooming.

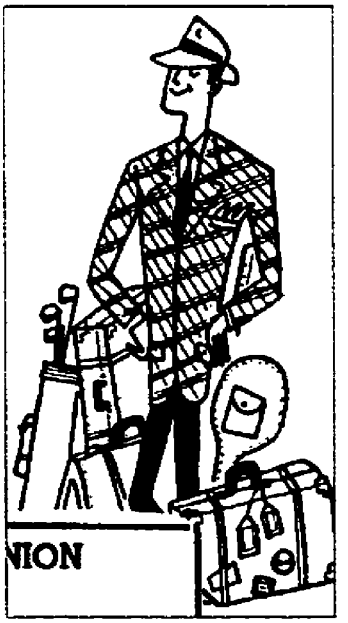


Figure 4.5: The Working-Class Sportsman [From: "Before You Take off on that Well-Earned Vacation." *Unionize*, 2 (5 July 1949), p. 4.]

More commonly, *Unionize* appealed either only to stylish men or only to stylish women. It is in these individual appeals where the union's recognition of men's and women's construction of stylised identities are most apparent. An illustration in a 1949 issue of *Unionize* that accompanies a plea for workers to sign a membership card "before you take off on that well-

[39] "Let's Be Proud to Say 'I Work at Eaton's.'" *Unionize*, 3 (8 Aug 1950), p. 1. See also untitled cartoon. *Unionize*, 3 (9 Jan 1950), p. 2; "V.I.P. ... --Your Union Stewards." *Unionize*, 4 (7 May 1951), p. 4.

earned vacation," for example, depicts a confident-looking, broad-shouldered man wearing a fashionable hat and a plaid sports jacket. Surrounding him are pieces of luggage, a tennis racket, and a set of golf clubs (fig. 4.5). Obviously proud of his appearance, this illustrated worker seems to be a toned-down twentieth-century descendant of the nineteenth-century working-class, urban, consumerist men described by historian Mark Swiencicki. In an article entitled "Consuming Brotherhood," he writes that such men "expressed their masculinity through stylish clothing, fashion, jewelry, and smart hairstyles."[40] While this worker's appearance speaks to his consumer identity, the paraphernalia surrounding him addresses his leisured, almost dandy-ish, interests. The decorated luggage implies that he is a more cosmopolitan traveler than his low-paying department-store job would seem to allow, and the tennis racket and golf clubs suggest that he has adopted some of the sporting interests of the Canadian élite. Through printing this image of a fashionable yet labour-identified male, the union thus tapped some potent signifiers of a masculine working-class identity in which aspiration, accommodation, and class expression congealed.

Just as the union appealed to men's sports-related identities, so too did the union address women's notions of glamour. In one illustration, *Unionize* depicted a woman wearing an evening dress, earrings, and gloves. She is talking to a man, and is saying that "...the sooner we get our [one-dollar membership fee] in, the sooner we can start **bargaining**."[41] An article entitled "You Can't Buy '**TALENT**' at bargain-basement prices-And the reason you can't is because it's **UNIONIZED**" demonstrates even more

---

[40] Mark A. Swiencicki. "Consuming Brotherhood: Men's Culture, Style, and Recreation as Consumer Culture, 1880-1930." *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*. ed. Lawrence B. Glickman (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 222.
[41] Untitled cartoon. *Unionize*, 3 (9 Jan 1950), p. 2.

clearly organised labour's attempts to raise employees' class awareness by materialising glamour in ways that accented its costs and the benefits of working-class solidarity (fig. 4.6). The article informs its readers that the "big names of the entertainment world in Movies, Theatre, Television, Radio, and Music are union members"; further, by "joining" the union, "you're not only helping yourself to a better life, you will be helping to raise retail standards for hundreds of thousands of men and women across Canada."[42] Accompanying the article is a picture of a female performer applying makeup. By comparing working women at Eaton's with such glamourous women as television and movie stars, union organisers referred to the performative aspects of many of the department store's female employees' work. In this way, the article provided a voice for working women's pride in their labouring lives, which showcased talents and skills usually unrecognised in dreary presentations of 'working girls.' Moreover, by making a symbolic connection between women's cosmetic usage and the price of women's labour, the union underscored that for many women producerism and consumerism were simply two sides of one worker/consumer identity.

Figure 4.6: The Appeal to Glamour [From: *Unionize*, 4 (13 Aug 1951), p. 4.]

Another way that union organisers appealed to the consumer interests of many of Eaton's male and female employees was by holding dances. Dances have been since the turn of the twentieth century an important component of working-class culture—particularly among young workers. At the dancehall, workers could escape the drudgery

[42] "You Can't Buy **'TALENT'** at bargain-basement prices-And the reason you can't is because it's **UNIONIZED.**" *Unionize*, 4 (13 Aug 1951), p. 4.

of routinised labour and "[put] on style," as historian Kathy Peiss notes.[43] While Eaton's Recreational Activities Department co-opted this component of working-class culture and turned dances into loyalty-forming opportunities, Local 1000's Social Committee reclaimed dances for Eaton's employees as places where workers could express their identities in a collective working-class environment. Significantly, the union advertised dances as places far removed from the workday pressures of department-store labour: men and women in dance notices wear fashionable clothing and sway gracefully as they glide across the dance floor (fig. 4.7).[44] From a photograph in *Unionize* that accompanied an article describing the union's dances, it is possible to determine that many workers did don fashionable clothes for their evening out: at least one woman is wearing a strapless dress and the men are all wearing suits.[45] Though perhaps unwittingly, by offering dances Local 1000's Social Committee gave Eaton's workers a place where they could express their desire to transcend class oppression through the cultivation of fashionable and attractive appearances.

Figure 4.7: Reclaiming a Working-Class Cultural Arena [From: *Unionize*, 4 (9 April 1951), p.3.]

One final appeal to workers' investment in the world of fashion occurred at a dance called the Spring Frolic, which the union put on at the beginning of May, 1951. Besides the usual offering of music and dance competitions, that year the Social

---

[43] Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), p. 56.

[44] See also: "Cabaret Night," *Unionize*, 2 (25 Oct 1949), p. 3; "Be Seeing You at Local 1000's Dance." *Unionize*, 2 (1 Nov 1949), p. 1.

