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A Private Space Within the Public Sphere: How Did the Crinoline Shape Victorian Society?

By

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Fashion from the Victorian Era is often characterized as being uncomfortable, prudish, and even dangerous. These stereotypes may be true in part, however, it does not tell the full story. This narrative tends to leave out the possibility that fashion could have been used as a way for middle-class women to claim access to and interact with the public sphere in new ways and on a larger scale. Specifically, I argue that these women utilized their fashion as a tool to assert their consumer power and autonomy within the public realm. To demonstrate this I use the example of the department store as a public place that rapidly expanded throughout the nineteenth-century and was regarded as a social space for women where she could exercise these freedoms.

Crinoline—a key element in Victorian women's fashion—was responsible for the extremely large circumference of hoop skirts. Originally made of stiffened fabrics such as horsehair, it was a device used to help evenly distribute the weight of the many skirt layers that were worn to give women the illusion of a thinner waist.[1] Throughout time similar devices to the crinoline were popularly worn in order to create the desired silhouette of the era, such as the farthingale dating as far back as the fifteenth-century or the pannier used in eighteenth-century court dress.[2] These earlier versions were typically only worn by the most wealthy members of society, however, this was not the case for the crinoline of the nineteenth-century.[3]

In 1856, the steel-cage crinoline was introduced into women's fashion during a period characterized by textile and technological advancements.[4] This specific iteration of a skirt-shaping device was different from previous versions because of the timing of its invention

[1] Alison Gernsheim, *Fashion and Reality,* (Faber and Faber, 1937), 44-45.; C. Willett and Phillis Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes,* (Dover Publications Inc., 1992), 136.
[2] Willett and Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes,* 50.; Philippe Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century,* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 29.
[3] Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie,* 72
[4] Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Technology: Invention, Innovation, and the Rise of the Machine,* (Praeger Publishing, 2009), 21- 23.

with the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth-century that allowed it to be produced on a massive scale. The scale in which the steel-cage crinoline was able to be produced therefore contributed to its quick adoption as a fashion must-have as well as its popularity amongst women of all social classes.[5] However, I argue that it had the most significant impact on middle-class women because it provided them with the opportunity to not only exist within the public sphere, but to do so unattended. Furthermore, I argue that this opportunity granted by the steel-cage crinoline allowed for middle-class women to claim their consumer power and autonomy in places such as the department store by providing them a private space within the public sphere.

In order to make this argument, I first need to establish a working definition of the terms 'public sphere' and 'autonomy' as well as how they relate to the world of fashion. This project uses Simon Susen's explanation of the Habermasian definition on the relationship between the public sphere and autonomy which claims that individual autonomy does not exist in complete isolation, and instead it only appears when individuals relate and interact with others, such as in a public of autonomous private beings.[6] However, various critiques against Habermas argue that this version of the public does not properly account for gender since most women at this time were not considered "private beings" since they did not own property.[7] In addition to this, Susen highlights the importance of visibility in regards to how autonomy is performed within the public sphere.[8] Plenty of middle-class women occupied spaces within the public sphere throughout history, but many of them were either accompanied by an escort or remained relatively unnoticed. However, popular fashion of the nineteenth-century—specifically the steel-cage

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[5] Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie,* 72.
[6] Simon Susen, "Critical Notes on Habermas's Theory of the Public Sphere," *Sociological Analysis*, 5, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 43. https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/1101/1/Simon%20Susen%20%27Critical%20Notes%20on%20Habermass%20Theory%20of%20the%20Public%20Sphere%27%20SA%205%281%29%20pp%20%2037-62.pdf.
[7] Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women In the Making of London's West End,* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 78.; Susen, "Critical Notes on Habermas's Theory of the Public Sphere," 54.
[8] Susen, "Critical Notes on Habermas's Theory of the Public Sphere," 41.

crinoline—made it so that it was much more difficult for average women to exist in public without being perceived. The crinoline essentially created a private space for women within the public sphere which allowed them to act as "private beings," albeit in a different way than men. The crinoline created this unique space by acting as a sort of dome over the wearer's legs so she could make room for herself in the traditionally male-dominated public.[9] This private space combined with the increased visibility made possible by the crinoline provided middle-class women with the chance to exercise more autonomy over their everyday life.

Furthermore, I use the term "public sphere" as it would have been understood by nineteenth-century contemporaries, meaning that there was not one singular definition for all.[10] On the one hand was Habermas' explanation of the public sphere which he claims represented the space between the private realm of the economy and home and the public realm of the state.[11] However, the spheres were also understood to be divided more literally, based on physical location, such as everything within the home is the domestic sphere and everything outside of it is the public sphere.[12] This version of the public sphere therefore included all aspects of life outside of domesticity such as the economy, the state, civil society, and communal spaces. As is argued by Erika Rappaport in *Shopping for Pleasure*, some feminist entrepreneurs and activists of the nineteenth-century held both views and they believed that consumerism could be a possible path towards other possibilities in the public sphere such as participation in politics.[13]

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[9] Kay Boardman, "'A Material Girl in a Material World': The Fashionable Female Body in Victorian Women's Magazines," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 3, no. 1 (1998): 97, https://doi.org/10.1080/13555509809505913.
[10] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure,* 78.
[11] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (MIT Press, 1991), 19-20, https://arditiesp.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/habermas_structural_transf_public_sphere.pdf.
[12] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 78.
[13] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 78.

Essentially they believed that by gradually increasing women's individual access to public spaces (such as the department store) they could create a more feminine friendly public sphere.[14]

I argue that because the steel-cage crinoline made middle-class women more visible in the public sphere, they were allowed to be more truly autonomous in ways that were not previously possible based on Habermas' definition of autonomy, which cannot fully exist in isolation. Although women's increased visibility may have partially resulted in an influx of goods marketed towards female consumers, women took advantage of this by using her consumer power to solidify her public position.[15] Going shopping was one of the ways in which women exercised this power, and their continual purchasing and use of the crinoline despite the criticism is an example of this power in action. The steel-cage crinoline of the nineteenth-century therefore played a vital part in granting women the autonomy that came as a result of their increased visibility.

The scope of my research is mostly confined to the geographic perimeters of London and the surrounding metropolitan area. However, I also make references to the industrial city of Sheffield and the fashionable city of Paris when necessary. This project primarily focuses on the period beginning in the mid-1850s and ending just before the 1870s, as these decades are when the department store emerged and expanded across Britain. This is also the period that encompasses the various innovations made to the steel-cage crinoline as well as the moment when the circumference of women's skirts reached their largest and began to die out. I also refer to some of the changes that occur after this period, but this is not the primary focus of the project.

The expansion of women's skirts was not something that was unfamiliar to fashion history at this time, as is exemplified by the earlier farthingale and panniers. These previous iterations from

[14] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 79.
[15] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 79.

earlier centuries also received public backlash, mostly from men, in regards to the physical space that the wearer would take up. However, the key difference between earlier examples and the steel-cage crinoline of the nineteenth-century is that the earlier versions were mostly only worn by the wealthy upper-class members of society, whereas the crinoline was worn by all social classes.[16] There is some evidence that some lower and working class women would sometimes wear smaller versions of the pannier, however, the practice of wearing such devices was still ultimately an indication of high social status and wealth.[17] This idea appears to be understood by at least some nineteenth-century contemporaries, such as Henry Mayhew, who states that "At that time of day only ladies of the better class wore farthingales and hoops, and the manufacture of the articles was confined to a few milliners' shops in London."[18] The mass production made possible by the various innovations of the Industrial Revolution thus allowed for the crinoline to be more easily accessible to all.

Although the steel-cage crinoline was worn by nearly all women at this time, this did not mean that there were no differences between the way that women from different social backgrounds wore the device. Rather, it was because the crinoline was being worn by nearly all women that there were so many different ways to wear the same device.[19] Satirists would often make it appear as if all crinolines had an extremely large circumference in the way that they depicted them in cartoon illustrations, even if this was not necessarily the norm. One

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[16] Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie,* 72.; Henry Mayhew, *The Shops and Companies of London, and the Trades and Manufactories of Great Britain,* (Strand Printing and Publishing Company, 1865), 59, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/JXPVTV809312775/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-%20GDCS&xid=8bf40fee&pg=1.

[17] Lydia Edwards, *How to Read a Dress: A Guide to Changing Fashion From the 16th to the 20th Century*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 46-49, http://proxy.uchicago.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=1423155&site=ehost-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_49.

