

# Coco Chanel's Unraveling of the Corset

*Melinda Rolls & Abbigail Cote*

# Thesis

Despite the disputes over its controversial history, it is evident that the corset has served as an emblem of female oppression in the past. Women were not deemed respectable in their natural figures, and thus were required to alter their bodies for a cultural standard forced upon them. Fashion designer Coco Chanel's free form and practical attire was instrumental in helping to break these barriers corsetry placed on women in the early 1900s. Nevertheless, her work was far from breaking the barrier of all the complex body expectations women continue to face.

*Panel #1*

# Tight Laced Expectations

By early 20<sup>th</sup> century, corsets became an everyday necessity for all classes of women, as it was scandalous to be seen in public without them. Even children were expected to conform to these expectations.

"By the nineteenth century, many urban working-class women wore corsets, either on Sunday or every day. By 1824, Apparently even the poorest street-walkers in London wore corsets." -Valerie Steele, *The Corset A Cultural History*, 2001

## THOMSON'S PATENT "GLOVE-FITTING" CORSET



EXCELS ALL OTHERS  
IN DURABLE BEAUTY OF SHAPE, AND  
COMFORT TO THE WEARER.  
As Made by LOUIS A. THOMSON, AND HIS BROTHERS  
At No. 100 Nassau St.  
THOMSON, LATHROP & CO.  
305 Broadway, New York.

## THE FOUR MOST POPULAR CORSETS IN AMERICA



# Backlash

Corsetry faced backlash for the daily struggles it caused women. Everything from medical reports to personal memoirs suggested corsetry was a detriment to women's lifestyle, but the tradition held steady.



## Women Who Wear

corsets wearers are the well-dressed women. The most in the fashionable houses in a woman's dress, in her social appearance, in her career in our country, the gown cannot fail.

## American Lady CORSETS

Our corsets are made of the finest materials, and are the most comfortable and durable ever made. They are made in a way that is perfect for the American Lady. CORSETRY is a science, and we have mastered it for the benefit of our customers. We make corsets for the most delicate and the most robust. We make corsets for the most fashionable and the most practical. We make corsets for the most beautiful and the most useful. We make corsets for the most elegant and the most comfortable. We make corsets for the most refined and the most practical. We make corsets for the most beautiful and the most useful. We make corsets for the most elegant and the most comfortable. We make corsets for the most refined and the most practical.

## AT YOUR DEALER'S

for the best results. We make corsets for the most beautiful and the most useful. We make corsets for the most elegant and the most comfortable. We make corsets for the most refined and the most practical. We make corsets for the most beautiful and the most useful. We make corsets for the most elegant and the most comfortable. We make corsets for the most refined and the most practical.

## FREE BOOKLET

for the best results. We make corsets for the most beautiful and the most useful. We make corsets for the most elegant and the most comfortable. We make corsets for the most refined and the most practical. We make corsets for the most beautiful and the most useful. We make corsets for the most elegant and the most comfortable. We make corsets for the most refined and the most practical.

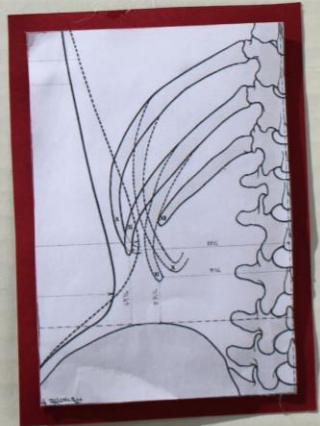
"when worn for extended periods, they do weaken the back and abdominal muscles, resulting in muscle atrophy, lower-back pain, and an increased reliance on the corset." -Valerie Steele, *The Corset A Cultural History*, 2001

"Compression could cause permanent alterations in the bony contour of the ribs, especially if corsetry began at or before adolescence." Dr. Kutsche, *The Corset A Cultural History*, 2001

"American Lady Corsets", 1910, The New York Public Library Digital Collections



"Dr. Ludovic Corset X-Ray", The Public Domain Review



"Dr Ludovic Diagram", The Public Domain Review

"Dr. Ludovic Corset X-Ray", The Public Domain Review

"The thought of the discomfort, restraint and pain, which we had to endure from our clothes, makes me even angrier now than it did then; for in those days nearly everyone accepted their inconveniences as inevitable. Except for the most small-waisted, naturally dumb-bell-shaped females, the ladies never seemed at ease, or even quite as if they were wearing their own clothes." -Gwen Raverat, *A Cambridge Childhood*, 1957

"I had a bad figure, and to me they were real instruments of torture; they prevented me from breathing, and dug deep holes into my softer parts on every side." -Gwen Raverat, *A Cambridge Childhood*, 1957

"It has ceased to be a metaphor that woman is *"dressed to kill"*. We are of stronger stuff than our brothers or we should have sunk in our shackles long ago... Could your father or husband live in your clothes?...Could he conduct his business and support his family in your corsets?" -Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *What to Wear*, 1873

So burn up the corsets! No, nor do you save the whale bones. You will never need whalebones again. Make a bonfire of all the cruel steel that has lorded it over the contents of the abdomen and thorax so many thoughtless years, and heave a sigh of relief; For your "emancipation," I assure you, has from this moment begin." Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *What to Wear*, 1873

"I can't breathe." I said defiantly.