Committee also offered a Beauty Contest for female union members. According to the leaflet announcing the event, the winner would receive the title "Miss Local 1000," "an armful of roses" and "a mystery prize."[46] On the night of the contest, "fourteen beautiful competitors paraded before the three-man jury: Murray Cotterill, president of Toronto Labor Council; Jim Perna, United Automobile Workers, and executive board member of Toronto Labor Council; and Eamon Park, M.P.P. and United Steelworkers' Director of Publicity."[47] Eventually, a nineteen-year-old elevator operator from the Main Store won the contest, and she received a crown, roses, and a cash prize.[48] According to *Unionize*, the beauty contest winner's three sisters accompanied her to Frolic to cheer her on during the competition, and the day after the competition they phoned home to the rural town of Cochrane, Ontario, to announce the good news to the family.[49] Miss Local 1000's fame did not end there, however. In the 1951 Labour Day Parade, she and the runners-up in the contest rode in a convertible in front of Local 1000's float, waving and smiling at the crowds lining the sidewalk.[50]

Obviously, both the offering of a Beauty Contest to female union members and the judging of these members by high-profile male figures in the labour movement carried disempowering political implications, and these will be discussed shortly. For now, however, it is important to address the more positive issues surrounding the pageant. First, by offering a beauty contest to female union members, Local 1000's Social Committee paid homage to Eaton's female workers' pride in their feminine

---

[45] "Local 1000 Dance Highly Successful," *Unionize*, 3 (24 Oct 1950), p. 2.
[46] "Miss Local 1000." Leaflet, April 1951.
[47] "Line of Lovelies Judged," *Unionize*, 4 (15 May 1951), p. 3.
[48] Untitled caption, *Unionize*, 4 (15 May 1951), p. 1.
[49] "Line of Lovelies," p. 3.
[50] "File the Lists," *Unionize*, 4 (5 Sept 1951), p. 1.

appearance, a part of their working-class identities. They also offered Eaton's female workers a cultural arena in which they could claim dignity and respect as both women

Figure 4.8: Class Consciousness and the Culture of Glamour [From: "Line of Lovelies Judged." *Unionize*, 4 (15 May 1951), p. 3. *Note*: To protect privacy, the winner's name and entry number have been removed from the caption.]

and workers. Importantly, almost all the women who entered the contest wore fashionable evening gowns and party dresses (fig. 4.8). Not only did this signify their construction of particular female identities, it also demonstrated a rejection of Eaton's injunction that its female workers were to wear subdued, drab business attire. Appropriating the signifiers of aristocratic privilege, including high-heeled fashionable shoes and large pieces of jewellery, these women asserted a consumer identity that was rooted in class experience and expressive of a yearning for social change. Furthermore, by parading in front of their peers, these women forcefully demanded the attention, admiration, and respect of their unionized co-workers, both male and female. Moreover, and as the winner's phoning home and her sisters' attendance at the dance suggest, at least

some of the entrants attached considerable meaning to their participation in the beauty contest. Finally, by deciding to ride in a convertible in the 1951 Labour Day Parade, Miss Local 1000 and other contest finalists demonstrated clearly that their investment and pride in their attractive appearances were fully compatible with both collective action and the development of a working-class consciousness. Thus, though the objectification of the contestants by male unionists may have denied these women complete political autonomy, women participated in the Beauty Contest, in part at least, on their own terms, expressing publicly a part of their identity.

Through articles in *Unionize*, dances, and beauty contests, Local 1000's organisers appealed to workers on many levels. Not only did the union realise that many salespeople had to look good on the job, but it also recognised—even if it did not fully understand—that many workers developed a flamboyantly attractive presence to assert power over their customers, to escape the routinised and paternalist environment of department-store labour, and to envision a world where they would be free of the limitations of class. Nonetheless, the union's appeal to workers' consumer appearances was not without its own constraints. In fact, due to the union organisers' insistent ideological reliance on the sexual division of labour, attempts to give dignity to workers' investment in style, grooming, and performance were often negated by the union's privileging of masculinity and providerhood over all other working-class identities.

Although the union made some referrals to men's desires to appear attractive, these identifications were far outweighed by the union's portrayal of the true heroic male labourer not as a person interested in fashion and grooming, but rather as a serious, hard-working man who supports his family, who takes pride in his rationalism, who possesses

strong producerist skills, and who provides his wife and children—and not himself—with consumer articles. Certainly, this image of the decent male provider is at odds with the more flamboyant and proud image of the leisured sportsman that the union occasionally presented. By sympathising with the self-supporting breadwinner, the union was attempting to gain support among the married men at Eaton's, but at the same time it was negating the political agency and denying the alternative utopic visions that may have motivated fashionable men to join Local 1000. The union was, in addition, implicitly casting aspersion on such men who were selfish and irrational enough to spend money on adornments for their own persons instead of using their income for more 'noble' purposes, such as sustaining a family. In this context of masculine providerhood, it is not surprising that Local 1000's organisers usually rationalised working men's interests in fashion and grooming, chalking these interests up to job requirements and hardly ever going further in their analysis.

The union similarly disempowered the political implications latent in women's stylish and attractive appearances. In fact, organisers treated stylish and attractive women as aesthetically-pleasing, non-political females who existed solely to please men and to prettify men's environments. A cartoon printed in a January 1950 issue of *Unionize* illustrates this treatment well. Two stylish women dressed in evening gowns are imploring a man to go out on a date with them. One wants him to go to a show, the other

Figure 4.9: Objectifying Stylish Women [From: *Unionize*, 3 (17 Jan 1950), p. 2.]

wants him to go to a dance. The man refuses both of them, saying, "Sorry girls, some other time – to-night is my **department meeting!**" (fig. 4.9). Clearly designed to increase attendance at union meetings, the cartoon nevertheless presents a range of other meanings. By portraying glamourous women as the embodiment of all that keeps men away from their union meetings, the artist of the cartoon is suggesting that men are the real political actors in the union, while Eaton's women workers distract 'true' workers from proper and rational behaviour. Not only does the cartoon negate any political meaning the women may have invested in their wearing of fashionable clothing when attending shows and dances, it also suggests that women who are interested in such frivolities as fashion and entertainment are incapable of participating in the building of Local 1000.