[18] Mayhew, *The Shops and Companies of London*, 60.

[19] Giles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy*, (Princeton University Press, 1994), chap. 2, Kindle.

consequence of this was that it created a common misconception that the crinoline was much larger than it ever really was in practice, therefore keeping women's fashion in the limelight of criticism.

Most of the women who did wear crinoline skirts of extreme sizes, albeit still not to the degree that many men tried to claim, were wealthy women who used this as an indicator of her social and material status.[20] On the other hand, average middle-class women were actually advised against wearing extreme crinolines by other women who suggested that women who do wear them are subject to the most ridicule.[21] For example, in 1864 *The Ladies' Treasury* suggested to its readers that "The worst of all fashions is that it is apt to run into an extreme, and thereby become a ridiculous offence to good taste… and it is to be hoped that the exaggerated hooped petticoat, with its inconveniences and immodesty, will soon be among things of the past."[22] It is important here to note how she does not say that the crinoline itself is a burden, but rather the extreme or exaggerated versions of it are what she takes issue with. Unfortunately, this did not mean that middle-class women or women of any other background were protected from criticism against their fashion choices, even when they were making the "right" one as prescribed by the fashion magazines. A significant part of this criticism can be attributed to the emergence of the department store, as it was becoming much more normalized for middle-class women in particular to be present there.[23]

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[20] Boardman, "'A Material Girl in a Material World,'" 106.
[21] "The Fashions," *The Ladies' Treasury*, October 1, 1865, 316, https://link-gale-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/apps/doc/DX1902011702/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=03ff5da8.; "The Fashions," *The Ladies' Treasury,* September 1, 1865, 282, link.gale.com/apps/doc/BJIBJI903996332/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark- GDCS&pg=291.
[22] "The Fashions," *The Ladies' Treasury*, March 1, 1864, 94, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/BIRSHW827468925/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-%20GDCS&xid=2aba53a9&pg=103.
[23] Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse: Women Walk in the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice, and London*, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 14, AppleBooks.

Shopping in large retail shops with lots of merchandise was not something that was new to the Victorian Era, in fact, it had already been established as a common activity for many women by the end of the eighteenth-century.[24] During this time shopping was not viewed as a passive activity as it would be later in the nineteenth-century, but rather it was believed to be something that required certain skills such as negotiation and comparison.[25] These skills were thought to be incredibly important because they understood that shop salesmen and advertisements were merely trying to manipulate them to buy their product and having these skills could protect them from this exploitation.[26] However, this perception would change over time when the large shops that once catered to mostly aristocratic customers began to merge with the "fast selling shops" that were known for selling ready-made items at reasonable prices.[27] This did not mean that these types of shopping experiences disappeared, but instead that a new form emerged which catered to a more middle-class consumer audience that was previously not exclusively marketed to. The combination of these two types of retail formats therefore made a significant contribution to what would later become known as the department store in the nineteenth-century.

In addition to these gradual changes that aided in the creation of the department store, there was also a specific event that played a significant role in its development, particularly in Britain. While some of the earliest conceptions of a "department store" were established in France during the first half of the Second Empire, its roots in Britain can be traced back to the Great Exhibition of 1851.[28] Officially known as "The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations," the event was a massive spectacle meant to celebrate the industrial feats and scientific progress

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[24] Claire Walsh, "The newness of the department store: a view from the eighteenth century," in *Cathedrals of Consumption: European Department Store, 1850-1939,* ed. Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain (Ashgate, 1999), 57.
[25] Walsh, "The newness of the department store, 59-60.
[26] Walsh, "The newness of the department store, 59.
[27] Walsh, "The newness of the department store, 65.
[28] Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie,* 58.

of the world, located in London's Hyde Park in the marvelous Crystal Palace.[29] While the inspiration for London's Great Exhibition came from a similar version in Paris a few years prior, the one in Britain ultimately proved to be much larger in size, thus making it more impactful as a whole on society.[30]

In Britain, the origins of the first department store begin with someone named William Whiteley. According to the story, Whiteley was a young man from Yorkshire who visited the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London where he came up with the concept for a store inspired by the exhibition's luxuriousness, grandeur, and vast assortment of objects on display.[31] Whitely later returned to London after four years with allegedly only £10 to his name and attempted to make his idea come to fruition.[32] In 1863, he had established a small drapery store with his namesake, and with a steadily growing customer base, by 1867 the store boasted a whopping number of 17 separate departments.[33] Whitely was adamant he could sell anything to anybody, and because his store offered such an expansive array of products, he proclaimed himself the title of "Universal Provider."[34] A characteristic feature of the department store is that it can provide its shoppers with nearly anything they might possibly need to buy, ranging from daily items such as clothing and furniture to other items that are considered more niche. The Great Exhibition of 1851 therefore played a significant role in this transition towards a more universal shopping experience in which customers could purchase a broad range of items from one shared location.

These two factors, the combining of large shops with "fast selling" shops and the impact of the Great Exhibition of 1851, not only played a significant part in the development of the

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[29] Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914*, (Sanford University Press, 1990) 17-19.
[30] Patrick Beaver, *The Crystal Palace: A Portrait of Victorian Enterprise,* (Hugh Evelyn Limited, 1970) 12.
[31] "The Whiteley London Timeline," *The Whiteley London,* accessed April 10, 2025, https://www.thewhiteleylondon.com/history.
[32] "The Whiteley London Timeline."
[33] "The Whiteley London Timeline."
[34] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 17.

department store, but it also had a major effect on societal perceptions and attitudes of the time. The emergence and growth of the department store marked a stark shift in attitude towards shopping as a whole, but more specifically towards female shoppers. One reason for this was because shopping was no longer viewed as an activity that required any of the skills it once did, and it was instead treated as a frivolous and materialistic endeavor.[35] Another way that these two factors affected societal perceptions and attitudes could be attributed to the experience of the people who visited the Great Exhibition of 1851.

When the Crystal Palace opened its doors to the public, British middle-class women were amongst those in attendance, mingling along with a crowd full of people from all different walks of life. However, their attendance caused societal concern for various reasons, one of which was the fear that large crowds meant respectable ladies could be "rubbing shoulders" with some of the more unsavory members of the population such as the poor, foreigners, or even prostitutes.[36] An article from *The Times* on the Great Exhibition speaks of the Executive Committee's decision to place two rows of seating around the center aisle of exhibition stalls claiming that "... These seats will, we imagine, be occupied by ladies and will thus form a graceful and effectual barrier to the crowds of the male sex collected in close column behind them."[37] This exemplifies how fears of social and gender mixing had already been plaguing British society at this time. However, it was the Great Exhibition of 1851 that merely cast a light on how the industrial

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[35] Walsh, "The newness of the department store, 67.
[36] "Our London Lazyroni," *Punch*, June 12, 1869, 247, https://link-gale-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/apps/doc/DX1901563782/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=fd6602cc. ; Jonathan Shears, *The Great Exhibition, 1851: A Sourcebook*, (Manchester University Press, 2017), 119, https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=1528940&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
[37] "The Great Exhibition," *The Times,* April 26, 1851, 5, https://link-gale-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/apps/doc/CS84575386/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=bd453281.

changes of the nineteenth-century were effectively changing the societal composition, thus exaggerating these fears.

Since the department store was so heavily inspired by the Great Exhibition of 1851, which occurred about five years prior to the invention of the steel-cage crinoline, it is possible to use this event as a comparison between the experiences of women who did and did not wear the crinoline before and after the emergence of the department store. Furthermore, the similarities between the construction and function of the Crystal Palace and the department store exposed the need for middle-class women to have their own private space within the public sphere as a form of protection. This idea would later appear in the form of women-only spaces such as tearooms and clubs towards the end of the nineteenth-century, however, I argue that the steel-cage crinoline served as this private space in the period when the department store was initially expanding, in a time before there were official spaces just for women.

The societal fears can also explain why the crinoline was first marketed as a safety mechanism to keep others out of the female's private space, and with the added benefit of more comfort for the wearer. A comical cartoon illustration from *Punch* highlights this purpose by depicting a man wearing his wife's crinoline which he has now dubbed his "Patent Anti-Garotte Overcoat," claiming it will protect him from harm on the walk home alone in the city.[38] These practical alterations to women's dress combined with mass production are what ultimately led to the crinoline becoming such a salient feature of women's dress in the nineteenth-century. The unstoppable nature of the crinoline's popularity therefore allowed it to be utilized by middle-class women as a tool to exercise her autonomy and consumer power.

