

“A Style of Our Own”: Modesty and Mormon Women, 1951–2008

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Historically, modesty of dress has had important symbolic meaning for leaders and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Brigham Young, second president of the Church, often warned women against following the “indecent” fashions of the world, challenging them to separate themselves from women of the world and dress accordingly. Almost thirty years after Young’s death, President Joseph F. Smith and his counselors issued “A Call to the Women of the Church,” expressing concern that “our women are prone to follow the demoralizing fashions of the world [including] exhibitions of immodesty and of actual indecency in their attire . . . seemingly oblivious in this respect to the promptings and duties of true womanhood.”¹ In response, the general boards of the Relief Society, Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association (YLMIA), and Primary, led by Relief Society general president Amy Brown Lyman, issued dress guidelines for all Mormon women.² Although Church leaders made short-term efforts to define Churchwide dress standards in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these attempts did not result in either a widely recognized definition of modesty or a set of official instructions regarding women’s dress. Instead, despite the attempts of Young, Lyman, and others, modesty of dress was almost a non-issue during this time.

On February 13, 1951, Elder Spencer W. Kimball delivered a speech to students at a Brigham Young University Devotional entitled “A Style of Our Own: Modesty in Dress and Its Relationship to the Church.”³ Kimball’s talk defined standards of modesty for

LDS women in the twentieth century and also articulated enduring rationales for proper dress. Generally regarded as the “first” modesty talk of the twentieth century, it caused a stir at BYU and elsewhere. This address and the phrase “a style of our own” became classics; many talks, articles, and LDS publications on modesty, beginning in the 1960s, reference either the phrase or the actual text of Kimball’s devotional.⁴

Clothing has been the subject of scriptural injunctions and a perennial topic of Church leaders’ concern. Subtle changes in both dress standards and rationales for modest dress in the latter half of the twentieth century reflect the LDS Church’s teachings and attitudes toward chastity and women, the feminine ideal, and changing women’s roles. Definitions of modest and appropriate dress have symbolic importance as well, and have served as a mechanism to both maintain and blur boundaries between LDS women and the broader culture.

In his address, Elder Kimball warned his student audience against falling into temptation. Asserting that “unchastity is the great demon of the day!” he instructed young men and women that sexual sin is an abomination and admonished his listeners to hold chastity and virtue as “most dear and precious above all things” (Moro. 9:9). Elder Kimball specifically denounced “immodest dresses that are worn by our young women, and their mothers” as contributors to the breakdown of moral values in America and declared that “immodest clothes lead to sin.” He categorized strap and strapless evening gowns, low-necked dresses, form-fitting sweaters, shorts in general, backless attire, and “general immodest clothing” as inappropriate for the daughters of Zion and argued that “a woman is most beautiful when her body is clothed. . . . She needs no more attractions . . . and men will not love her more because her neck or back is bare.” Elder Kimball strongly encouraged all in attendance to seek “clean hands and a pure heart” and counteract the evil of modern styles by developing a “style of our own,” by which he meant a fashion sense unique to Latter-day Saint girls and women that would set them apart from the world.⁵

Although Elder Kimball’s talk only briefly discussed and promoted “a style of our own,” his remarks apparently made an impact on those who were in attendance.⁶ Perhaps because the last

official statement on women's dress had been issued in 1917, Kimball's disapproval of strapless gowns and other "inappropriate dress" surprised many young women. Although today Brigham Young University has a formal dress and grooming standard, the student-initiated Code of Honor, adopted in 1949, mentioned only the importance of honesty, integrity, and moral cleanliness.⁷ Bertha Clark, a BYU sophomore in 1951, remembered that, prior to attending Elder Kimball's devotional, she had purchased a strapless dress to wear to an upcoming BYU formal dance. She recalled, "My dress was beautiful, but it wasn't 'kimballized,' so I bought a little jacket I could wear with it. Most of my friends 'kimballized' their wardrobes. In fact, we called modest clothing 'kimballized' until one of the brethren told us we shouldn't single [Kimball] out."⁸ An editorial in BYU's *Daily Universe* a week after Kimball's speech applauded "the noticeable change in attire at the Friday night Banyan Ball" among women students. The article continued: While "no order will be imposed to enforce modesty, we expect to see a very definite effect on coed's [sic] clothing."⁹