Unionize was not the only agent of fashionable women's objectification and political immobilisation. The Social Committee also conveyed the union's message that Eaton's fashionable female employees' political agency was inferior to the agency of rational male unionists. The appointment of male, prominent union representatives as judges of the Beauty Contest, for instance, cast contestants as de-politicised, aestheticised objects of the male gaze. In this position, they had no autonomy; moreover, their status as beautiful women was assumed to be dependent on the judgement of high-ranking union men.

The union's reliance on the sexual division of labour and the privileging of rational, male providerhood over all other ideological categories hence created some disempowering moments within the union's appeal to fashionable and attractive workers. Ignoring the radical possibilities contained in both men's and women's construction of

themselves as stylish labourers, the union unwittingly belittled the political agency contained in the consumer yearnings of male and female department-store workers. Yet, regardless of these obvious drawbacks contained within the union's appeal to fashionable men and women workers, it is still noteworthy that despite labour organisers' obvious mixed messages surrounding the purchasing and wearing of commodities, stylish labourers who worked at Eaton's did join Local 1000. In doing so, they demonstrated that their fashionable and glamourous working-class personas were compatible with collective action.

In its exploration of the relationship between working-class consumerism and unionisation, this chapter has demonstrated that there were profound limitations on Local 1000's organisers' abilities to articulate a class-based vision of consumption. Because the union did not address either salespeople's pride in their craft or their experiences on the salesfloor, it only fleetingly tapped into issues relating to how commodity culture affected retail workers. As well, even when the CCL and CCF organisers did address consumption, their reliance on the ideologies of masculine producerism, rationalism, respectability, and male providerhood caused their appeals to Eaton's workers' consumer longings and identities to be ambiguous at best, and disempowering at worst.

It is nonetheless important to point out that even if the union had made direct class-based appeals to workers' consumer identities, it is doubtful whether these appeals would have sparked a company-wide interest in joining the union. There were too many structural factors impeding workers' decisions to vote for Local 1000's certification, including fear of what would happen if the union were certified and loyalty to the Eaton family. In addition, the union's own industrial approach and patriarchal biases made it

insensitive to the grievances and experiences of thousands of workers, especially those employed on the selling floor.

Further, consumption was a category of class experience that was wrought with barriers to solidarity. Just as workers' labouring identities were affected by the variables of age, skill, and gender, so too were their consuming identities. The pride that a young salesperson felt in his or her stylish appearance might have carried less significance for, say, an elderly worker employed in the Mail Order. Similarly, the meaning that working-class parents invested in their abilities to purchase goods for their children might have had less significance for someone who had no dependents. That the Department Store Employees' Union had such a difficult time organising a 15,000-member-strong workforce whose members not only adhered to different gender identities but who boasted a variety of ages, skills, and occupations reinforces this point.

Nevertheless, it is clear that in mid-twentieth-century Toronto, thousands of workers participated as both labourers and consumers in one of the largest union drives ever undertaken in Canada. Local 1000's CCF organisers' frequent referrals to Eaton's employees' consumer identities suggests that although they had profound misgivings about consumption, they recognised that consumption was important enough to Eaton's workers' lives that it should constitute a significant part of their organising campaign. For historians of the Canadian working class, such a recognition should not be taken lightly. If we are to arrive at a sophisticated understanding of why workers have participated as consumers in the mass market, we need to begin recognising that for many workers, labouring and consuming personas were not diametrically opposed. Rather, they were often two sides of one working-class identity.

CONCLUSION

> To re-awaken, in the midst of a privatized and psychologizing society, obsessed with commodities and bombarded by the ideological slogans of big business, some sense of the ineradicable drive towards collectivity that can be detected, no matter how faintly and feebly ... is surely an indispensable precondition for any meaningful ... intervention in contemporary culture.
>
> --Fredric Jameson, 1979[1]

This thesis began with the question, "why do workers consume?" By analysing the experiences of one group of workers, Eaton's employees in mid-twentieth-century Toronto, the chapters of this thesis have provided a response to this troublesome but important query. Due to their position at the heart of the free market, the commodity-exchange, Eaton's employees faced numerous attempts by Eaton's managers and customers to turn them into advertisements for the T. Eaton Company. In turn, thousands of Eaton's workers responded to these commodifying efforts by developing elaborate performative and consumer personas. These personas allowed them to negotiate managers' and customers' commodifying demands, alleviate their insecure economic circumstances, and assert pride in their identities as retail labourers. Eaton's workers' consuming interests and activities, in other words, were born from their class experience at the department store.

As class-based as their participation in Eaton's commodified world was, however, Eaton's workers' consumer interests did not prod them to articulate a coherent political challenge to either Eaton's inequitable employment practices or their marginal socioeconomic positions. In part, this lack of politicisation is attributable to the isolated

and individualist forms that their consuming activities sometimes took. A salesworker asserting power over a customer by demonstrating superior consuming skills may have been an articulation of class discontent, but it occurred in an isolated context. As well, a worker displaying pride in his or her attractive appearance was a gesture of class expression, but it was limited by the individualist nature of this pride. Further, and as the Department Store Employees' Union's appeals to various consuming interests demonstrated, workers' consuming activities were divided along the lines of age and gender. The pleasure a youthful worker may feel in participating in the fashion industry may have less meaning for a worker nearing retirement, for example; similarly, the pride that husbands may have felt in providing commodities for their dependents may have had less meaning for single employees.

Nevertheless, simply because Eaton's workers' consuming activities carried isolated and individualist overtones, historians should not assume that it was these overtones alone that prevented them from formulating class-based demands based on their consumer interests. Indeed, the individualism present within Eaton's workers' consumption was far outweighed by two broader structural factors. First, Eaton's managers exerted a tremendous amount of control over workers' activities at the department store. The T. Eaton Company was, after all, the creator of the department store's paternalist and commodified world, and its managers carefully governed its employees' consuming practices in numerous ways. They supervised employees' activities on the salesfloor, they specified which goods and services employees could buy, and they orchestrated all of the firm's recreation and training events. Through these

---

[1] Fredric Jameson. "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *The Jameson Reader*. eds. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 147.

and countless other methods they furthered the isolating and individualist forms that employees' consuming interests and activities took. By holding fashion shows in which men picked out their favourite employee models, for instance, Eaton's Staff Trainers encouraged women workers to view themselves as individual competitors within a commodified environment where the only way they could achieve recognition was by being more attractive than their co-workers.