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[38] "Mr. Tremble Borrows a Hint from His Wife's Crinoline," *Punch*, December 27, 1856, 251, https://link-gale-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/apps/doc/DX1901540117/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=aa86b51f.

One of the ways she put this power to use was through the continual purchasing and use of the crinoline despite all of the criticism against it, as well as against female shoppers in general. In her book on shopping in Chicago during the nineteenth-century, Emily Remus argues that many of the male criticisms against female dress were largely rooted in their fears of a "loss in feminine self-control."[39] However, I take this a step further to assert that these fears were not really about the *loss* of female self-control, but rather the consumer power and autonomy that women *gained* as a result of the industrial advancements made during Queen Victoria's reign.

Early in their development, department stores typically catered to a feminine middle-class audience. As referenced above, this was largely because the department store was viewed as a mix of the traditional aristocratic mansion shops and the "fast-selling" shops which raised concerns over morality.[40] The moment in which the department store emerged was when a family's respectability and social position was still rooted in the idea that the middle-class wife and daughter should be kept separate from the market, politics, and public space.[41] This ideology meant that the unescorted female shopper was especially troublesome for disturbing this viewpoint.[42] One particular figure that represented the lifestyle and values that were often criticized in the media is what the scholar Lauren Elkin refers to as a *flâneuse*. The *flâneuse* was the feminine counterpart to the masculine *flâneur* which referred to a single male observer and wanderer who is consumed by the urban lifestyle.[43] Until the early 1860s, the feminine version of this figure was more so known as a "woman of the streets" and was usually regarded as being a prostitute.[44] However, this perception eventually changed once the *Queen* magazine began

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[39] Emily Remus, "The Hoopskirt War of 1893," in *A Shoppers' Paradise: How the Ladies of Chicago Claimed Power and Pleasure in the New Downtown*, (Harvard University Press, 2019), 37.
[40] Walsh, "The newness of the department store, 65.
[41] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure,* 6.
[42] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure,* 6.
[43] Elkin, *Flâneuse,* 20.
[44] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 116.

addressing women of these sorts as observant tourists, browsing shoppers, and magazine readers.[45] Both the *flâneuse* and the department store emerged at relatively the same moment and because of this, they were essentially mutually dependent on each other to thrive.[46] This is not to say that one could not exist without the other, but rather that each was able to become much more successful than otherwise possible because of the other.

This shift towards the *flâneuse* being a potential consumer had both positive and negative effects for these women. On the positive side, middle-class women who lived this lifestyle were no longer treated as prostitutes and they had access to more autonomy over their consumer choices.[47] On the negative side, the *flâneuse* could also be more easily subjected to criticism against frivolous consumption and the choices she does have are relatively limited.[48] The steel-cage crinoline in particular made the *flâneuse* figure stand out in ways that the masculine *flâneur* did not, thus making her a bigger target for criticism and manipulation. Furthermore, I argue that in spite of the crinoline making them bigger targets, middle-class women embraced the crinoline and used it as a tool that could provide them with a private space within the public sphere in places such as the department store. I refer to the following poem as an example of this argument from a feminine point of view:

Crinoline. (1858)
Pray, gentle ladies have you seen
Me in my charming Crinoline?
Of newest fashion like my bonnet;
The men have all their eyes upon it.
My hoops of steel my body's bound,

[45] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure,* 115.
[46] Anne Friedburg, *Window shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*, (University of California Press, 1993), 36, http://proxy.uchicago.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=42297&site=ehost-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_COVER.
[47] Friedburg, Window shopping, 36.; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure,* 116.
[48] Friedburg, Window shopping, 36.

Of circuit vast, and all around,
My petticoats, with ample spread,
Sweep clean the path where'er I tread,
No alderman of portliest size
With me in comprehension vies,
Mere flesh, unnoticed, stands apart,
Here Nature must give way to Art.
Like huge church-bell upon the ground,
My figure stands; the men, around,
Vain efforts make to pass the fence
Of Crinoline's circumference,
And, thus kept back, impatient grow
To storm the fort and grasp the foe.
Fashion! Thou idol of my heart,
From thee I cannot live apart,
For thee I'd life itself resign,
For thee — e'en darling Crinoline.[49]

This poem was written and published anonymously in the Belfast edition of *The Weekly Press* in 1858 and it allows a glimpse of what wearing the steel-cage crinoline might have been like as told from the perspective of a woman. One interesting aspect of this poem is that it voices how the steel-cage crinoline physically created a space for the woman wearing it. Furthermore, when describing the "hoops of steel" as encircling her body, the author notably does not refer to the crinoline with words such as 'cage' that carry the connotation of someone being trapped. Instead of making her feel confined or restricted, the crinoline would "sweep clean the path" wherever she walked to make room for her in a place that was traditionally not welcome to her.

My intervention into the topic of middle-class women and their autonomy in the public sphere is situated between the conversations on the initial emergence of the department store and the

[49] "Crinoline," *The Weekly Press*, October 30, 1858, https://tinyurl.com/3u3e2c7d.

later appearance of women-only spaces in the male-dominant public sphere. The root claim of my argument is that during the early days of the department store the steel-cage crinoline was a tool that middle-class women used to create a private space for themselves. This claim is partially supported by the evidence that, when the crinoline slowly faded away and was replaced with smaller skirt-shaping devices, there became more of a necessity for women-only spaces to be established for their protection.

Erika Rappaport and Krista Lysack both write on the topic of women-only spaces, particularly in the department store setting, which appear towards the latter half of the nineteenth-century. Their work does provide a useful amount of insight as to what shopping for middle-class women would have been like in a period when the crinoline was no longer worn. On the other hand, in her essay "The Newness of the Department Store" Claire Walsh explores how the department store can actually be traced back to the late eighteenth-century. This is once again useful to see how women shopped in the era before the crinoline was introduced. However, for the purpose of this project I am more interested in the experience of women who *did* wear the steel-cage crinoline while shopping in the department store. My goal is to highlight the ways in which the steel-cage crinoline was unique to the nineteenth-century, specifically in its relationship to the industrial advancements of the time, in order to show how it could have been used to create a private space within the public sphere at a time before designated women-only spaces were common. To do this I use the department store as my primary example of a space that middle-class women frequented in the periods before, during, and after the steel-cage crinoline was worn.

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In 1856, a Frenchman named R.C. Millet received the patent for his steel-cage crinoline design consisting of multiple concentric steel hoops covered in fabric used to create the desired circular shaped silhouette of the era (Figures 1 & 2).[50] Milliet was from the French town of Besançon, a place well-known in the watch-making industry, meaning that the spring steels used for his crinoline design would have been easily obtainable for experimentation and invention.[51] His ability to experiment highlights how the creation of the steel-cage crinoline was dependent on the industrial makeup of the nineteenth-century. Millet first applied and received a patent in France for his design of a 'skeleton petticoat made of steel springs fastened to tape,' and a mere few months later was granted the British patent when his agent filed on his behalf.[52] Before long, the steel-cage crinoline had taken off in popularity in both France and Britain for making women's waists appear smaller, and most importantly, for its ease of mobility that the design created.[53]

At the time of his invention the 'dome' or 'bell' shaped silhouette had already been established as the desirable look for women of this period. However, prior to the introduction of the steel-cage crinoline, women would use the stiffened horsehair crinoline along with many layers of petticoats in order to achieve the sought after look (Figure 3). These layers were very heavy and cumbersome with the weight of all the fabric being situated on the wearers' legs. Thus, the idea of the steel-cage crinoline was to alleviate some of this heaviness by distributing the petticoats more evenly, as well as eliminating some of the layers needed to achieve the desired look of the era, or to put it more plainly, it saves the "...depressing weight on the hips,

[50] Gernsheim, *Fashion and Reality,* 45.
[51] Eleri Lynn, *Underwear: Fashion in Detail* (V&A Publishing, 2010), 170 & 219 note 6.
[52] Lynn, *Underwear*, 170.
[53] Gernsheim, *Fashion and Reality,* 45.

and the laundress' expenses."[54] In addition to these benefits, the crinoline was also believed to provide more protection for women. However, nearly all of the supposed benefits of the crinoline would soon become muddled when it expanded to extreme volumes. Over the following decade after its creation the crinoline would change structure and shape according to the current fashion, but the basic "cage" remained until the end of the 1860s.[55]