Significantly, at that point no link was made between modest dress and sexual chastity, despite the immediate press coverage of the talk, including publication in the *Church News* and in a series called "An Apostle Speaks to Youth," subsequent general conference talks, *Church News* editorials, and other LDS publications. During the 1950s, few General Authorities besides Elder Kimball cited immodesty as a leading cause of sexual sin. Instead, addresses and publications, including BYU's Code of Honor, focused on modesty only as one of many virtues, along with honesty, loyalty, honor, and propriety.¹⁰

A 1957 version of BYU's *Your Passport to Honor* reminded students to observe "integrity, honesty, [and] the principles of the gospel in all you do."¹¹ Students at BYU had ample opportunity to listen to lectures, including a series by President Ernest L. Wilkinson, watch films, and study pamphlets on the Code of Honor.¹² In contrast to the later emphasis on dress standards, BYU students at that time were encouraged to exhibit a more comprehensive sort of modesty—a genuine modesty of person. A 1957 Mutual Improvement Association (MIA) pamphlet series entitled "Be Honest with Yourself" included a pamphlet called

“Modesty Is the Best Policy,” which emphasized the importance of modesty in conduct, manner, and dress. It argued that fashionable clothing and modesty could coexist, but that “flaunt[ing] one’s figure,” especially in order to impress a young man, was “more likely to bring a ‘whistle call’ of dubious compliment than a sincere proposal of honorable friendship.”¹³ The pamphlet emphasized that “modesty is a many-sided virtue,” and presented information on speech and conduct in the same detail as it did dress. A final reward promised to those who cultivated this holistic version of modesty was self-respect, which would lead to the “true joy of living.” The same information was also available in poster form, and both were available to congregations throughout the Church.¹⁴

In September of 1959, the *Improvement Era* began a four-month series of columns entitled “To a Teenage Girl.” It gave advice on appropriate habits, dress, speech, and general behavior for young women but focused on the importance of good posture and a good figure, proper apparel, including ironing and pressing one’s clothes, and how to “graciously give and graciously receive” gifts and compliments.¹⁵ Despite the detailed suggestions in many aspects of personal appearance and cleanliness, it mentioned dress only in passing or indirectly. Instead of stipulating what type of clothes to wear, young women were only instructed to make sure their clothing was clean and pressed. In the 1950s, the definition of modesty at BYU and as discussed in MIA pamphlets and the *Improvement Era* was an important component of general modesty of person, which included how one thought, dressed, and acted.

Despite Elder Kimball’s 1951 call to arms, there were few new threats, inside the Church or in the broader American culture, to the morality of LDS youth that would elicit intense interest in women’s dress. The Church continued to teach young women and men to be loyal to their country, prepare for the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood, and be active in practicing their religion. Likewise, popular culture emphasized loyalty to the United States and idealized family life, promoting a “cult of motherhood,” where fulfillment for women meant serving others, most often their families. *McCall’s* magazine described American family life in idyllic terms in 1954—Little League, car rides, and back-

yard barbecues.¹⁶ Although strapless dresses and tight sweaters were popular in the 1950s, fashionable hemlines did not rise above the knees, and women could easily be in style without appearing either dowdy or immodest.

However, the 1960s brought a decade of rapid social change in the United States, and Church leaders were especially worried about the effects of social turmoil on Mormon youth. This perceived nationwide moral crisis was epitomized by the popularity of new women's fashions, including the miniskirt and hip-hugging bell-bottoms, the introduction of the birth control pill in 1965, a nascent feminist movement, and the sexual revolution.¹⁷ Also alarming to Church leaders was the emergence of the drug culture, counterculture, radical student movements, and a general disregard for authority among the nation's youth. In the midst of these changes, Mormon youth began adopting the dress and grooming habits of the new morality and the counterculture, including shorter skirts, "grubby" clothing, and longer hair and beards for men. The importance of modest dress took on a new urgency. Prior to the 1950s, many Church leaders had seen immodest dress as, at worst, a nuisance. However, in the 1960s, immodest and unkempt appearance were symbols of undesirable attitudes and even actual evil.