Eaton's orchestration of its employees' activities therefore exacerbated the isolating and individualist tendencies of its workers' consumerism, and it thus posed major barriers to the creation of a culture of solidarity among the firm's workers. Hence, it is not surprising that workers' consumer interests did not spark a broad-based challenge to Eaton's employment practices. However, when the opportunity finally did arise in which workers could direct their consumer interests toward achieving collective demands—namely, the Eaton Drive—such a challenge again did not materialise. In Chapter Four, this thesis demonstrated that not only did many workers' consumer interests lead them to join Local 1000, but also that the union's CCF organisers did recognise the existence of these interests. However, due to Tallman and her staff's adherence to ideologies rooted in the sexual division of labour, these organisers consistently dulled the class-based origins of workers' consuming activities. Throughout the union drive and afterwards, therefore, Eaton's workers' participation in commodity culture remained a fractured phenomenon.

Significantly, it is precisely at this point where the connections between the CCF organisers' misrecognition of working-class consumption and Marxist academics' limited portrayal of consumerism comes into focus. Just as did the organisers downplay Eaton's

workers' interests in consumption because they privileged the ideological categories of masculinity, rationality, and respectability, so too did Marx, Lukács, and Adorno and Horkheimer minimise the importance of consumption in the capitalist marketplace by imagining production and producers to be rational and autonomous, and consumption and consumers to be irrational and debilitating. Therefore, reliance on ideologies arising from the sexual division of labour has caused both Marxist theorists and union activists to overlook many of the more positive aspects of consumption, including, as this thesis has shown, the pride that retail workers take in their consuming skills and the alternate expressions of working-class identity that arise out of participating in the fashion and beauty industries.

With the expansion of the non-unionised white-collar labour force in the postwar years, it is imperative that historians begin to re-evaluate Leftist assumptions surrounding working-class consumption. Many of the workers within this labour force are women and youths, and many of these workers have adopted class-based modes of expression that differ significantly from those adopted by turn-of-the-twentieth-century, blue-collar, and married male workers. Importantly, consumer interests and activities figure prominently within these modes of expression. If historians wish to understand the full complexities of twentieth-century working-class experience, it is necessary that they begin to pay attention to working-class consumption. In this way, they can begin to sort out not only many of the contradictions that surround workers' consumerism, but also the possibilities for change that flow out of it.

APPENDIX

Occupational and Demographic Statistics of Eaton's Toronto Workforce, 1939 to 1953

The information in this appendix is compiled from statistical documents created by Eaton's Wages Office in Toronto. Unfortunately, the Wages Office did not separate managerial staff from non-managerial staff in its records. These statistics therefore include managerial staff. Yet, with the exception of "Expense," or Office staff, this inclusion only skews the figures presented in this Appendix slightly, as the numbers of non-managerial employees far outweighed the numbers of managerial ones. It is important to note, however, that Expense staff figures include all of Eaton's upper- and middle-managers in Toronto.

Source: Statistics Notebook, c. 1910s-1950s, T. Eaton Papers, Series 181, Box 1, Archives of Ontario.

Table 1. Total Employees, 1939-1953

Regular Staff = Full- and part-time employees.
Casual Staff = Employees hired for Saturdays, busy periods, and product demonstration.
Christmas Staff = Employees hired to help out for Christmas Rush and Boxing Week and then fired before the New Year.

	REGULAR STAFF	CASUAL STAFF	CHRISTMAS STAFF	TOTAL
1939	10 943	1555	2851	15 349
1941	13 569	2020	3675	19 234
1944	12 313	2260	2545	17 118
1945	13 220	1996	2203	17 419
1947	14 234	2488	2856	19 578
1949	15 202	1651	n/a	n/a
1951	13 815	1573	n/a	n/a
1953	14 048	2096	n/a	n/a

Table 2. Employees by Occupational Group as Percent of Total Regular Workforce, 1939 to 1953

Sales = Sellers on the salesfloor.
Sales Expense = Non-selling sales-related occupations such as elevator-operating, cash-counting, delivering, and warehousing.
Expense = Managers, accountants, and secretaries.
Work Rooms = Merchandisers and caretakers.
Mail Order Mdse. (Mail Order Merchandise) = Warehousers, stockkeepers, packagers.
Mail Order Expense = Mail order managers, secretaries, and letter-writers.
Factory Week (Factories – Paid Weekly) = Employees, such as garmentworkers, who are paid on a weekly basis for producing mass goods.
Factory Piece (Factories – Paid by the Piece) = Employees, such as garmentworkers, who are paid on a piecework basis for producing mass goods.
Factory – WR – Week (Factories – Workrooms – Paid by the Week) = Employees, such as craftspeople, paid on a weekly basis for hand-producing such goods as eyeglasses, shoes, and mannequins.
Factories – WR – Piece (Factories – Workrooms – Paid by the Piece) = Employees paid on a piecework basis for hand-producing such goods as parade floats.

	1939	1941	1945	1949	1951	1953
Sales	29%	27%	28%	26%	25%	26%
Sales Expense	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%
Expense	26%	27%	28%	29%	31%	32%
Work Rooms	9%	8%	8%	8%	9%	8%
Mail Order Mdse.	4%	4%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Mail Order Expense	5%	6%	9%	8%	9%	9%
Factory - Week	5%	5%	5%	4%	3%	3%
Factory - Piece	10%	11%	7%	7%	6%	5%
Factory Work Rooms - Week	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%
Factory Work Rooms - Piece	-1%	-1%	-1%	-1%	-1%	-1%

Table 3. Casual Employees as Percent of Total Workforce (Excluding Christmas Help), by Gender, 1939 to 1953

Note: Casual Employees, or "Reserve Staff," are Saturday-Only Workers, Occasional Workers, and Product Demonstrators.