Fashion is generally understood to function as a cycle that keeps repeating albeit in slightly new forms only after enough time has passed so that we have forgotten the previous trend.[56] This concept of Fashion is supported by the study conducted by Jane Richardson and A. L. Kroeber in 1947 on "Three Centuries of Women's Dress Fashions: A Quantitative Analysis" which concludes that, regarding the width of women's skirts between the late sixteenth and early twentieth centuries, the circumference would fluctuate between fuller and thinner skirts on a fairly consistent cycle of about one hundred years.[57]

Contemporaries of the nineteenth-century appear to be quite aware of these fashion cycles due to the various times and places in which comparisons were made between the current crinoline and the previous iterations.[58] One particular example comes from a book written by one of the co-founders of *Punch* magazine, Henry Mayhew, in which he establishes a timeline beginning with when "Queen Elizabeth introduced the farthingale, Queen Anne the hoop, and now in the

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[54] "The Fashions," *The Ladies' Treasury,* August 1, 1866, 115, https://link-gale-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/apps/doc/DX1901525993/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=6885ce7d.
[55] Edwards, *How to Read a Dress*, 83.
[56] Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, (Bloomsbury, 2004), 50.; Agnes Brooks Young, *Recurring Cycles of Fashion, 1760-1937,* (Harper & Brothers, 1937), 4.
[57] A. L. Kroeber and Jane Richardson, "Three Centuries of Women's Dress Fashions: A Quantitative Analysis," *Anthropological Records* 5, (1947): 128.
[58] "Hooped Petticoats," *The Ladies' Treasury*, May 1, 1860, 133-134, https://link-gale-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/apps/doc/DX1901524481/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=128518ee.; "Familiar Lines," *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, February 1, 1865, 49, https://link-gale-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/apps/doc/DX1901419778/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=1d920cf0.

reign of Victoria the fashion has been revived in the form of the crinoline."[59] The farthingale, panniers (hoops), and the crinoline all essentially serve the same function of creating the desired silhouette of the dress by placing some sort of shaping device underneath the skirt.[60] However, there are some key differences between the steel-cage crinoline of the nineteenth-century and these other versions with the most significant being the scale of production.

Toward the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, methods were being created in order to increase the production of steel in Britain.[61] Perhaps the most significant result that came from this explosion of steel availability was the development of the railway which allowed for the transportation of goods and people to be much faster than ever before.[62] The city of Sheffield therefore became particularly important in this process because of its established position as a steel producer of the time and due to its accessibility to fast flowing rivers that provided power for the water wheels used to generate the steel mills.[63] By the mid nineteenth-century the railways were continuing to expand and more steel mills were popping up in Sheffield and other cities across the Midlands.[64]

As technology increasingly advanced over the years the steam engine would become one of the most important factors that led to the mass production of the crinoline. In 1862 the city of Sheffield was producing an estimated 20 tons of crinoline per week, and it was also believed that there had already been enough crinoline made to "...encircle the globe again and again."[65] This

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[59] Mayhew, *The Shops and Companies of London*, 59.
[60] Jazmin Montalvo, "Spanish Farthingale," *Fashion History Timeline*, Sep 9, 2018, https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/spanish-farthingale/.; Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie,* 29.
[61] Mark Cartwright, "The Steel Industry in the British Industrial Revolution," *World History Encyclopedia*, March 22, 2023, https://www.worldhistory.org/article/2206/the-steel-industry-in-the-british-industrial-revol/.
[62] Sussman, *Victorian Technology*, 15-16.
[63] Cartwright, "The Steel Industry."
[64] Sussman, *Victorian Technology*, 99.
[65] Mechanics Magazine, "Crinoline.—The Production of Crinoline Is Going on …." *Weekly Press*, April 26, 1862, https://link-gale-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/apps/doc/RQYGCH962579015/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=5a66ff83.

shows how the addition of the steam engine to the production process allowed for the steel-cage crinoline to become one of the leading articles of women's attire that were mass produced at this point in the century.[66] Particularly what made this iteration of the hoop skirt special was that there were entire factories, warehouses, and shops all dedicated to the producing, storing, and selling *only* the steel-cage crinoline.[67]

The scale of production of the nineteenth-century crinoline made the device much more widely available, and because of this, it also became a social requirement for nearly all women to wear one. This of course does not mean that all women actually wore them in everyday life, but women who chose not to wear the crinoline were likely making a conscious decision to go against the current mode of fashion.[68] However, these efforts were typically not enough to challenge the status quo, meaning that the crinoline would retain its role as a fashion necessity for most women. Thus, the recurring problem of the steel-cage crinoline was that its availability made distinguishing between the social classes increasingly more difficult, resulting in a heightened level of social anxiety for many people. This issue appears to be rooted in the concept put forth by Giles Lipovetsky on what he calls the "democratization of fashion," which refers to the process of how industrialization allowed items that were once only restricted to the wealthy to now be more available and affordable to a wider social market.[69]

The steel-cage crinoline of the nineteenth-century is therefore a clear example of this process in effect. One of the ways this can be seen in effect is in the way the device is actually made and worn by different women. Oftentimes the fullness, fabric, color, and way it was styled could be

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[66] Mayhew, *The Shops and Companies of London*, 58.
[67] Mayhew, *The Shops and Companies of London*, 58.
[68] "The Struggle of Crinoline," *Western Daily Press,* April 16, 1860, 3, https://link-gale-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/apps/doc/JL3241654167/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=f8acb0c3.
[69] Lipovetsky, The Empire of Fashion, chap. 2, Kindle.

indicators of the social status of the wearer.[70] Ladies of the upper or upper-middle classes were most notorious for making these distinctions as a reaction to the crinoline being worn by women of all social classes.[71] The fullness or size of the crinoline and adorning skirts were particularly important for communicating one's social status and would frequently be a point of discussion in the media. The industrial advancements made during this time to the printing press ensured that opinions on fashion were both voiced and heard by the public.[72] While these opinions were a mix of positive and negative remarks, the appearance of the crinoline in public incited numerous angry and unpleasant reactions—mostly from men. Satirical magazines of the time, such as *Punch,* would routinely comment on the ridiculous size of women's skirts in the form of cartoon illustrations (Figure 4). The magazine even coined the term 'Crinolinomania' as a way to further the idea of women's fashion being self-indulgent, especially in comparison to the "self-controlled" menswear.[73]

In addition to the satirical magazines, periodicals on women's fashion and domestic advice would also frequently comment on the sizes of crinoline. *The Ladies' Treasury* was one of the most successful periodicals intended for Victorian middle-class women, and much of this success was because of the work done by the chief editoress, Eliza Warren Francis.[74] Known in the publishing industry as simply 'Mrs. Warren,' she was most notorious for her financial and domestic advice to women, which was believed to be the perfect blend between amusement and instruction.[75] According to *The Cambridge Chronicle,* "The papers in the Ladies' Treasury are by no means of the frivolous character so frequently, though erroneously, deemed acceptable to the

[70] Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie,* 72.
[71] Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie,* 72.
[72] Lori Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women*, (Oxford University Press, 1994), 5.
[73] "Crinolinomania," *Punch,* December 27, 1856, 253, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hnv1wl.
[74] Jolein De Ridder and Marianne Van Remoortel, "Not "Simply Mrs. Warren: Eliza Warren Francis (1810–1900) and the "Ladies' Treasury,'" *Victorian Periodicals Review* 44, no. 4, (2011): 311, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24642956.
[75] Ridder and Remoortel, "Not "Simply Mrs. Warren," 312.

weaker sex, but such as are calculated to lead aright the young ladies who may patronise this periodical, at the same time finding them wholesome amusement."[76] This comment is just one of many that praise the publication's method of simultaneously providing a source of direct information as well as moral guidance for impressionable young women.[77]

In addition to being the editor of *The Ladies' Treasury,* Warren Francis was also the author of various book manuals, including *How I Managed My House on Two Hundred Pounds a Year*—one of her best-known publications.[78] The success between all of her published works indicates that the advice and recommendations she provided were likely to be practiced by their respective readers. While this does not necessarily mean that all women who purchased Mrs.Warren's publications took what she wrote into practice in their everyday lives, it is safe to assume that the women who purchased her books and magazines at least took her words into consideration. Moreover, because *The Ladies' Treasury* mostly addressed a middle class audience, it can be assumed that these were the primary group of women who may have been most likely to take her advice.[79]

Both the financial and fashion advice that Warren Francis offered to her readers happened to have significant overlap with the question of what one needs to buy in order to be fashionable. This included not only encouraging other women on what they need to buy, but also warning them about what *not* to buy as well. This latter type of advice is exemplified by Mrs. Warren's comment on how women should not imitate wearing extremely large crinoline skirts in order to avoid negative remarks. Additionally, she also provided advice on what types of fashions were currently in vogue.