Modesty in dress quickly became a watch cry for protecting the purity and moral values of LDS youth; and increasingly, LDS leaders exhorted members to dress both modestly *and* appropriately. However, LDS Church leaders employed varied and at times contradictory tactics for influencing female members to choose modest clothing in particular, rather than focusing on the more general "modesty of person" articulated in earlier materials. Such exhortations were particularly frequent in *Church News* editorials. These unsigned editorials had been written by Mark E. Petersen of the *Deseret News* "since the beginning of the publication in 1931," and which he continued as an apostle (ordained in 1944 at age forty-three) until close to his death in 1984.¹⁸

General Authorities and local leaders alike delivered strong statements condemning immodest clothing.¹⁹ LDS leaders taught that women's immodest dress often led to immoral or unchaste behavior. They emphasized a woman's responsibility not only for her own dress and chaste behavior, but also for the chastity of her male

associates. Modest dress would keep men's thoughts clean and pure; women were responsible if their dress encouraged male failure. Elder Petersen gave a talk at the annual Relief Society conference in 1962, later published in multiple venues, where he charged: "What tempts the boys to molest the girls today more than any other one thing . . . is the mode of dress of our girls," which included skirts above the knees, tight and revealing tops, and low-cut evening gowns. When "such sights are placed before their eyes, almost like an invitation, can you blame them any more than you would the girls who tempt them, if they take advantage of those girls?"²⁰ This strong indictment of young women's immodest dress as the cause and even excuse for young men to take advantage of them sexually, harsh by today's standards, was not uncommon in America at this time.²¹ Although Petersen criticized young women for tempting their male counterparts, he also faulted their parents for buying them skimpy clothing and permitting them to date early. Instructing the women in attendance that "the preservation of the home is left chiefly to the wife and mother," Petersen asked them to "have the courage to correct" the immodest clothing of their daughters by establishing a fashion style of their own.²²

In a 1964 letter to the *Church News*, Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith strongly encouraged the women of the Church to "correct the evil . . . which confronts the female world and which members of the Church imitate," by which he meant immodest dress. He feared that "modesty is DEAD!" and without modesty, chastity was in danger.²³ Smith and other leaders felt that modesty for young women was of extreme importance because of Church teachings that sexual sin, including not only premarital intercourse and adultery, but also "lesser sins" of physical intimacy, were an "abomination."²⁴

The importance of modesty as a shield against sexual temptation and women's responsibility for both their own and male chastity has survived. Taught today in the LDS Church to varying degrees, it was not apparently the primary motive for LDS Church teachings on modesty in the 1960s and 1970s. Occasionally, a *Church News* editorial blamed miniskirts for societal decay, but more often, the editorials suggested women should dress modestly and appropriately to express their independence from

worldly fashion and to establish boundaries between women of the church and women of the world. In the mid to late 1960s, Elder Petersen employed several strategies in his *Church News* editorials to convince LDS women to eschew modern styles. For example, these editorials cited campaigns for modesty in Philadelphia schools and elsewhere, quoted Parisian fashion experts who denounced miniskirts that exposed women's knobby knees and flabby thighs, and also quoted alleged FBI statistics that rape had dramatically increased after the introduction of the miniskirt.²⁵

Two conflicting calls to action emerged during this decade. The first was an appeal for independent thought by the Church's women, particularly its young women. The second was a renewed emphasis on "femininity" and feminine dress. On the first call, editorials and articles by General Authorities often tried to appeal to young women's individuality or bravery, asking Latter-day Saint young women if they "had the courage" to change their wardrobes, independent of the popular fashions of the day.²⁶ An editorial entitled "The Mini Skirts" asked, "Isn't it time for our women to decide to use their own good sense in regard to dress, and refuse to be like sheep following the dictates of fashion designers who like extremes? . . . If our people would think for themselves, rather than be herded into styles by New York or Paris, all would be infinitely better off." Instead of mindlessly following the whims of fashion, the editorial invited women to daringly think for themselves and "just decide to forget the world."²⁷