	WOMEN	MEN	TOTAL
1939	10%	3%	13%
1941	10%	3%	13%
1944	13%	3%	16%
1945	10%	3%	13%
1947	12%	3%	15%
1949	7%	2%	9%
1951	8%	2%	10%
1953	10%	3%	13%

Table 4. Number of "Christmas Help" Fired, by Occupational Group, 1939-1948

Note: It is unclear why Eaton's separated the number of people fired into two periods (Dec 20-23 and Dec 27-30). It is probable, however, that the first total represents those people who helped throughout the Christmas season and then were fired prior to December 20, and that the Dec 20-23 and Dec 27-30 figures represent those who were fired during those respective periods. The last total may thus be understood as the entire number of people fired at Christmastime.

See Table 2 for an occupational key.

	SALES	SALES EXP.	EXP.	MO MDSE.	MO EXP.	TOTAL	DEC 20-23	TOTAL	DEC 27-30	TOTAL
1939	898	149	716	119	306	2188	26	2214	637	2851
1942	1040	128	672	153	133	2126	969	3085	446	3531
1944	711	85	553	59	326	1734	363	2097	448	2545
1946	637	90	602	55	79	1463	672	2135	293	2428
1948	714	56	596	64	57	1487	718	2205	335	2540

Table 5. Women as Percent of Total Regular Workforce, by Marital Status, 1939 to 1951

	SINGLE WOMEN (%)	MARRIED WOMEN (%)	WIDOWED WOMEN (%)	TOTAL WOMEN (%)
1939	41%	11%	3%	55%
1941	40%	17%	3%	60%
1944	34%	29%	4%	67%
1945	33%	28%	4%	65%
1947	32%	24%	4%	60%
1949	27%	26%	4%	57%
1951	25%	29%	4%	58%

Table 6. Ages of Toronto Female Staff, by Percent of Total Female Regular Workforce, 1941-1951

	1941	1943	1945	1947	1949	1951
Under 18	6%	6%	7%	7%	4%	3%
Under 21	26%	17%	17%	16%	14%	12%
21-44 Inclusive	54%	57%	59%	49%	53%	56%
45-49	7%	10%	11%	11%	12%	12%
50-54	4%	6%	7%	8%	9%	10%
55-59	2%	3%	5%	6%	6%	6%
60-64	1%	1%	2%	3%	3%	2%
65-69	-1%	-1%	-1%	-1%	1%	1%
70-74	0%	0%	-1%	-1%	-1%	-1%
75 and over	0%	0%	0%	-1%	0%	0%

Table 7. Ages Toronto Male Staff, by Percent of Total Male Regular Workforce, 1941-1951

	1941	1943	1945	1947	1949	1951
UNDER 18	4%	4%	5%	3%	3%	3%
Under 21	12%	6%	7%	8%	8%	8%
21-44 Inclusive	45%	36%	37%	47%	50%	51%
45-49	5%	14%	13%	11%	10%	10%
50-54	12%	16%	14%	11%	10%	10%
55-59	11%	14%	14%	11%	10%	10%
60-64	9%	10%	9%	8%	8%	8%
65-69	5%	4%	5%	4%	3%	3%
70-74	-1%	1%	1%	1%	-1%	-1%
75 and over	-1%	-1%	-1%	0%	-1%	0%

Table 8. Women as Percentage of Regular Occupational Groups in Stores, 1939 to 1953

See Table 2 for an occupational key.

	WOMEN AS % SALES	WOMEN AS % SALES EXPENSE	WOMEN AS % EXPENSE	WOMEN AS % WORK ROOMS
1939	76%	47%	39%	41%
1941	77%	52%	45%	39%
1945	83%	58%	54%	47%
1949	77%	53%	46%	38%
1951	77%	52%	45%	3%
1953	77%	51%	47%	37%

Table 9. Women as Percent of Regular Occupational Groups in Mail Order, 1939 to 1953

See Table 2 for an occupational key.

	WOMEN AS % OF MO MDSE.	WOMEN AS % OF MO EXPENSE
1939	49%	61%
1941	52%	68%
1945	64%	76%
1949	56%	76%
1951	55%	77%
1953	56%	77%

Table 10. Women as Percent of Regular Occupational Groups in Factories, 1939 to 1953

See Table 2 for an occupational key.

	WOMEN AS % OF FACTORY - WEEK	WOMEN AS % OF FACTORY - PIECE	WOMEN AS % FACTORY WORK ROOMS - WEEK	WOMEN AS % OF FACTORY WORK ROOMS - PIECE
1939	47%	72%	30%	33%
1941	50%	74%	43%	25%
1945	53%	73%	36%	25%
1949	49%	76%	33%	20%
1951	54%	71%	31%	20%
1953	52%	72%	32%	25%

Table 11. Marital Status of Employees, by Gender and Percent of Total Regular Workforce, 1939 to 1953

See Table 2 for an occupational key.

	% SINGLE MEN OF TOTAL MEN	% MARRIED MEN OF TOTAL MEN	% WIDOWED MEN OF TOTAL MEN	% SINGLE WOMEN OF TOTAL WOMEN	% MARRIED WOMEN OF TOTAL WOMEN	% WIDOWED WOMEN OF TOTAL WOMEN
1939	32%	66%	2%	76%	20%	5%
1941	35%	67%	2%	68%	28%	4%
1944	16%	84%	4%	51%	43%	6%
1945	20%	75%	3%	51%	43%	7%
1947	24%	74%	2%	53%	41%	7%
1949	27%	71%	2%	47%	45%	7%
1951	26%	72%	2%	43%	51%	6%

Table 12. Single Female Employees, as Percent of Total Regular Female Employees in Particular Occupational Groups, 1939-1951

See Table 2 for an occupational key.

	1939	1945	1951
Sales	67%	35%	30%
Sales Exp	91%	59%	49%
Exp	86%	60%	51%
Store WR	70%	57%	46%
MO Mdse	95%	35%	51%
MO Exp	92%	61%	47%
Fact. Week	81%	58%	57%
Fact. Piece	68%	54%	46%
Fact. WR Week	86%	34%	63%
Fact. WR Piece	100%	100%	100%

Table 13. Single Male Employees, as Percent of Total Regular Male Employees in Particular Occupational Groups, 1939-1951

See Table 2 for an occupational key.