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[76] "Opinions of the Press in 1866," *The Ladies' Treasury,* December 1, 1866, link-gale-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/apps/doc/DX1901526178/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=ff3770d3.
[77] "Opinions of the Press in 1866."
[78] Ridder and Remoortel, "Not "Simply Mrs. Warren," 307.
[79] Ridder and Remoortel, "Not "Simply Mrs. Warren," 307.

By the latter half of the 1860s the crinoline had already begun to decline in popularity amongst the upper-classes, and soon the trend had started to spread to the general masses. However, in a particular example from 1867, Mrs. Warren speaks about a moment of resurgence for the crinoline, albeit in a more moderate size, and compares it to earlier periods before the steel-cage was introduced saying "The trouble in former times… was to obtain a petticoat of sufficient substance to prevent the dress from clinging to the figure, and when one was obtained and worn, the weight was depressing; and this, crinoline, imperceptible on the outside of the dress, entirely obviates."[80] Not only is this an example of how women's fashion advice was communicated to the reader, but it also provides an account of a woman's personal experience wearing the crinoline. She appears to be thinking back fondly on a time when the crinoline was presumably bigger and yet her tone appears reminiscent of that time.

Part of the reason for this nostalgia could be attributed to the fact that she was writing at a time when the crinoline was beginning to disappear and its replacement in the public sphere—such as tearooms and clubs—had still not become as common as in the end of the century.[81] Although the crinoline was replaced with similar skirt-shaping devices like the crinolette or the bustle, these did not provide enough volume as the crinoline in order to act as a private space within the public sphere.[82] As is exemplified by the woman's comment, when the crinoline was worn in a more practical manner and size it was actually something that was appreciated and welcomed by its wearers. However, it was the continuous forces of change

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[80] "The Fashions," *The Ladies' Treasury,* December 2, 1867, 563, https://link-gale-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/apps/doc/DX1901526880/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=67d27c06.

[81] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure,* 94.; Rosy Aindow, *Dress and Identity in British Literary Culture, 1870-1914,* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), 49.

[82] Lynn, *Underwear*, 170.

against Fashion that occurred over time that contributed to the rapid growth and eventual downfall of the steel-cage crinoline.[83]

Originally designed to create a dome or bell-shaped effect on the skirt, the steel-cage crinoline was meant to replicate the desired silhouette that the previous horsehair crinoline wished to achieve.[84] By the mid-1860s the steel-cage crinoline in general had amassed peak popularity in Britain, making it a regular feature of women's daily dress, but it was the structural changes that helped the crinoline to reach its most extreme circumferences.[85] These alterations happened gradually over time and were mostly characterized by the flattening of the front of the crinoline and more emphasis on the back, thus making the skirts protrude from the rump in a more "fan-like" manner.[86] While fashion plates and satirical magazines depicted the crinoline as this massive obstacle, photographs and real material dresses from this era show that skirt sizes of this magnitude were rarely worn by average women in everyday life (Figures 5 & 6).[87]

The scholar Agnes Young has highlighted three essential skirt silhouettes that continuously appear in feminine Western fashion: back-fullness, bell-shaped, and tubular.[88] However, despite the overarching trends that tended to dictate what styles were being produced, bought, and worn, there were still variations that came with the introduction of each new cycle. The steel-cage crinoline of the nineteenth-century initially started in the bell-shaped category because of its circular appearance, but over time it would undergo various changes and adaptations in order to keep it in vogue. Many of these modifications were made with the intent of making the crinoline both more comfortable for the wearer and less of an imposition on the public.

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[83] Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, (Bloomsbury, 2004), 50.; Young, *Recurring Cycles of Fashion*, 4.
[84] Gernsheim, *Fashion and Reality,* 45.
[85] Gernsheim, *Fashion and Reality,* 47.
[86] Willet and Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes*, 164.
[87] Gernsheim, *Fashion and Reality,* 47-48.
[88] Young, *Recurring Cycles of Fashion*, 14-16.

In order to emphasize these modifications, different crinoline manufacturing brands created multiple versions—such as the 'Sansflectum' and 'Ondina'—likely in an effort to appeal to a broader consumer audience by offering product variation.[89] In an 1864 advertisement for the Ondina crinoline it boasted that "…a lady may ascend a steep stair, lean against a table, throw herself into an arm-chair, pass to her stall at the opera, or occupy a fourth seat in a carriage, without inconvenience to herself or others, or provoking rude remarks of the observers…" (Figure 7).[90] This particular advertisement not only highlights the practical features of this crinoline such as its apparent improvement on mobility, but it also provides assurance to the wearer that she will not be ridiculed for wearing this particular model.

While the argument could be made that these changes to the crinoline were actually for the benefit of men, both in the sense of physical space and product sales, there is also sufficient evidence that some women appreciated these modifications and denounced the use of extreme crinolines. The aforementioned Mrs. Eliza Warren Francis frequently spoke against extreme crinolines, and even when reaching its peak circumference in the mid-1860s, she cautioned her readers that women who wear the crinoline "…in its widest form, are now objects of remark rather than imitation."[91] However, this did not mean that she was criticizing the crinoline as a whole, but rather, only the versions that were overly exaggerated. Later in that same paragraph she went on to say that "... a light crinoline, two and a half yards in width, is a comfort, inasmuch by its help, the dresses are kept from the ground, and a graceful walk and carriage is the result…" According to *The Ladies' Treasury*, the recommended two and a half yard

[89] Willet and Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes*, 164-165.
[90] "Sansflectum Crinolines," advertisement in *The Crystal Palace Penny Guide Advertiser,* August, 1864, 8, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015055410933.
[91] "The Fashions," September 1, 1865, 282.

circumference of the crinoline in 1865 was no larger than the typical dimensions of the device nearly a decade earlier in 1858.[92]

It is not unfair to assume that, based on this advice from *The Ladies' Treasury* and its primary readership, most middle-class women were wearing a more manageable crinoline of average size. That is, of course, if they decided to take this advice, however, the typical crinoline dimensions appear to support the theory of most women wearing a more practical style. One reason for some of these women to wear a smaller crinoline, aside from the fact that she was explicitly told to by other women, was because it was much easier to navigate the public sphere compared to the overdramatic versions typically worn by wealthier women. The extremely large crinolines also posed additional dangers for the wearer and those around her because it was more likely to catch fire or be caught in the wheel of a passing omnibus. Therefore, especially while participating in activities such as shopping in the department store, the average sized crinoline was welcomed and appreciated.

As previously mentioned, the department store was the result of the transitional period when large aristocratic retail shops started to merge with the mass produced "fast selling" shops. Because of this, the department store largely catered to middle-class customers who would not necessarily feel welcome in either of the other two types of shops. This did not mean that women from other classes did not frequent the department stores or spend their money there. However, upper-class or wealthy ladies would rarely be seen in the department store because it was more likely that they would instead rely on their servants or shop attendants to shop on their behalf.[93] This was especially true in the mid-1860s when the crinoline was at peak circumference and

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[92] "Fashions for the Season," *The Ladies' Treasury,* Vol. 1, 1858, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/BDDACM909419153/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=27e3eb34&pg=171.

[93] Alison Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping 1800-1914: Where, and in What Manner The Well-dressed Englishwoman Bought her Clothes,* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1964), 94.

wealthy women who might have worn the extreme crinoline wished to remain out of the public eye to avoid ridicule.

Particularly in Britain, the department store also had a significant connection to the Great Exhibition of 1851 which took place in London inside the spectacular Crystal Palace. Whitely was mostly inspired by the grandeur and mass assortment of displays which were featured at the exhibition, but the actual construction of the palace also played a significant role in the development of the department store. Many department stores were constructed using the newly available techniques learned from building the Crystal Palace using steel and plate glass to create a sense of openness, light, and visibility.[94] The open and visible nature of the department store was very important because it contributed to female shoppers becoming truly autonomous beings that could practice their consumer power over the public sphere. As Simon Susen argues, true autonomy cannot fully exist in isolation or concealment, but rather, it is the visibility within the public sphere that allows individuals to be autonomous in their movements and actions.[95] The steel-cage crinoline and the vast architectural landscape of the department store therefore worked in tandem to allow middle-class women to autonomously shop and exist in public by making them more visible.