A 1967 *Church News* editorial, "Time for Style of Our Own" encouraged women of the Church to become "distinctive, special, and independent" in creating their own style, which would help them "put decency above fashion and decide to be beautifully feminine, but still remain becomingly modest." The article argued that the more than two million members of the LDS Church would be able to make a difference in the world. A campaign for modesty in dress would bring the Church and its women "at least as much admiration as have our Welfare Plan, our Missionary Program, and our stand on the Word of Wisdom." The editorial suggested that LDS women would become as distinctive in the world's eyes as the missionary service of LDS men.²⁸

Independent thought was heralded as a virtue, as long as it led women to spurn the world and worldly dress. Miniskirts were not

the only new fashions that concerned Church authorities; many leaders in the late 1960s and 1970s equated appropriate dress for women with “feminine” dress. Popular women’s fashions in the mid to late 1960s included collarless jackets and bellbottoms, and “women’s fashion increasingly favored the ‘boy look’; full breasts and hips [popular in the 1950s] go out of fashion as women try to make themselves look as androgynous as possible.”²⁹ Women of the world began to wear pants, jeans, and more casual clothing generally, adopting a unisex look, but Church leaders pled with LDS women to retain their feminine charm.

Perhaps Church leaders would have worried less about young women wearing jeans or collarless jackets (both of which were modest and therefore would presumably not cause unchastity), if they had not also been increasingly concerned about the influence of the feminist movement. The second wave of feminism, which began in the 1960s, sought to rectify inequalities in the workplace, government, and education. In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, which confronted “the problem that has no name,” or the free-floating discontent felt by many women at being defined by a biologically driven and domestic ideal. She suggested that many women did not find fulfillment through total involvement in their family and encouraged women to take control of their own lives.³⁰ While some feminist organizations, such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) worked to combat prejudice and discrimination that faced women, more radical organizations such as New York Radical Women and the Redstockings advocated the overthrow of capitalism and “repudiated the male master class, marriage, and the traditional nuclear family.”³¹

Many leaders and members of the LDS Church felt that the feminist movement threatened traditional gender roles. While groups like the Redstockings were certainly subversive to Church teachings concerning the importance of marriage and family, organizations such as NOW also advocated that women did not have to find fulfillment as a wife and mother, but instead could remain single or enter the workplace, even with children at home. Alarmed by these trends, Church leaders not only emphasized the importance of modesty, but also actively campaigned for feminin-

ity in dress, and discouraged women from dressing in a “unisex” manner.³² Taking a bold and independent stand against the world, as leaders encouraged, did not also translate into joining new independence movements.

As early as 1965, the Church published its first *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet, which provided LDS youth with guidelines concerning dress, manners, dating, dancing, and clean living. Officers of the MIA, representatives from BYU and the Church Educational System, and youth of the Church joined to create the pamphlet, designed to be a guide for youth and their parents. The First Presidency (then David O. McKay, Hugh B. Brown, and N. Eldon Tanner) felt strongly about the importance of the original *For the Strength of Youth* and asked members of the Church to “familiarize themselves with . . . and conform to [its] regulations.”³³

Six years later, Brigham Young University and other Church colleges formally adopted a dress and grooming standard.³⁴ Although BYU had established a dress code for its students in the previous decade, it had not been incorporated into the Honor Code. A new, slightly altered dress code became a condition of enrollment in the fall of 1971.³⁵ *For the Strength of Youth* and BYU’s dress and grooming standards were designed to encourage appropriate dress and behavior among the youth of the Church and can be used to track changing standards and rationales for standards among Church leaders. Although both dress codes have been revised since 1965 and 1971, standards of modesty regarding clothing style and length have remained remarkably similar to instructions given by Elder Kimball in 1951.³⁶ However, both documents have evolving definitions of gender-appropriate clothing, including the acceptability of pants, jeans, sweatshirts, and shorts. These two “codes of modesty,” used as a case study for the Church’s emphasis on femininity, show that Church leaders invoked modesty to prevent women from looking like women of the world in hopes that their behavior would also remain distinctive. The emphasis on femininity was meant to discourage women from following larger American trends away from women’s traditional roles and instead to encourage women to dress a certain way to reflect their feminine, God-given nature.