"I can breathe," said grandmother, "your mother can breathe, and your sisters can breathe – and you can breathe too!... It is unfitting and disreputable not to wear a corset... And where would you have the young man place his arm, if I may ask?" -Edith Rode's memoirs, 1879

Fortunately, change was coming. A new designer would take the fashion industry by storm, and before long corsets would be deemed a thing of the past.

*Panel #2*

# The Rise of Chanel



"Coco Chanel", ProQuest



"Chanel Gabrielle, 'Coco'", Britannica ImageQuest

Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel grew up poor in a French convent, raised by nuns, where she learned to sew and found the basis for her now iconic use of black and white. She would go on to open her first shop selling hats and other practical items, but before long her fame took off.

"Woe to anyone who dared make any smart remark [to Chanel] about nuns. She always retained immense gratitude towards them – thanks to them she learned to sew." -Edmond Charles-Roux, *Chanel and her world*, 2005

"The key to her peculiar genius and its sartorial consequences may lie in the fact that Chanel, most Parisian and expensive couturier of her epoch, was born poor and in the country." Janet Flanner, *31, Rue Cambon*, 1931

# Innovative Fashions



"Overblouse", 1930-1935, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

"In this example, Chanel uses striped jersey to create a dramatic and jaunty sports shirt. She purposefully designed the garment on the bias to create interest with diagonal lines, angles, and intersections. The tie at the neck refers to a sailor's dress, just one of the working-class examples of men's wear from which she drew inspiration. This shirt continues the boyish 'Garçonne' look Chanel championed in the 1920s. The pairing of this particular fabric with the cut of the blouse creates a signature Chanel sportswear look." *metmuseum.org, Overblouse*

Chanel became famous for her menswear-inspired looks, as well as her simple shape and cheap jersey fabric. Most influential, she became the first major designer to make fashions that did not rely on or even encourage corsetry.



"Green Satin Dress by Coco Chanel", *Britannica, ImageQuest*

"Her clothes offered the perfect solution for women dressing for a new world." Rhonda K. Garelick, *Mademoiselle: Coco Chanel and the Pulse of History*, 2014

"Jersey was working-class, but Chanel knew something about making the most of humble circumstances. She turned those yards of Jersey into tubular chemise dresses and skirts garments that hung loose and straight, requiring a minimum of stitching and draping. She used it in its natural undyed state, but she also started having the fabric dyed an array of beautiful colors in Leon—France's textile capital. By necessity, since the fabric did not permit much tailoring, her Jersey garments skimmed rather than defined the waist." Rhonda K. Garelick, *Mademoiselle: Coco Chanel and the Pulse of History*, 2014

"She has brought the essential items of most of the other humbler trade costumes into fashionable circles. She has put the *apache's* sweater into the Ritz, utilized the ditch-digger's scarf, made chic the white collars and cuffs of the waitress, and put queens into mechanics' tunics." Janet Flanner, *SI, Rue Cambon*, 1931

"Chanel's name was associated with this new, freeing style that allowed women to dress and undress



"Dress", 1935, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art



"Cocktail Ensemble", 1964, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art



"Dressable", 1927, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

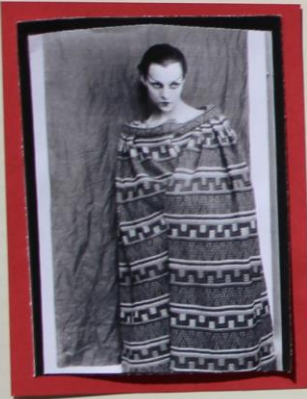


# Explosive Success

pair of hands (be they a husband's or servant's) to hook buttons, lace a corset, and then hoist, smooth, and fluff yards of heavy fabric into the massive, sculptural outfits that entirely encased the female body." Rhonda K. Garelick, *Mademoiselle: Coco Chanel and the Pulse of History*, 2014

Chanel's career rapidly took off. From her perfumes to her little black dresses, everyone knew her name. The corset-free look gradually replaced the norm for women's fashion as her style spread, and women everywhere happily obliged, leaving fashion forever marked by Chanel. The easy transition to corset-free life comfort and practicality being emphasized over visual aesthetic was the result of the feminist movement that began to linger in society's intellect.