	1939	1945	1951
Sales	49%	26%	26%
Sales Exp	46%	22%	30%
Exp	27%	20%	26%
Store WR	29%	17%	22%
MO Mdse	25%	23%	26%
MO Exp	41%	25%	34%
Fact. Week	25%	22%	22%
Fact. Piece	14%	9%	18%
Fact. WR Week	24%	18%	26%
Fact. WR Piece	0%	0%	0%

Table 14. Married Female Employees, as Percent Total Regular Female Employees in Particular Occupational Groups, 1939-1951

See Table 2 for an occupational key.

	1939	1945	1951
Sales	26%	55%	62%
Sales Exp	9%	37%	45%
Exp	11%	37%	44%
Store WR	23%	36%	45%
MO Mdse	4%	34%	45%
MO Exp	6%	61%	48%
Fact. Week	16%	37%	38%
Fact. Piece	27%	40%	49%
Fact. WR Week	12%	34%	32%
Fact. WR Piece	0%	0%	0%

Table 15. Married Male Employees, as Percent Total Regular Male Employees in Particular Occupational Groups, 1939-1951

See Table 2 for an occupational key.

	1939	1945	1951
Sales	50%	72%	73%
Sales Exp	53%	75%	70%
Exp	72%	77%	72%
Store WR	69%	79%	75%
MO Mdse	75%	76%	73%
MO Exp	58%	72%	64%
Fact. Week	73%	74%	77%
Fact. Piece	83%	89%	78%
Fact. WR Week	74%	78%	72%
Fact. WR Piece	100%	100%	100%

Table 16. Widowed Female Employees, as Percent of Total Regular Female Employees in Particular Occupational Groups, 1941-1951

See Table 2 for an occupational key.

	1939	1945	1951
Sales	7%	11%	8%
Sales Exp	1%	4%	6%
Exp	3%	4%	5%
Store WR	7%	8%	9%
MO Mdse	1%	2%	5%
MO Exp	2%	4%	5%
Fact. Week	3%	5%	5%
Fact. Piece	4%	7%	6%
Fact. WR Week	2%	5%	5%
Fact. WR Piece	0%	0%	0%

Table 17. Widowed Male Employees, as Percent of Total Regular Male Employees in Particular Occupational Groups, 1941-1951

See Table 2 for an occupational key.

	1939	1945	1951
Sales	1%	2%	1%
Sales Exp	1%	3%	1%
Exp	1%	3%	2%
Store WR	2%	4%	3%
MO Mdse	1%	2%	1%
MO Exp	2%	4%	2%
Fact. Week	3%	5%	1%
Fact. Piece	3%	5%	4%
Fact. WR Week	3%	5%	3%
Fact. WR Piece	0%	0%	0%

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archival Sources

Eileen Tallman Sufrin fonds (MG 31 B 31), National Archives of Canada
Series: Department Store Unions and the Eaton Drive

T. Eaton Papers (F 229), Archives of Ontario
Series 8: Executive Office, General Files
Series 54: General Office, General Files
Series 59: General Office, Correspondence Section, Signature/Management Lists
Series 60: General Office, Correspondence Section, Signature Notices
Series 61: Store Superintendent's Office, Outgoing and Incoming Notices
Series 64: General Office, Correspondence Section, Outgoing and Incoming Notices
Series 69: Merchandise Offices, Housefurnishings, General Files
Series 73: Merchandise Offices, Merchandise Office Main Store, Outgoing Notices
Series 141: Public Relations/Community Relations, Archives Office, Employee Magazines
Series 151: Public Relations/Community Relations, J. A. Brockie's Files
Series 162: Public Relations/Community Relations, Archives Office, Subject Files
Series 163: Staff Superintendent's Office, Ivor Lewis's Files
Series 165: Economic and Marketing Research Office, Research Files
Series 170: Company Personnel Office, General Files
Series 171: Company Personnel Office, Notices to Employees
Series 182: Company Personnel Office, Recreation Office, Scrapbooks and Records
Series 183: Company Personnel Office, Recreation Office, Annual Reports and Miscellaneous Files
Series 181: Company Personnel Office, Wages Statistics Office, Wages Statistics
Series 180: Company Personnel Office, Welfare Office, Incoming Notices
Series 221: Public Relations/Community Relations, Archives Office, People Files
Series 403: Staff Training (Eaton's Sound and Moving Images Collection)

Unpublished Papers and Theses

Aylward, Sandra. "Experiencing Patriarchy: Women, Work, and Trade Unionism at Eaton's." PhD Thesis, Department of Sociology, McMaster University, 1991.

Forbes, Susan L. "The Influence of the Social Reform Movement and T. Eaton Company's Business Practices on the Leisure of Eaton's Female Employees During the Early Twentieth Century." PhD Thesis, Department of Kinesiology, University of Western Ontario, 1998.

Howell, Alison. "Retail Unionisation: An Historical Approach to the Suzy Shier Case." Undergraduate Honours Thesis, Department of History, Trent University, 2000.

Matthews, Mary Catherine. "Working for Family, Nation, and God: Paternalism and the Dupuis Fréres Department Store, 1926-1952." MA Thesis, Department of History, McGill University, 1997.

Wright, Cynthia. "'The Most Prominent Rendezvous of the Feminine Toronto': Eaton's College Street and the Organization of Shopping in Toronto, 1920-1950." PhD Thesis, Graduate Department of Education, University of Toronto, 1992.

Published Sources

Articles and Book Excerpts

Adorno, Theodor and Horkheimer, Max. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. John Cumming. New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 1976, pp. 120-167.

Agnew, Jean-Christophe. "Coming Up for Air: Consumer Culture in Historical Perspective," *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*. Ed. Lawrence B. Glickman. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999, pp. 373-398.

Auslander, Leora. "The Gendering of Consumer Practices in Nineteenth-Century France," *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*. Eds. Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 79-112.

Bailey, Peter. "White Collars, Grey Lives? The Lower Middle Class Revisited," *Journal of British Studies*, 38 (July 1999), pp. 273-290.

Bosworth, Fred. "Simpson's vs. Eaton's, The Battle of The Big Stores," *Canada in the Fifties: From the Archives of Maclean's*. Toronto: Maclean Hunter Publishing Limited, 1999, pp. 58-69.