The first *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet reflected Church leaders’ concerns about members’ dress. The pamphlet acknowl-

edged that “modesty cannot be determined by inches or fit since that which looks modest on one person may not be so on another,” but also instructed that skirts should “be long enough to cover the kneecap” and that low-cut, strapless, and spaghetti strap outfits were inappropriate.³⁷ The 1968 version noted that women were to “always try to look feminine in their dress. They should not dress like boys or try to give a masculine appearance.” In addition to this general principle, the pamphlet specified: “Pants for young women are not desirable attire for shopping, at school, in the library, in cafeterias or restaurants.”³⁸ Women were allowed to “appropriately wear slacks” only when participating in hiking, camping, and active sports, activities that would presumably be immodest in a dress.³⁹

Church leaders modified the *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet several times. Several of the changes deal with issues of propriety, not actual modesty in dress. For example, one section originally titled “‘Grubbies,’ Curlers, Hair Fashions” in 1965, informed young women that “‘Grubby’ clothes are inappropriate in public for everyone. A ‘real lady’ does not go out in public, to the market, or to shops with her hair in curlers.” Perhaps leaders felt their instructions were not sufficiently explicit, for three years later, “grubby” was replaced with “soiled, sloppy, or ill-fitting clothes.” These items joined long hair [for men], an unkempt or dirty appearance, and “rowdy” behavior as proscribed behavior in 1968.⁴⁰ Presumably because these traits were characteristic of the student movements and counterculture of the 1960s, Church leaders counseled youth to avoid even the appearance of being associated with them.⁴¹

Like *For the Strength of Youth*, BYU’s dress and grooming standards evolved over time, often spelling out the need for women to dress femininely and elucidating the reasons behind some of the dress standards changes. A BYU Dress Standards Committee had existed since the late 1940s; in the 1950s and 1960s, Ernest L. Wilkinson, president of Brigham Young University, had tried to create formal dress standards for students.⁴² His administration published two general types of material to convince students to follow “appropriate dress standards” and distributed materials to inform students about standards that emphasized the interconnectedness of beauty, dress, and modesty.⁴³ For example, out-

raged by the preponderance of short skirts on campus, in 1968, BYU officials began passing out a “Pardon Me” card to students and visitors alike whose skirts were “too short.” The card read in part: “In order to spare you embarrassment we give you this folder to remind and inform you of dress standards at BYU because we do not want you to feel out of place on our campus. . . . Women—The following are not acceptable: Mini skirts (anything above the knees), Pant dresses, Shorts, Pants & pedal pushers (acceptable on 1st floor of Wilkinson Center only), Sweat shirts, Bare feet, Culottes (acceptable if dress length).”⁴⁴ The student body reacted strongly against this practice, with the *Daily Universe* printing “you are not pardoned” coupons to be given to officials. The administration halted the practice soon after it began.

An example of a less intrusive and proscriptive publication is *Dress Standards at BYU*, an eight-page pamphlet apparently published and circulated in 1969. It did not set forth specific dress standards for women (or men) but quoted several leading Church authorities on beauty, dress, and modesty. Notably, it quotes Church president David O. McKay several times on the link between chastity and beauty: “There is a beauty every girl has . . . [and] that beauty is chastity. Chastity without skin beauty may enkindle the soul; skin beauty without chastity can kindle only in the eye.” A beautiful woman, if she was also chaste and modest, was “creation’s masterpiece.”⁴⁵