"She turned a trick that even Marie-Antoinette, dressed as a dairymaid, had not been able to, and if in doing it Chanel ruined the corset and hairpin-makers, at any rate *mondaine* Parisian women breathed freely and were at ease for the first time in French history."  
Janet Flanner, *31, Rue Cambon*, 1931



Cocteau, Jean, *Gabrielle Chanel's Antique Costume*

"From the impact of your personal relationships to your advocacy, influence, and eventually contribution to the modern musical style that emerged in this decade, you have been a force in defining the new sound I described as 'music on which one walks'." Jean Cocteau, *Letter from Jean Cocteau to Coco Chanel*, 1925



Jackie Kennedy in Chanel Suit, *Daily Mail*

"What do I wear in bed? Why Chanel No 5, of course." Marilyn Monroe, 1952

"To look at a Chanel jersey costume is to desire it ardently." -Vogue (1916)

I, The Donor hereby gives and assigns to the United States of America all copyrights which she has in the Material being donated.  
Signed: *C. A. Stanton*  
Date: *July 29 2003*  
Pursuant to the authority of Chapter 21 of title 44, United States Code, the foregoing gift of the historical Materials of our Donor is determined to be in the public interest and is accepted on behalf of the United States of America, subject to the terms, conditions, and restrictions set forth herein.  
Signed: *John W. Call*  
Archivist of the United States  
Date: *8-13-03*

Gift of Chanel Suit to National Archives, [archives.gov](http://archives.gov)



Jackie Kennedy in Chanel Suit after Assassination of JFK, *Daily Mail*

"Your work-a-day-inspired clothing evokes a sense of simplicity and body-conscious naturalism. The values of restraint and elegance are juxtaposed with aspects of freedom and fun; these are the values that true French culture are based in!" Jean Cocteau, *Letter from Jean Cocteau to Coco Chanel*, 1925

But, was this lack of corsetry only masking a new form of women's oppression?

*Panel #3*

# Internalizing the Corset

While corsetry was on the decline, its waist snatching results still attempted to be mirrored through other methods. In a way, the corset became "internalized" after the 1920s, as body shaping transitioned to more calorie-based dieting and fitness trends.

"I've got nothing against knees if they're pretty. But if they're not pretty, if you stand rue Cambon all day long, you'll struggle to find people with good legs. We never thought they had such bad legs, knock-knees, too fat, purplish" -Coco Chanel about her dislike of short dresses, *Coco Chanel on fame, trousers, creativity and the Moon*, 2012

"Since Coco's slim, young body needed no corset, Jersey suited her to perfection. but not all women could say the same. Chanel's clothes did not flatter all older women, or woman with Fuller figures, whose curves transformed into something more like lumps under coco's sleek styles." -Rhonda K. Garelick, *Mademoiselle: Coco Chanel and the Pulse of History*, 2014

"I created a brand-new silhouette, to conform to it, with the help of the war [ when food supplies dwindled], all my customers became slim,'slim' like Coco.... Women came to me to buy thinness. 'Chez Coco, we look young, do what she's doing,' they told their seamstresses. -Coco Chanel, no date given



Keeping Your Weight Down!, Welch Grape Juice Co.

MENU FIVE

"I created a brand-new silhouette, to conform to it, with the help of the war [ when food supplies dwindled], all my customers became slim,'slim' like Coco.... Women came to me to buy thinness. 'Chez Coco, we look young, do what she's doing,' they told their seamstresses. -Coco Chanel, no date given



"Diet Imperial's Taste Never Goes to Your Waist", 2000



Keeping Your Weight Down!, Welch Grape Juice Co.

## MENU FIVE

BREAKFAST	CALORIES
Weich's, 1 glass chilled (two-thirds grape juice and one-third water).....	100
Bacon, lean, 4 slices.....	100
Egg, poached, on dry toast.....	170
Coffee, black.....	
<b>LUNCHEON</b>	
Consommé, 1 cup.....	25
Crackers, wholewheat, 4.....	100
Cottage Cheese and Spinach salad (cheese, 5 tablespoons, spinach 1/2 cup).....	140
Graham toast, 1 slice.....	100
Butter, 1 level tablespoon.....	100
Grape eggnog.....	200
<b>DINNER</b>	
Vegetable Bouillon.....	
Steak, beef round, broiled (2x1/2 x 1/2 in.).....	100
Lima Beans, fresh or canned, 1/2 cup.....	150
Carrots, 2 small.....	50
Bread, wholewheat, 1 slice.....	100
Grape Juice salad.....	140
Lady Fingers, 3.....	100
Coffee, black.....	

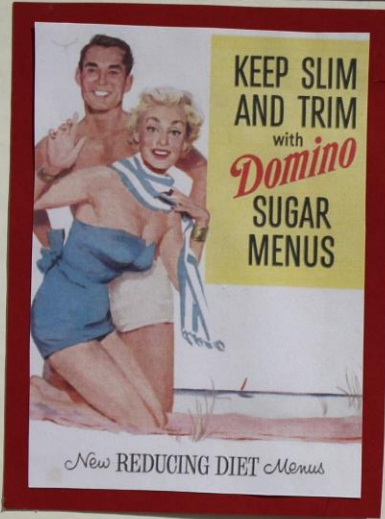
1875



"Diet Imperial", 1967, *Vintage Ads*

cup	150
Carrots, 2 small	50
Bread, wholewheat, 1 slice	100
Grape Juice salad	140
Lady Fingers, 3	100
Coffee, black	100
twelve	1675