Although middle-class women were able to access their autonomy because of the crinoline and the department store layout, there were still negative outcomes that resulted from this change. On the one hand, the openness and visibility was used as a marketing tool to encourage the shoppers to buy more products.[96] In the era before the department store, it was still commonly believed that shopping was an activity that required proficient skills in order to avoid

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[94] Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola*, (Routledge, 2010), 3, https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=295445&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
[95] Susen, "Critical Notes on Habermas's Theory of the Public Sphere," 41 & 43.
[96] Aindow, *Dress and Identity,* 50.

manipulation tactics from retailers.[97] The increase of "fast selling" or mass produced items being sold shifted this belief towards the idea that shopping was a frivolous and wasteful endeavor. Shopping for clothing was especially ridiculed in the media, and the crinoline was the main target. One woman calls out the men who complain about how much money women spend on their clothes arguing that it is "Because what we spend in dress is seen, and the men spend not, we are to be grumbled at, persecuted, and called extravagant… I wonder if these noisy gentlemen about crinoline, bonnets, and dress have ever added up at the end of the year the sum expended on their own dress, for cigars, and drink?"[98] By exposing the hypocrisy between the men who complain about a woman' s spending she highlights the ways in which gender played a role in not only the way that shopping is negatively discussed in the media but also how the entire concept of shopping has been feminized. Part of this process of feminization also corresponds with the gradual decline of the belief that shopping required skills such as negotiation and comparison, thus resulting in women constantly being criticized.[99]

Despite the cynical way that shopping was portrayed in the media in the nineteenth-century, female shoppers held a majority of the control over the consumer market because it was her decision whether she wanted to buy or not.[100] This of course can also contribute to the negative media portrayal because men were afraid of a "loss in feminine self-control."[101] However, I argue that these fears were not really about the loss of female self-control, but rather the consumer power and autonomy that women could now more easily access. These fears were particularly heightened concerning single women who wandered the city as a tourist or customer, a figure

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[97] Walsh, "The newness of the department store, 67.
[98] "A Lady on Crinoline," *The Leicester Chronicle*, December 26, 1857, https://link-gale-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/apps/doc/R3212860382/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=8efd2701.
[99] Walsh, "The newness of the department store, 67.
[100] Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 2.
[101] Remus, *A Shoppers' Paradise*, 37.

now called the *flânuese*. The "radical move of the *flâneuse,*" as Lauren Elkin would say, was the desire to be seen on her own accord in a public space where she determines whether or not to shop and does not define herself based upon this decision.[102]

Businessmen were often at the forefront of creating "artificial desires" amongst female shoppers by overemphasizing the sale of products that had little to no correlation to the real needs of the consumer, thus encouraging a trend of impulse buying.[103] Whether women were giving in to these marketing tactics or not, this is the power that she holds, the decision to choose. Although married women had been serving as their husbands' financial agents for some time before the department store was introduced, their consumer choices may have been affected by their lack of autonomy in this time.[104] Previously, middle- and upper-class women were strongly encouraged to have some sort of chaperone when going out in public, especially since going out alone could lead to unpleasant rumors. This meant that while going shopping ladies would oftentimes be accompanied by her husband or other married women, or if she was unmarried then she would typically go with an older married woman or servant.[105]

Women continued to go shopping together throughout the nineteenth-century, but by the end of the century it had become much more normalized for women to go out unaccompanied than before (Figure 8).[106] As mentioned earlier, as the department store and the crinoline became more prevalent, the media began to attack women for their consumer habits on a much larger scale than before, marking a shift in attitude towards forgetting that shopping required mental ability. This shift is also reflected in the changing laws of the 1860s and 1870s which restricted the

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[102] Lauren Elkin, "Radical Flâneuserie," *The Paris Review,* August 25, 2016, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2016/08/25/radical-flaneuserie/#:~:text=Fl%C3%A2neuserie%E2%80%94to%20coin%20a%20term,Tokyo%2C%20Venice%2C%20and%20London..
[103] Aindow, *Dress and Identity,* 50.; Bowlby, *Just Looking,* 2.
[104] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure,* 51.
[105] Walsh, "The newness of the department store, 58.
[106] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure,* 138.

spending power of married women using their husbands' money.[107] Both the increased mockery in the media and the changing laws were a result of it being more common for women to go shopping unattended.

The open and visible layout of the department store modeled after the Crystal Palace manifested similar feelings of anxiety and fear due to the fact that 'respectable' women could be exposed to additional dangers as a result of being unattended in public places (Figure 9).[108] Once again, I argue that these fears were less about protecting women in the dangerous world and more so about her having access to more consumer power and autonomy. When men are the most likely to be the perpetrators it becomes difficult to really believe that their true intentions were solely to protect women. However, despite the way that many men expressed their apparent fears in the media on the dangers for unescorted women, some of the actual advice and guidance for women by other women seems to contradict the sentiments of most men. According to *Miss Leslie's Behaviour Book, a Guide and Manual for Ladies as Regards Their Conversation, Manners, Dress,* by 1859 it was actually recommended that, "If you have shopping to do, and are acquainted with the town, you can be under no necessity of imposing on any lady of the family the task of accompanying you. To shop *for* others, or *with* others, is a most irksome fatigue. Even when a stranger in a place, you can easily, by enquiring of the family, learn where the best stores are to be found, and go to them by yourself."[109] Seemingly speaking from her own experience, Miss. Leslie emphasizes how it is no longer essential for single women to be escorted on her public excursions. Furthermore, she points out that it is actually better to go alone so that she is

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[107] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure,* 51.
[108] "Tayport," *Dundee Courier*, November 26, 1866, 3, https://link-gale-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/apps/doc/R3212669074/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&pg=3&xid=5edd6d3a. ; Shears, *The Great Exhibition*, 119.
[109] Eliza Leslie, *Miss Leslie's Behaviour Book, a Guide and Manual for Ladies as Regards Their Conversation, Manners, Dress,* (Peterson and Brothers, 1859), 17, https://tinyurl.com/4rpv2ywa.

not a burden to others and so that she can have more freedom over what she does or does not buy.

This freedom that she refers to with her comment about the "irksome fatigue" of shopping for or with another person reveals that at least some women felt pressure from others to exercise her consumer power in ways she may not have wanted to. This could be both in the form of convincing her to buy or not to buy a certain product, because both are a hindrance on her own decisions. Particularly for the *flâneuse* character, it was important to have this freedom of choice to not buy anything while shopping and to instead just simply look. Part of the definition of the *flâneuse* was to be someone who looks and observes various aspects of public life ranging from other people on the streets to shop window displays.[110] However, the other part of the definition is tied to the *flâneuse's* desire to control when and where she is seen by others.[111]

The steel-cage crinoline in particular played a significant role in the way that these women presented themselves in public. While some scholars have argued that there is no possibility of a female *flâneur* because women in the nineteenth-century could hardly exist in public unnoticed, Elkin maintains that this is not the case by reworking the definition.[112] Traditionally, it was characteristic for the male *flâneur* to be a discreet observer and idle city dweller. However, a key difference of the *flâneuse* was that she played both roles of the observer and the observed.[113] She was also not idle or wandering through the streets in the same way as the masculine version, but rather she forged new paths and was determined in her actions.[114] The steel-cage crinoline can therefore be looked at as a tool that women could have used in order to access this autonomy.

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[110] Elkin, *Flâneuse,* 14.
[111] Elkin, "Radical Flâneuserie."
[112] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure,* 116.
[113] Elkin, "Radical Flâneuserie."
[114] Elkin, *Flâneuse,* 27.

Looking back on the "Crinoline" poem, the woman mentions how the crinoline made her skirts "sweep clean the path" wherever she walked in order to make room for her in places not traditionally welcome to her.[115] Even for women of the middle- and lower-classes who would typically wear a more manageable crinoline, it would still have the same effect of expanding the skirts to create a space specifically for her. One particular lady testified that "In walking it permits a degree of comfort and freedom in movement to which, before its use, I had been an utter stranger."[116] Another similar sentiment comes from a woman looking back on her own dress history with nostalgia while answering her niece's question on what it was like to wear the crinoline, replying "'Oh, it was delightful, I've never been so comfortable since they went out. It kept your petticoats away from your legs, and made walking so light and easy.'"[117] Each of these examples highlights the way in which wearing the average size crinoline was actually a positive experience that allowed them more freedom of mobility. While one consequence of the crinoline was that it made women more visible for criticism, it also granted them the true autonomy that would not have been otherwise accessible.