However, as the flowering of Mormon beauty self-help books in the 1980s indicates, being beautiful required walking a fine line. *Dress Standards at BYU* quoted Brigham Young as equating beauty with simple goodness: “Goodness sheds a halo of loveliness around every person who possesses it, making their countenances beam with light, and their society desirable because of its excellency.”⁴⁶ Although the pamphlet taught that modesty made a woman beautiful, constant reminders to women to pay attention to their appearance suggest that simply covering objectionable parts of the body was not enough; *excessive* femininity or overt sexiness could also ruin a woman’s modest beauty.⁴⁷

Despite the attempts of the Wilkinson administration to create a mandatory dress code, the BYU dress and grooming standards did not become a condition of enrollment until the fall of 1971.⁴⁸ On April 1, 1971, the First Presidency issued a statement which

read in part: “The Church has not attempted to indicate just how long women’s or girls’ dresses should be nor whether they should wear pant suits.” Only when going to the temple were women advised against wearing “slacks or mini-skirts, or otherwise dressing immodestly.”⁴⁹ This statement prompted changes in *For the Strength of Youth* and BYU dress standards. The 1972 version cited the First Presidency statement, but no longer advised that skirts cover the kneecap; instead, skirts and dresses should be “of modest length.”⁵⁰

In the summer of 1971, Dallin H. Oaks, newly appointed president of Brigham Young University, sent a letter to the parents of all BYU students advising them of two changes in the BYU dress code. The university’s Public Relations Department also mailed students a special issue of the *Daily Universe*, informing them that women’s hemlines should be of “modest length” and that women were authorized to wear slacks.⁵¹ Oaks’s letter and the student newspaper included the information that the new dress standards applied to the Church College of Hawaii, Ricks College, and LDS Business College as well.⁵²

President Oaks spent much of his 1971 presidential address discussing BYU’s first published, formalized dress code. He quoted a statement by the BYU Board of Trustees, consisting of the First Presidency and other General Authorities, which stated that students’ grooming should emphasize “cleanliness and avoidance of dress or manner which . . . symbolizes either rebellion or non-conformity.” Oaks argued that while skirt lengths were “a function of modesty,” the prohibition of beards and long hair dealt with “symbolism and propriety.” He described the ban against beards as “temporary and pragmatic. They are responsive to conditions and attitudes in our own society at this particular point in time. . . . Beards and long hair are associated with protest, revolution, and rebellion against authority. They are also symbols of the hippie and drug culture . . . a badge of protest and dissent.”⁵³

Oaks did not, however, make the parallel that women’s dress standards were likewise to prevent association with protest and dissent. Rather, “the inclusion of pant suits authorizes a style of dress that is clearly modest, however unfeminine some may think it to be. . . . [It] does not authorize the wearing of jeans, men’s

trousers, or other slacks from the grubby end of the spectrum. . . . These two modifications must not be the occasion for a general deterioration of women's dress standards on this campus."⁵⁴ Oaks's 1971 address, the new dress code, and *A Style of Our Own* (1973) discouraged the unisex look and advocated dress-based distinctions between men and women.⁵⁵ This emphasis suggests that Church officials were not only concerned with the symbolism of bearded young men but also of androgynously dressed young women. Feminine dress would serve as a boundary separating LDS women from women of the world, especially American women who were advocating for new rights and against discrimination. Perhaps if women dressed to accentuate their femininity and to reinforce their identification as wives and mothers, Church leaders felt they would be less tempted by such worldly things as careers and the feminist movement.

The 1974 edition of *A Style of Our Own* makes two changes from the 1973 version. First, after repeating the injunction about appropriate dress, it explains: "*The intent of this standard is to encourage women to wear comfortable yet distinctly feminine attire.*" And second, it gives a measurable definition of "modest": "Women's hemlines (dresses, skirts, culottes) are to be *modest* in length. *A modest length for most young ladies would be no shorter than the top of the knee.*"⁵⁶ Subsequent Honor Code statements changed few things about these early 1970s publications except for finally allowing jeans for women (1981),⁵⁷ permitting knee-length shorts for both sexes (1991), and, most recently, prohibiting tattoos and multiple earrings for men and women (2000).⁵⁸ These prohibitions, along with an occasional threat to revoke the privilege of wearing shorts, have stayed largely the same since the early years of both the Dress and Grooming Standards and the *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlets. If anything, both "codes of modesty" have become stricter, emphasizing not necessarily the standards themselves, but youth and other members of the Church's responsibility to follow them.