"But why Welch's and not cheaper juices? Because, it is the Welch process that retains in the bottled juice the healthful properties of ripe Concord grapes so essential to the system." -*Keeping Your Weight Down*



REDUCING DIET MENU • FIRST DAY • 1200 CALORIES\*

*Breakfast*

1/2 cup orange juice—fresh or frozen  
1 medium egg—soft boiled or poached  
1/2 slice bread—whole wheat or white enriched  
1 tablespoon marmalade or jam  
Coffee or tea with 1 level teaspoon DOMINO sugar

*Lunch*

1 cup romaine  
Sandwich:  
2 slices bread—whole wheat or white enriched  
2 slices roast chicken—1 oz. each  
4 small lettuce leaves  
1-2 1/2 in. water apple pie  
Coffee or tea with 1 level teaspoon DOMINO sugar

*Dinner*

1 grilled hamburger—3 oz.  
1/2 cup string beans  
4 small lettuce leaves  
1/2 cup grated raw carrots  
1/2 slice bread—whole wheat or white enriched  
1/4 cup fresh sliced pineapple  
Coffee or tea with 1 level teaspoon DOMINO sugar

\*FOR 1200 CALORIE DIET—ADD TO DAILY MENU:  
1 pat butter or margarine  
2 slices bread—whole wheat or white enriched  
1 cup skim milk—8 oz.

Keep Slim and Trim with Domino Sugar Menus, 1994

"Practically no one need be overweight!" - *Keep Slim and Trim*, 1994

WINE AND EGGS / 3 days / loss: 5 lbs (2.5 k.)

Breakfast: 1 egg, hard-boiled  
1 glass white wine (dry, preferably Chablis)  
Black coffee

Lunch: 2 eggs, hard-boiled is best, but poached if necessary  
2 glasses white wine  
Black coffee

Dinner: 5 oz. (150 g.) steak, grilled with black pepper, lemon juice  
Remainder of white wine (one bottle allowed per day)  
Black coffee

Brown, Helen Gurley, *Crazy Wine and Eggs Diet*, MSN



"Laying Down Stomach Shaping Machine", 1940s "Slenderizing" Equipment



"Upright Stomach Shaping Machine", 1940s "Slenderizing" Equipment

# Modern Day



"Modern Skims Waist Trainer", Skims Body, Inc.

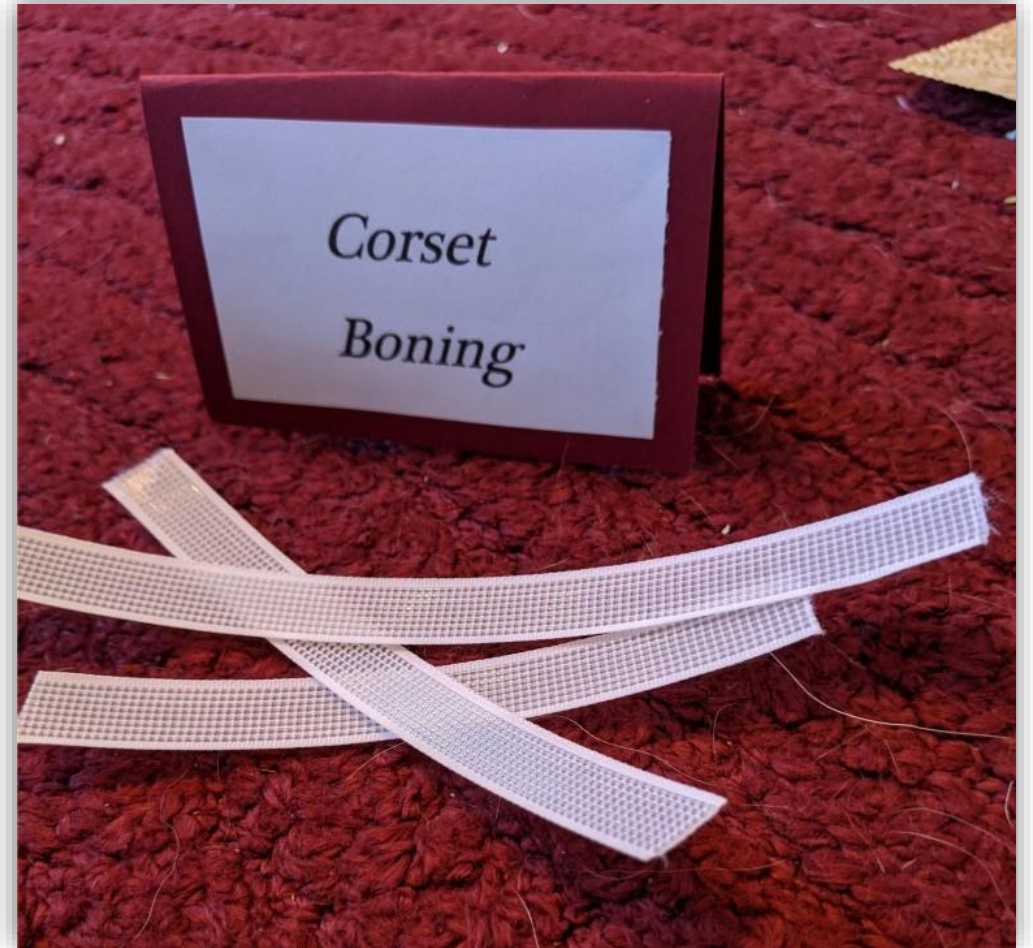
"SKIMS is Kim's answer to shapewear that actually works. Designed to smooth, enhance, lift and tone - each piece has a solution for every body." Kim Kardashian's shapewear brand online description, 2019, SKIMS