Although many department stores were designed with female consumers in mind, the public as a whole would remain a space that was generally unwelcoming to most women. However, this would slowly change over the course of the nineteenth-century as more 'women only' spaces began to emerge to accommodate ladies while they were in the city. I argue that the gradual disappearance of the steel-cage crinoline played a partial yet significant role in the creation of these spaces because women no longer had their own private area within the public sphere. Because the crinoline is a product of Fashion it must follow the cycle which determines how

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[115] Boardman, "'Material Girl in a Material World,'" 97.
[116] Mayhew, *The Shops and Companies of London*, 60.
[117] Gwen Raverat, *Period Piece: A Cambridge Childhood,* (Faber & Faber Limited, 1952), Ch.13, https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/raveratg-periodpiece/raveratg-periodpiece-00-h-dir/raveratg-periodpiece-00-h.html.

long it will stay in vogue as well as what will be its replacement.[118] Despite the many complaints against the crinoline such as the hindrance on the public or the fiery deaths it caused, the device would continue to remain popular until Fashion said its time was up. This moment seems to have come at the very end of the 1860s, because in the 1870s there were new replacements that appeared including the crinolette and the bustle.[119]

While both of these devices were meant to shape the skirts into the desired silhouette, the silhouette of the time happened to be much slimmer than the previous decades. The crinolette, also known as the half-crinoline, marked the mid-point between the disappearance of the steel-cage crinoline and emergence of the bustle.[120] Much like the crinoline, these skirt shaping devices also differed in appearance and form across social classes and time (Figure 10). However, one characteristic feature of the crinolette and bustle was that they were fully flat in the front and all of the emphasis was on the rear to create the signature "back-fullness" silhouette of the end of the nineteenth-century.[121] I assert that this slimming down effectively took away the private space that women once had in public as a form of protection and freedom of mobility, thus exposing the need for 'women only' spaces.

As argued by Rappaport in her book, *Shopping for Pleasure*, some feminist entrepreneurs and activists believed that consumerism could be a possible path towards other possibilities in the public sphere such as participation in politics.[122] Their belief was essentially that by gradually increasing women's individual access to public spaces they could make the public sphere more feminine friendly.[123] The crinoline was therefore a tool that gave women access to the true

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[118] Kroeber and Richardson, "Three Centuries of Women's Dress Fashions," 128. ; Young, *Recurring Cycles of Fashion*, 8-9.
[119] Lynn, *Underwear*, 176-177.
[120] Lynn, *Underwear*, 170.
[121] Young, *Recurring Cycles of Fashion*, 11, 14.
[122] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 78.
[123] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 79.

autonomy that allowed them to practice their consumer powers to the fullest extent. By the time the crinoline had disappeared from popular fashion, women had practically solidified their position as a significant part of the public sphere through their consumerism. This is made evident by the popular discourse in the latter half of the nineteenth-century on a woman's right to vote as well as various acts that were passed during this time granting married women more property rights.[124] While the property rights in particular might have been pushed for as a way to make married women more accountable for their spending habits, this was an important step towards women becoming truly autonomous since they could now be considered "propertied beings."[125] The political changes to women's lives happened to correspond with the disappearance of the crinoline and the emergence of 'women only' spaces. These spaces were mostly found in London's West End shopping district where most of the department stores were located and included tearooms, resting areas, public lavatories, and clubs.[126] Although the steel-cage crinoline was invented by a man, it became a tool that women could use in order to reach the position that allowed women themselves to create a public that they are indeed welcome in.

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In conclusion, the history of crinoline and the department store of the nineteenth-century reaches back farther than what some fashion historians might think, but there were a few elements in their development which are unique to this century. Specifically the industrial advancements of the time such as the introduction of the steam engine to the manufacturing

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[124] Charles Anthony, *The Social and Political Dependence of Women*, (Longmans, Green & Co., 1867), 11, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/AOYVCK231076957/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=15b31a6f&pg=18. ; *The Rights of Married Women In Their Property, Under the Act of 1882: written in a language everyone can understand*, (Phipps & Connor, 1882), https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/F0101410564/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=ec16bee9&pg=3.
[125] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 51.
[126] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 75.

process and the expansion of the railway resulted in an explosion of mass produced items. While mass production was also not new to the Victorian era, it became much more prevalent in society with the introduction of the department store. The department store was influenced by a number of factors including the combination of the aristocratic mansion shops with the "fast selling" shops popular in the previous century, as well as the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London.

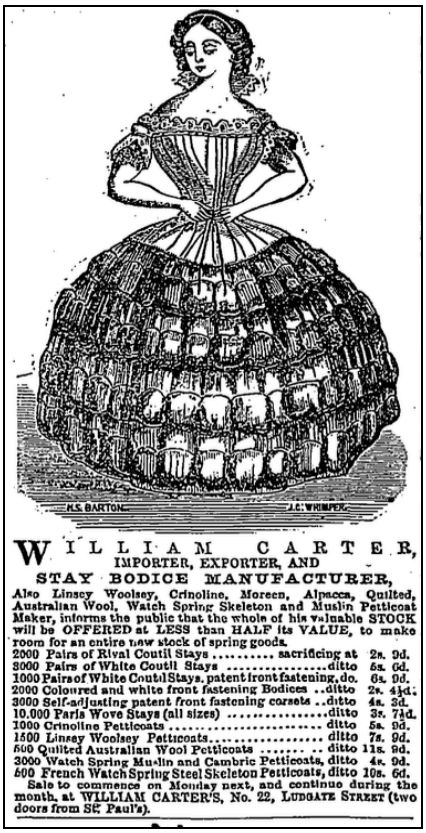
The combining of the earlier shops made the department store more suitable for the middle-class. This social group was most likely to frequent the department store because the previous versions primarily catered to the wealthy and working classes. While the societal makeup of the department store was partly influenced by the previous shops of the eighteenth-century, the Great Exhibition also served as inspiration, but in a different way. The Crystal Palace was built specifically for the Great Exhibition to show off the grand displays and to serve as a spectacle in itself. The use of glass in its construction made the objects and the people observing much more visible as if they were themselves a display. The department store therefore adopted this idea to use in its own creation to highlight the wide variety of products and items for sale. However, since the emergence of the department store in Britain coincided with the expansion of women's skirts using the steel-cage crinoline, middle-class women in particular were much more visible in the public sphere than ever before.

This visibility granted them the possibility to be truly autonomous and to exercise their consumer power as they pleased. Whether she was a *flâneuse* who shopped and surveyed the city unattended or if she was a married woman spending her husband's credit, the point was that women now had more opportunities to be and do what they pleased. While this did not necessarily protect them from scrutiny, especially in the media, the discourse of the mid-Victorian era shows that many middle-class women still made their own choices regardless

of the social consequences. This access to full autonomy and consumer power is what the steel-cage crinoline provided for women by creating a private space within the public sphere where men could not go. In the “Crinoline” poem, the speaker highlights this fact by saying:

Like huge church-bell upon the ground,
My figure stands; the men, around,
Vain efforts make to pass the fence
Of Crinoline’s circumference…

She makes a space for herself in the male-centric world by using the crinoline as a tool to physically move anyone or anything that is near or around her. Effectively creating a bubble of protection around herself anywhere she goes, wearing the crinoline therefore created a private space for women while still allowing them to participate in the public sphere. However, because the crinoline is tied to the rules of Fashion, it could not outlast its predetermined timeline of popularity and would eventually die out. Since women were already an established part of the public by the time of the crinoline’s disappearance they were able to transition from having their own individual private spaces underneath their skirts to a more formalized private space that was designated for women. The steel-cage crinoline of the nineteenth-century was essentially one of the singular most important pieces of fashion because of the social, economic, and political autonomy that it allowed many women to access.



WILLIAM CARTER,
IMPORTER, EXPORTER, AND
STAY BODICE MANUFACTURER,

Also Linsey Woolsey, Crinoline, Moreen, Alpacca, Quilted, Australian Wool, Watch Spring Skeleton and Muslin Petticoat Maker, informs the public that the whole of his valuable STOCK will be OFFERED at LESS than HALF its VALUE, to make room for an entire new stock of spring goods.