Bowlby, "Soft Sell: Marketing Rhetoric in Feminist Criticism," *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*. Eds. Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 381-388.

Buck-Morss, Susan. "The Flaneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering," *New German Critique*, 39 (Fall 1986), pp. 99-141.

Callwood, June. "She's Organizing Eaton's." *Maclean's*. 1 October 1950, pp. 20, 48-50.

Chessel, Marie-Emmanuelle. "Trading Sales Personnel in France Between the Wars," *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939*. Eds. Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999, pp. 278-298.

Cohen, Lizabeth. "A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Consumption in Postwar America: An Interview With Lizabeth Cohen," Conducted by Lisa Kannenberg and Lisa Phillips. *The Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries*, 57 (1995), pp. 6-23.

---. "Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915," *Material Cultural Studies in America*. Ed. Thomas J. Schlereth. Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1982, pp. 289-305.

---. "Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s," *American Quarterly*, 41 (March 1989), pp. 6-33.

---. "From Town Centre to Shopping Centre: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America," *American Historical Review* (October 1996), pp. 1050-1081.

---. "The Mass in Mass Consumption," *Reviews in American History*, 18 (1990), pp. 549-555.

---. "The New Deal State and the Making of Citizen Consumers." *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*. Eds. Susan Strasser et. al. Washington: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 111-125.

Clarke, John. "'Mine eyes dazzle:' cultures of consumption," *New Times and Old Enemies: Essays on Cultural Studies and America*. London: HarperCollins*Academic*, 1991, pp. 73-112.

---. "Pessimism versus Populism: The Problematic Politics of Popular Culture," *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*. Ed. Richard Butsch. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990, pp. 28-46.

Cobble, Dorothy Sue. "Organizing the Postindustrial Workforce: Lessons from the History of Waitress Unionism," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 44 (April 1991), pp. 419-436.

Crossick, Geoffrey and Jaumain, Serge. "The world of the department store: distribution, culture and social change," *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939*. Eds. Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999, pp. 1-45.

De Grazia, Victoria, and Cohen, Lizabeth. "Introduction" to "Class and Consumption," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 55 (Spring 1999), pp. 1-5.

De Grazia, Victoria. "Introduction," *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in*

Historical Perspective. Eds. Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 1-10.

Denning, Michael. "The End of Mass Culture," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 37 (Spring 1990), pp. 4-18.

Eley, Geoff and Nield, Keith. "Farewell to the Working Class?" *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 57 (Spring 2000), pp. 1-30.

Frager, Ruth. "Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Eaton Strikes of 1912 and 1934," *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*. Eds. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, pp. 189-228.

Geras, Norman. "Marx and the Critique of Political Economy," *Ideology in Social Science: Readings in Critical Social Theory*, Ed. Robin Blackburn. New York: Vintage Books, 1973, pp. 285-305.

Glickman, Lawrence. "Workers of the World, Consume: Ira Steward and the Origins of Labor Consumerism," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 52 (Fall 1997), pp. 72-86.

Gramsci, Antonio. "Americanism and Fordism," *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Eds. and Trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971, pp. 279-318.

Hardy, Stephen. "'Adopted by All the Leading Clubs'": Sporting Goods and the Shaping of Leisure, 1800-1900," *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*. Ed. Richard Butsch. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990, pp. 71-104.

Huyssen, Andreas. "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 44-64.

Hosgood, Christopher P. "'Mercantile Monasteries': Shops, Shop Assistants, and Shop Life in Late-Victorian Britain," *Journal of British Studies*, 38 (July 1999), pp. 322-352.

Iacovetta, Franca and Korinek, Valerie. "Jello Salads, One-Stop Shopping, and Maria the Homemaker: The Gender Politics of Food," *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant Women, Minority Women, and the Racialized Other in Canadian History*. Eds. Marlene Epp et. al. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming.

Iacovetta, Franca. "Recipes for Democracy? Gender, Family, and Making Female Citizens in Cold War Canada," *Canadian Woman Studies*, 20 (Summer 2000), pp. 12-21.

Jameson, Fredric. "Culture and Finance Capital," *The Jameson Reader*. Eds. Michael

Hardt and Kathi Weeks. New York: Blackwell, 2000, pp. 255-274.

---. "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *The Jameson Reader*. Eds. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks. New York: Blackwell, 2000, pp. 123-148.

Jones, Jennifer. "*Coquettes* and *Grisettes*: Women Buying and Selling in Ancien Régime Paris," *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*. Eds. Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 25-53.

Klein, Anne and Roberts, Wayne. "Besieged Innocence: The 'Problem' and Problems of Working Women—Toronto, 1896-1914," *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930*. Ed. Janice Acton et. al. Toronto: Women's Press Publications, 1974, pp. 211-260.

Licht, Walter. "Fringe Benefits: A Review Essay of the American Workplace," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 53 (Spring 1998), pp. 164-178.

Lukács, Georg. "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. London: Merlin Press, 1971.

Marx, Karl. "Capital, Volume One," Trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, Ed. Friedrich Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: Norton, 1978, pp. 294-438.

---. "The *Grundisse*," Trans. Martin Nicolaus. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: Norton, 1978, pp. 221-293.

---. "The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," Trans. Martin Milligan. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: Norton, 1978, pp. 66-125.

---. "Crisis Theory," Trans. Foreign Languages Publishing House. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: Norton, 1978, pp. 443-468.

McGovern, Charles. "Consumption and Citizenship in the United States, 1900-1940," *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*. Eds. Susan Strasser et. al. Washington: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 37-58.

Mort, Frank. "The Politics of Consumption," *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s*. Eds. Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1989, pp. 160-172.

Morton, Suzanne. "The June Bride as the Working-Class Bride: Getting Married in a Halifax Working-Class Neighbourhood in the 1920s," *Canadian Family History: Selected Readings*. Ed. Bettina Bradbury. Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1992, pp. 360-379.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indian University Press, 1989, pp. 14-28.

Nava, Mica. "Consumerism Reconsidered: Buying and Power," *Cultural Studies*, 5 (May 1991), pp. 157-173.

Owram, Douglas. "Canadian Domesticity in the Postwar Era," *The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada*. Eds. Peter Neary and J. L. Granatstein. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998, pp. 205-223.