Although the barrier of obsessive tight-lacing has been broken with the help of Chanel, this has only created an illusion of major progress in the cultural construct of the ideal body for women. The corset has rather only been internalized into arguably more risky forms in the past decade. On top of this, modern shapewear is emerging as an increasingly popular offspring of the corset. Evidently, the self-deprecating barrier imprisoning the minds of women needs more force before it crumbles to the ground.

## *Jersey Fabric*

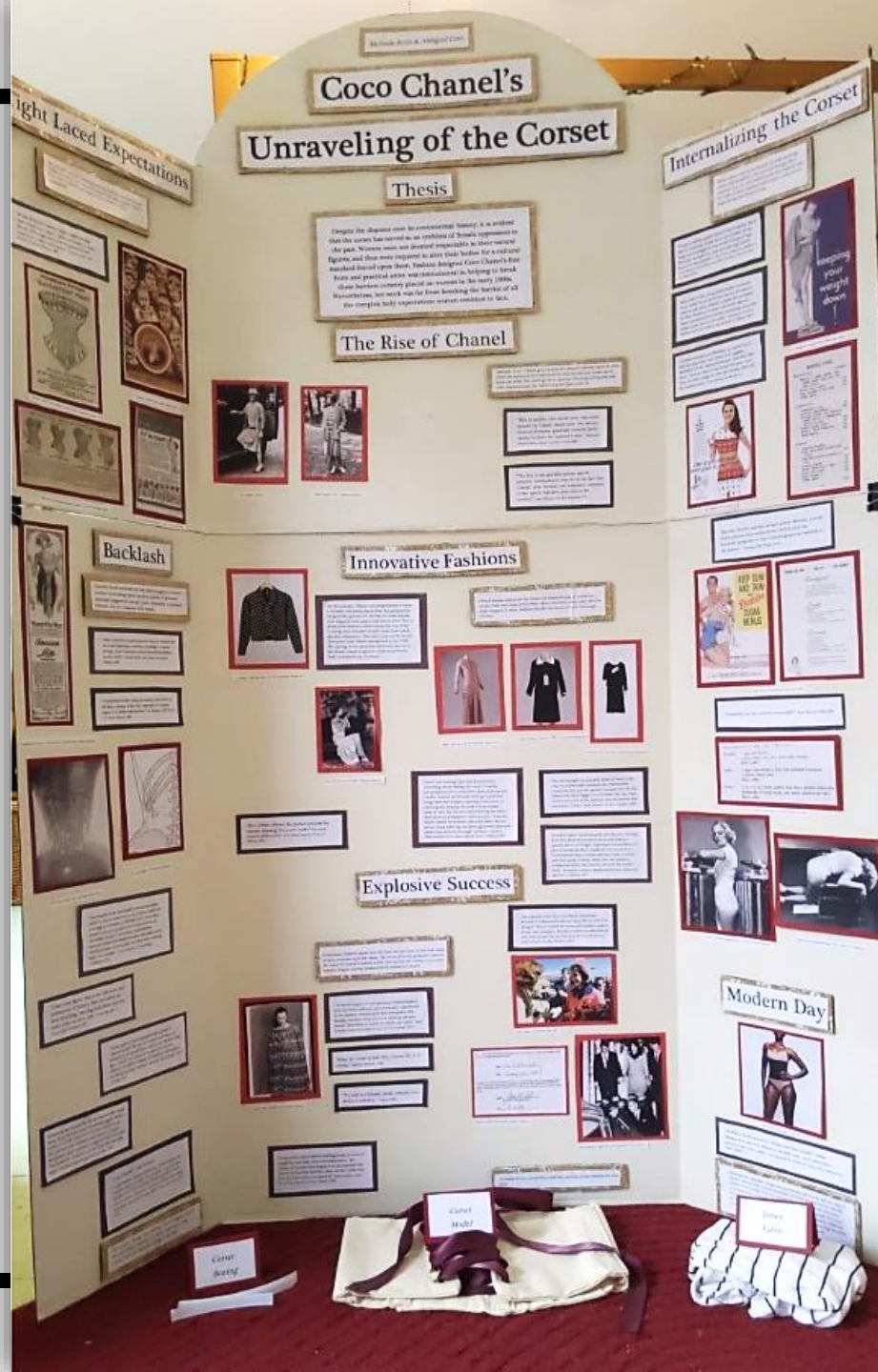


## *Corset Boning*



# *Handmade Corset Model*





The barriers of body standards imprisoning the minds of women can no longer stand.