2000 Pairs of Rival Coutil Stays	sacrificing at	2s. 9d.
3000 Pairs of White Coutil Stays	ditto	5s. 6d.
1000 Pairs of White Coutil Stays, patent front fastening, do.		6s. 9d.
2000 Coloured and white front fastening Bodices ..	ditto	2s. 4½d.
3000 Self-adjusting patent front fastening corsets ..	ditto	4s. 2d.
10,000 Paris Wove Stays (all sizes)	ditto	3s. 7½d.
1000 Crinoline Petticoats	ditto	5s. 9d.
1500 Linsey Woolsey Petticoats.....	ditto	7s. 9d.
500 Quilted Australian Wool Petticoats	ditto	11s. 9d.
3000 Watch Spring Muslin and Cambric Petticoats,	ditto	4s. 9d.
500 French Watch Spring Steel Skeleton Petticoats,	ditto	10s. 6d.

Sale to commence on Monday next, and continue during the month, at WILLIAM CARTER'S, No. 22, LUDGATE STREET (two doors from St. Paul's).

Figure 1: Steel-cage crinoline advertisement for "Watch Spring Muslin and Cambric Petticoats" from "Multiple Display Advertising Items," in the *Sunday Times*, February 21, 1858, https://link-gale-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/apps/doc/FP1801176370/GDCS?u=chic_rbw&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=934c0570.

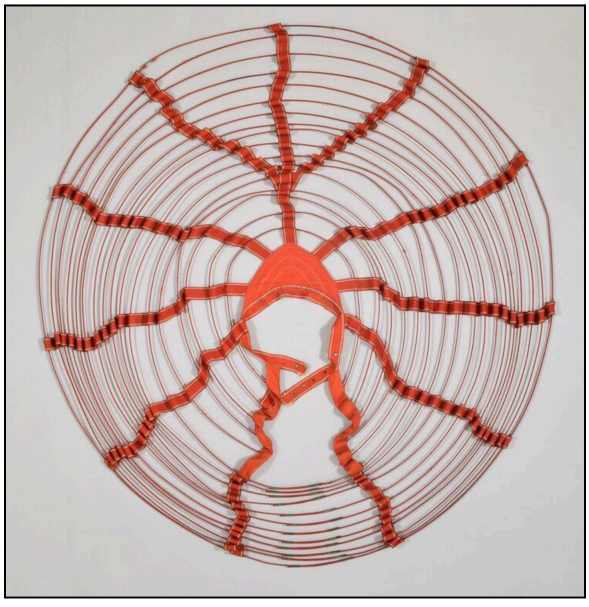


Figure 2: Thomson brand steel-cage crinoline, one of the most popular of its kind from Britain c. 1860, red wool tape and covered steel wire, circumference of approximately 100cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, object no. T.20-2013, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1261576/crinoline-crinoline-w-s/.

Figure 3: Dress showing the bell/dome-shaped silhouette of the 1850s before steel-cage crinoline demonstrating the ruffled skirts making for a fuller effect. British c. 1854-56, black silk dress with turquoise accents, The MET, New York, object no. 1987.190.2a, b, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/85340.

54 PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI. [FEBRUARY 6, 1858.

A WHOLESOME CONCLUSION.

Lady Crinoline. "YES, LOVE—A VERY PRETTY CHURCH, BUT THE DOOR IS CERTAINLY VERY NARROW!"

Figure 4: Illustration of two women whose skirts are too big to fit through the doorway because of their crinoline who are complaining that the door is too narrow. "A Wholesome Conclusion," from *Punch* magazine, Feb. 6, 1858, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951001914552d.

Figure 5: Photo of a woman wearing a dress that represents more typical dimensions of crinoline skirts for the average woman in the 1860s. Pictured in the book, *English Women's Clothing in the Nineteenth-Century* by C. Willett Cunnington, (Faber and Faber, 1937), 209.

Figure 6: Afternoon dress (also known as a walking or day dress) demonstrating what a middle-class woman might have worn due to its level of simplicity and practicality. British, c.1860, black and purple striped silk taffeta dress, The MET, New York, object no. 2006.43.1, https://fashionmuseum.fitnyc.edu/objects/127981/afternoon-dress?ctx=4b103c40e647b8fb6ae8e64085f1f4936630a7a5&idx=10.

8 THE CRYSTAL PALACE PENNY GUIDE ADVERTISER.

SANSFLECTUM CRINOLINES.

Puffed Horsehair Jupon (Registered). 21s., 25s., 30s., and 33s., in Grey. White, 5s. extra.

The Sansflectum Jupon, 10s. 6d., 15s. 6d., 18s. 6d., and 21s. Muslin Covers, 3s. 6d.; Llama or Alpaca, 5s. 11d.

Ondina, or Waved Jupon, 15s. 6d., 18s. 6d., and 21s. Coloured Llama, 25s. 6d.

"The PATENT ONDINA, or Waved Jupon, does away with the unsightly results of the ordinary hoops; and so perfect are the wavelike bands, that a lady may ascend a steep stair, lean against a table, throw herself into an arm-chair, pass to her stall at the opera, or occupy a fourth seat in a carriage, without inconvenience to herself or others, or provoking rude remarks of the observers; thus modifying in an important degree all those peculiarities tending to destroy the modesty of English women; and, lastly, it allows the dress to fall into graceful folds."—*Queen*.

Illustrations, with Pamphlet, post free.

E. PHILPOTT, Family Draper and Jupon Manufacturer,

37, PICCADILLY, W.

Figure 7: An advertisement for the newest iterations of the steel-cage crinoline that now have a shape that is supposedly better than the original, both in functionality and appearance. "Sansflectum Crinolines," *The Crystal Palace Penny Guide Advertiser*, 1863, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015055410933?urlappend=%3Bseq=14%3Bownerid=13510798885722713-16.

Figure 8: The front cover illustration for the music sheet of the song *The Early Closing Movement*, *Three ladies went shopping*, written and composed by Joseph R.W. Harding. Published in 1859, this image depicts three women walking down the street whilst going shopping. Based on the shape and size of their skirts, combined with the publication date mean it is fair to assume they were wearing the crinoline while on this excursion. Printed ink on paper, 32.3cm x 23.5cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, object no. S.195-2012, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1244328/the-early-closing-movement-music-score-joseph-rw-harding/.

Figure 9: Image of the interior of the Crystal Palace during the Great Exhibition of 1851 located in London's Hyde Park. The structure was built using steel and glass to highlight Britain's industrial prowess. The use of glass in particular created an open layout with lots of natural light which made both the displays and the visitors more visible. John Absolon, *General View, Crystal Palace*, print c.1851, 27.5cm x 37.7cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, object no. 19538:2, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O25360/general-view-crystal-palace-print-absolon-john/.

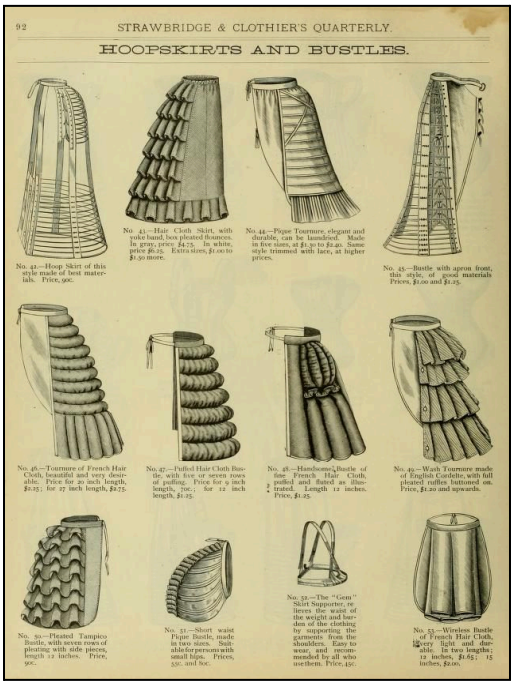


Figure 10: Image from the Strawbridge & Clothier's Quarterly magazine showcasing various types of hoop skirts and bustles that were popular at the time. "Hoopskirts And Bustles," *Strawbridge & Clothier's Quarterly,* 1882, 92, https://archive.org/details/strawbridgecloth02stra/page/92/mode/2up.

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