Parr, Joy. "Household Choices as Politics and Pleasure in 1950s Canada," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 55 (Spring 1999), pp. 112-128.

Peiss, Kathy. "Making Up, Making Over: Cosmetics, Consumer Culture, and Women's Identity," *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*. Eds. Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 311-336.

Pragnell, Bradley. "Organizing Department Store Workers: The Case of the RWDSU at Eaton's, 1983-1987." Queen's University at Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre, 1989.

Reekie, Gail. "'Humanising Industry': Paternalism, Welfarism, and Labour Control in Sydney's Big Stores, 1890-1930," *Labour History*, 53 (November 1987), pp. 1-19.

---. "Impulsive Women, Predictable Men: Psychological Constructions of Sexual Difference in Sales Literature to 1930," *Australian Historical Studies*, 24 (1991), pp. 359-377.

Roberts, Mary Louise. "Review Essay: Gender, Consumption, and Commodity Culture," *American Historical Review*, 103 (June 1998), pp. 817-844.

Sangster, Joan. "Doing Two Jobs: The Wage-Earning Mother, 1945-1970," *A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945-1980*. Ed. Joy Parr. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995, pp. 98-134.

---. "The Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers, and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923-60," *Labour/Le Travail*, 32 (Fall 1992), pp. 164-99.

Smith, Helen and Wakewich, Pamela. "'Beauty and the Helldivers'": Representing Women's Work and Identities in a Warplant Newspaper," *Labour/Le Travail*, 44 (Fall 1999), pp. 77-107.

Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. "The Other Side of Venus: The Visual Economy of Feminine Display," *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*.

Eds. Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 113-150.

Struthers, James. "Family Allowances, Old Age Security, and the Construction of Entitlement in the Canadian Welfare State, 1943-1951," *The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada*. Eds. Peter Neary and J. L. Granatstein. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998, pp. 179-204.

Swiencicki, Mark A. "Consuming Brotherhood: Men's Culture, Style and Recreation as Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*. Ed. Lawrence B. Glickman. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999, pp. 207-240.

Valverde, Mariana. "'When the Mother of the Race is Free:' Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism," *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*. Eds. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, pp. 3-26.

Weems, Robert E., Jr. "The Revolution Will Be Marketed: American Corporations and Black Consumers During the 1960s," *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*. Ed. Lawrence B. Glickman. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999, pp. 316-325.

Willis, Ellen. "'Consumerism' and Women," *Voices from Women's Liberation*. Ed. Leslie B. Tanner. New York: New American Library, 1971, pp. 307-313.

Wright, Cynthia. "'Feminine Trifles of Vast Importance: Writing Gender into the History of Consumption," *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*. Eds. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, pp. 229-260.

---. "Rewriting the Modern: Reflections on Race, Nation, and the Death of a Department Store," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 33 (May 2000), pp. 153-67.

Young, Louise. "Marketing the Modern: Department Stores, Consumer Culture, and the New Middle Class in Interwar Japan," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 55 (Spring 1999), pp. 52-70.

Books

Abella, Irving Martin. *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour, 1935-1956*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973.

Benson, Susan Porter. *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans. R

Robert Nice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.

Brandes, Stuart. *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880-1940*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

Burke, Timothy. *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996.

Cohen, Lizabeth. *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Coward, Rosalind. *Female Desires: How They Are Sought, Bought, and Packaged*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1985.

Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: Zone Books, 1994.

Eaton, Flora McCrea. *Memory's Wall: The Autobiography of Flora McCrea Eaton*. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1956.

Enstad, Nan. *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Ewen, Stuart. *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1976.

Faue, Elizabeth. *Community of Suffering: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945*. Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Finnegan, Margaret. *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women*. Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Frank, Dana. *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1919-1929*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Glazer, Nona Y. *Women's Paid and Unpaid Labor: The Work Transfer in Health Care and Retailing*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993.

Green, Nancy L. *Ready-to-Wear, Ready-to-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997.

Haug, Wolfgang Fritz. *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality, and Advertising in Capitalist Society*. Trans. Robert Bock. London: Polity Press, 1971.

Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

Howell, Colin D. *Blood, Sweat, and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.

Jacoby, Sanford M. *Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism Since the New Deal*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Joyce, Patrick. *Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England*. London: The Harvester Press, 1980.

Klein, Naomi. *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2000.

Korinek, Valerie J. *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.

Kowaleski-Wallace, Elizabeth. *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Lancaster, Bill. *The Department Store: A Social History*. London: Leicester University Press, 1995.

Lawson, Helene M. *Ladies on the Lot: Women, Car Sales, and the Pursuit of the American Dream*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000.

Lears, T. J. Jackson. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.

Li, Peter S. *The Making of Post-War Canada*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996.

MacPherson, Mary-Etta. *Shopkeepers to a Nation: The Eatons*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1963.

McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

McQueen, Rod. *The Eatons: The Rise and Fall of Canada's Royal Family*, rev. ed. Toronto: Stoddart, 1999.

Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: Forms and Function of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Trans. Ian Cunnison. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1967.

May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1998.

Miller, Michael B. *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.

Monod, David. *Store Wars: Shopkeepers and the Culture of Mass Marketing, 1890-1930*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.

Mort, Frank. *cultures of consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

Palmer, Bryan D. *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992.

Parr, Joy. *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

Peiss, Kathy. *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.

---. *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*. New York: Owl Books, 1999.

Pierson, Ruth Roach. *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986.

Rosenzweig, Roy. *Eight Hours For What We Will: Workers & Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Sangster, Joan. *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989.

---. *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920-1960*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995.

Santink, Joy L. *Timothy Eaton and the Rise of His Department Store*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.

Strasser, Susan, et. al. *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Stephenson, William. *The Store That Timothy Built*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1969.

Strange, Carolyn. *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995.

Sufrin, Eileen. *The Eaton Drive: The Campaign to Organize Canada's Largest Department Store, 1948-1952*. Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1982.

"The Scribe," *Golden Jubilee, 1869-1919*. Toronto and Winnipeg: T. Eaton Company, 1919.

Tone, Andrea. *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997.

Valverde, Mariana. *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.