*Continue scrolling for process paper and bibliography.*

**Coco Chanel's  
Unraveling of the Corset**

Melinda Rolls & Abbigail Cote  
Senior Division  
Group Exhibit  
Student-Composed Words: 498  
Process Paper: 496



## Annotated Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Brown, Helen Gurley. "Wine and Eggs Diet." *Crazy Wine and Eggs Diet*, MSN, [www.msn.com/en-in/health/nutrition/this-crazy-wine-and-eggs-diet-has-to-be-seen-to-be-believed/ar-BBLRvot](http://www.msn.com/en-in/health/nutrition/this-crazy-wine-and-eggs-diet-has-to-be-seen-to-be-believed/ar-BBLRvot).

The "Wine and Eggs" diet introduced within the pages of a 1977 Vogue magazine shows the lengths women would go to match their figures to the ones covering the magazine itself.

Cocteau, Jean. *Letter from Jean Cocteau to Coco Chanel*. June 20, 1925.

This letter from one of Coco's close friends shows not only her close relationships, but also her true originality. She is praised as revolutionary for her fashions no one has ever seen anything like; this demonstrates just how ground-breaking Chanel's designs really were. A few quotes extracted from this letter were used in the exhibit.

"Compton's Coraline Corset." *Digital Commonwealth*, [www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:5712mc682](http://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:5712mc682).

The Compton's Coraline Corset's marketing towards mothers with young children showcases how the corset became such a cultural expectation that even children were expected to meet the standards given to them by society.

"Chanel Gabrielle, 'Coco'." *Britannica ImageQuest*, 25 May 2016. [quest.eb.com/search/153\\_2938872/1/153\\_2938872/cite](http://quest.eb.com/search/153_2938872/1/153_2938872/cite).

A portrait of a young Coco Chanel is clothed in the free-flowing and loose-fitting clothing shows the style of clothing she popularized in the 1920s.

“Coco Chanel.” *ProQuest*. Getty Images, Inc, New York, 1928,  
<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1953170591?accountid=193930>.

A portrait of a young Coco Chanel shows another example of the free-flowing and loose-fitting clothing she popularized in the 1920s.

Cocteau, Jean. “Chanel Costume.” *Gabrielle Chanel's Antique Costumes*, Chanel News,  
[www.chanel.com/us/fashion/news/2017/04/gabrielle-chanel-s-antique-costumes.html](http://www.chanel.com/us/fashion/news/2017/04/gabrielle-chanel-s-antique-costumes.html).

Chanel’s design for a costume in an Antigone’s play in 1922 consists of the draping of fabric over the model that cinched near the shoulders. The lack of structure to the design to contour the body displays is an effective example of Chanel’s design free-from design style.

“Diet Imperial Ad.” *Vintage Ads*, 14 Feb. 2010, [oldadvertising.blogspot.com/2010/02/diet-imperial-1967.html](http://oldadvertising.blogspot.com/2010/02/diet-imperial-1967.html).

Advertising margarine as something that will not lead to weight gain around the waist shows how even after the decline of corsetry, a certain ideal figure was still attempting to be achieved.

Flanner, Janet. “31, Rue Cambon.” *The New Yorker*. Mar. 14, 1931.

This article from Chanel’s time praising her fashions was very interesting to read, because it showed the true mindset change. The author condemns corsets as out of fashion and praises Chanel for being up to date and original, which shows her influence at the time, and as such some of these statements were used on the poster. Additionally, she goes on to talk of her childhood and the influence it had, which was hard to find information on.

“Gift of Historical Materials Relating to Jacqueline B. Kennedy to The National Archives and Records Administration.” *National Archives*, 13 Aug 2003.

<https://www.archives.gov/files/foia/pdf/kennedy-dress.pdf>

This document shows record of a Chanel suit that Jackie Kennedy wore being donated to the National Archives. We used part of this document on our poster to signify how important this suit had become, and how part of Chanel’s brand was documented in one of the most secure places possible. This demonstrates how far her fame has spread.

“Green Satin Dress by Coco Chanel” *Britannica ImageQuest*, 25 May 2016.

[quest.eb.com/search/108\\_246376/1/108\\_246376/cite](http://quest.eb.com/search/108_246376/1/108_246376/cite).

Chanel’s green satin dress design draping loosely over the model displays an example of the free-flowing figure of Chanel’s work.

*Keep Slim and Trim with Domino Sugar Menus*. 1994. The American Sugar Refining Company, [https://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/sliker/msuspcsbs\\_domi\\_americansu8/msuspcsbs\\_domi\\_americansu8.pdf](https://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/sliker/msuspcsbs_domi_americansu8/msuspcsbs_domi_americansu8.pdf).

Domino’s dieting booklet used as a form of promotion for their product shows that diets were extremely sought-after and marketable due to their promise to give women the figure they desired. Through the booklet, the company is taking advantage of a women’s insecurities about her body that have stemmed from societal standards.

*Keeping Your Weight Down!* Welch Grape Juice Co.,

[https://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/sliker/msuspcsbs\\_welg\\_welchgrape13/msuspcsbs\\_welg\\_welchgrape13.pdf](https://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/sliker/msuspcsbs_welg_welchgrape13/msuspcsbs_welg_welchgrape13.pdf).

Welch’s diet booklet is yet another example of a company taking advantage of women’s body insecurities by promising them their ideal figure. This showed how body standards had not truly disappeared, and were still extremely prevalent.

“Laying Down Stomach Shaping Machine.” *1940s ‘Slenderizing’ Equipment*, Verizon Media, 9 Jan. 2014, [www.huffpost.com/entry/vintage-photos-workout\\_n\\_4567456](http://www.huffpost.com/entry/vintage-photos-workout_n_4567456).

A picture of Pat Odgen testing out the fitness fad of the 1940s, the “Slenderizing Salon”, taken by LIFE photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt. The machines were said to stimulate muscle contractions and in turn reduce fat. The invention of machines specifically targeted towards reducing fat for women showcases how slim body standards were attempted to be reached by women.

“Modern Skims Waist Trainer.” *Waist Trainer*, Skims Body, Inc., [skims.com/products/waist-trainer-onyx](http://skims.com/products/waist-trainer-onyx).

An example of a modern day “corset”, demonstrating that women are still attempting to live up to the body standards they believe they need to reach. This once again shows how the barrier has not been entirely broken as we might have originally thought.

Monroe, Marilyn. Interview by Georges Belmont. *Marie Claire*, 1960.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--7mbRMPQ\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--7mbRMPQ_E)

This interview was used mainly for the quote relating to Chanel No 5. Chanel being Marilyn Monroe’s perfume of choice showed its far-reaching influence, and how important her designs were.

O'Followell, Ludovic. “Dr. Ludovic Corset X-Ray.” *The Corset X-Rays of Dr Ludovic O'Followell (1908)*, The Public Domain Review, [publicdomainreview.org/collection/the-corset-x-rays-of-dr-ludovic-o-followell-1908](http://publicdomainreview.org/collection/the-corset-x-rays-of-dr-ludovic-o-followell-1908).

Dr. Ludovic’s x-ray work of a corset wearer displays the medical effects corsets can cause on the body, most noticeably the movement of the ribcage that can be detrimental to

organs. This demonstrates that corsets were definitively a detriment to women's health when tight laced, and why Chanel and other women's dismissal of them was justified.

O'Followell, Ludovic. "Dr. Ludovic Diagram." *The Corset X-Rays of Dr Ludovic O'Followell (1908)*, The Public Domain Review, [publicdomainreview.org/collection/the-corset-x-rays-of-dr-ludovic-o-followell-1908](http://publicdomainreview.org/collection/the-corset-x-rays-of-dr-ludovic-o-followell-1908).

Dr. Ludovic's diagram of his x-ray maps out the movement of the ribcage that can occur from wearing a corset. We used this image to show how a corset can permanently alter the human body, which could lead to dangerous health consequences.

Phelps, Elizabeth. *What to Wear*. J.R. Osgood and Company, 1873.

This book showed how deeply upset some women were by corsetry, and how deeply they felt oppressed by being forced to wear corsets. It served as a great source material for quotes.

Raverat, Gwen. *A Cambridge Childhood*. Gutenberg Canada. 1952.

This book also showed how hurt women were by corsetry in Raverat's personal memoir, but also how engrained this was into society, such as how mothers and grandmothers enforced these beliefs. This was also used for quoting on the exhibit.

The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library. "American Lady Corsets." *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1910. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-fcf5-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

This ad shows a picture of a beautiful women in a corset with the caption "women who were corsets are well dressed." This showed the societal expectations at the time for women, and how deeply they were tied to corsets.

The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library. "Ferris' Good Sense Corset Waist." *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1898. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-fcf7-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

An advertisement by the corset company Ferris portrays a woman wearing a corset with an unreasonably small waist, causing women to compare themselves to this figure and develop an unhealthy view of their bodies.

The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library. "The Four Most Popular Corsets In America." *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1886.

<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-fcba-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

An advertisement by the corset company Dr. Warner shows four corset drawings that gives a visual of what corsets looked like in 1886.

The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library. "Thomson's Patent 'Glove-Fitting' Corset." *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1868.

<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-fce6-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

The extremely cinched in waist in the Thomson's company corset advertisement in 1868 shows how minuscule women were striving to make their waists.

The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library. "Style, Health and Comfort from Infancy to Old Age--H. & W. Corset Waists." *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1914-10.

<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-fcf4-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

Showing an infant grow up wearing a corset into old age in 1914 shows how impactful the societal norm of corset-wearing was on every stage of a women's life, and something she could never escape from.

“Upright Stomach Shaping Machine.” *1940s 'Slenderizing' Equipment*, Verizon Media, 9 Jan. 2014, [www.huffpost.com/entry/vintage-photos-workout\\_n\\_4567456](http://www.huffpost.com/entry/vintage-photos-workout_n_4567456).

Another machine Pat Odgen tested out as part of her work with LIFE photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt. This once again showed the extreme lengths that women were willing to go to for an ideal body shaping, echoing what the corset represented.

### Secondary Sources

Fleming, Olivia. “‘It would produce hysteria’: Why Jackie Kennedy's blood-stained pink suit is being hidden from public view until 2013.” *Daily Mail*. Nov. 19 2013.

This article was mainly used for the pictures of Jackie Kennedy in her famous Chanel suit. This showed how widespread her fashions had become, as not only had her clothing spread to America, but an extremely important woman: the first lady, was wearing it.

Garelick, Rhonda. *Mademoiselle: Coco Chanel and the Pulse of History*. Random House Publishing Group, Sept 30, 2014.

This book delves into the story of Coco Chanel, recounted her life and childhood with many details, explaining why she was so revolutionary, and how she came to be this way. Additionally, Garelick explores the nuance of her impact, and how Chanel did not completely break barriers of women's oppression, which was an interesting addition.

Krick, Jessa. "Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel (1883–1971) and the House of Chanel." *New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Oct. 2004,  
[https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chnl/hd\\_chnl.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chnl/hd_chnl.htm)

This site contained numerous pictures of Chanel's wardrobe that were used on the poster, as primary sources that displayed her sense of style. They showed her tendency towards masculine fashions and silhouettes, and were useful in demonstrating her influences.

Marcangeli, Sveva. *Undressing the Power of Fashion: The Semiotic Evolution of Gender Identity By Coco Chanel and Alexander McQueen*. 2015. Bucknell University.  
[https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1299&context=honors\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1299&context=honors_theses)

This book was primarily used for research into Coco Chanel's fashion choices. While this source was not directly used on the poster, it informed what elements to look for in her designs and chosen materials and was great for general information.

Povoledo, Elisabetta. "Chanel, the Woman who Reads." *The New York Times*. Sept. 22, 2016

This article was used to find other sources, primarily relating to Coco and her close relationships. It attributed some of her success to these and provided ideas such as her costuming of *Antigone* and Jean Cocteau's letter to her.

Steele, Valerie. *The Corset: A Cultural History*. Yale University Press, 2001.

This book was an incredibly detailed account of corsetry and provided most of the research necessary for this portion of the project. Besides containing numerous important facts, it also cited many primary sources relating to corsetry that could be looked at. Through this several personal period accounts of the corset wearing process were found, which was vital in determining how engrained they were into society.



## Process Paper

### **How we chose our topic:**

From the beginning, both of us knew quickly that we wanted to do something in relation to fashion. From there we explored iconic designers, and of course stumbled across Chanel. After discovering the story of how she brought the corset out of style, we decided this could make an intriguing project. We also found it interesting that Chanel's identity and story outside of her iconic perfume hasn't been widely analyzed. Additionally, it very easily lent itself to the idea of "Breaking Barriers", as the corset was such a staple of a woman's wardrobe that was finally abandoned. After deciding to add commentary on how the world was left changed by Chanel's designs, the general structure and topic of our poster was designed.

### **How we conducted our research:**

First, we started by looking through books and websites, looking for secondary sources to guide our research. Beyond this initial research, most of our searching was spent looking for primary sources that could aid in telling our story. This involved combing archive sites and galleries, as well as looking through our secondary sources for references to primary ones we could find directly. The most useful source was certainly *The Corset: A Cultural History* by Valerie Steele, which gave an extensive history of corsetry, but most importantly gave reference to numerous personal memoirs and accounts of corset wearing that were crucial for our project.

### **How we picked our category and created our project:**

The choice to make an exhibit was simple for one reason: Chanel's importance was based on her clothing, along with how it looked and felt. We wanted to be able to show what the corset looked and felt like in comparison to her choice of jersey with our artifacts and show numerous pictures of advertisements and clothing design, both of which could only be done with an exhibit. An exhibit also allowed us to showcase a hand-crafted corset, which we managed to make through online tutorials. With hardly any experience in sewing, crafting a corset was a tricky, but with perseverance we figured it out!

For the actual poster itself, we incorporated Chanel's iconic color palette of black, white, gold, and red. The three panels of the poster separated the sections of our project: the corset-based world before Chanel, how she changed it, and how the world looked afterwards.

**How our project relates to the NHD theme:**

For this project, the evident barrier being broken is corsetry in fashion. Women influenced by Chanel's style were able to go without a corset and the burdens that came with it. She broke through that barrier by achieving massive success in her field, despite her poor upbringing. However, we wanted to emphasize that the oppression of women, the broader barrier, has not yet been broken. The stifling visual expectations for women have still been extremely prevalent over recent decades, a concept we distinctly addressed in hope to inspire more to act against it.