In summary, then, during the 1960s and 1970s, Church leaders were concerned that members were adopting the dress and grooming habits of the feminist movement and the counterculture, regardless of whether they were also espousing the movement's ideologies and methods. Symbols and image are very im-

portant to both the leadership and the general membership of the Church. Appearance matters. Appropriate dress delineated a clear boundary between “Saints” and “the world,” thus serving a function similar to that of the Word of Wisdom in the twentieth century. In this case, appropriate, or feminine, dress became a behavioral reminder to LDS women to dress and act in ways that represented their true self. In the December 1974 *Ensign*, Rita L. McMinn, an assistant professor of clothing and textiles at Brigham Young University, emphasized: “If dress communicates to others, it also communicates to ourselves. . . . Our choice of dress even goes so far as to influence our behavior.”⁵⁹ McMinn felt that one could judge a person’s character and future actions based on dress, and advised young women and men to dress appropriately. Elder Sterling W. Sill of the First Council of the Seventy instructed: “When we put on the uniform we may naturally expect that we will be judged by the standards that our appearance suggests” and remarked that appearance is much more than a style. Instead, “it is also an outward symbol of an inward condition.”⁶⁰ Similarly, a 1971 First Presidency statement on dress read, “Make yourself as attractive as possible, but remember that your clothes reflect your values, outlook, and personality.”⁶¹ The idea extends to the present; the most recent *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlets, similar to previous versions, states, “The way you dress is a reflection of what you are on the inside.”⁶²

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the issue of appropriate dress for Mormon women took a somewhat dramatic turn. Earlier pleas to dress femininely established an idealized boundary in both dress and behavior between women of the Church and women of the world. In 1977, approximately five thousand women were serving as LDS missionaries; one in six missionaries—15 percent—were female.⁶³ In that year, according to Alice Buehner, wife of a former mission president, and point woman for new dress and appearance standards for sister missionaries, Church leaders realized that “a stigma had been attached to lady missionaries.” This “far from desirable” stigma was due to their lack of “understanding, knowledge and awareness . . . of the effect of nonverbal communication in areas of clothing, makeup, hair-styles, and social behavior.” The General Authorities felt strongly,

Buehner claimed, that the sister missionaries' dress and appearance failed to represent the Church favorably. Because a sister missionary's physical appearance "communicates her own character and capabilities . . . [and] it also reflects upon the LDS Church as a whole," sister missionaries were encouraged to change their proselyting attire.⁶⁴

Church leaders asked several women, whose husbands had served as mission presidents and who were image consultants, to create an educational program to train sisters "in the art of projecting a professional image . . . to enhance not only their own appearance—therefore building individual self confidence—but also to improve the image of the Church as a whole."⁶⁵ This committee focused on "wardrobe, grooming, poise, makeup, and hair care" to create the Personal Development Program for Lady Missionaries.⁶⁶ Buehner was in charge of the program's dress and grooming portion. She described "the general appearance" of sister missionaries as "a motley assortment of house dresses, jumpers, and little girl type clothes. An occasional mumu even showed up."⁶⁷ To combat this unprofessional look, Buehner launched a mandatory weekly dress and grooming class for sister missionaries in the Provo Missionary Training Center (MTC) in October 1977.

Shortly thereafter, the wives of the Managing Directors of the Missionary Department developed an interim three-page clothing guide, sent to sister missionaries already in the field, advising them on appropriate dress. It was quickly determined that a more comprehensive guideline should be prepared, and Buehner's thesis was part of this process. As a result, the committee created a pamphlet for the Church and the Missionary Training Center describing aspects of "a professional image for sister missionaries."⁶⁸ Buehner notes, "Research into the area of nonverbal communication and clothing design determined that the most professional image is considered to be the 'executive' or 'business' look which projects authority and efficiency."⁶⁹ The Church printed fifteen thousand pamphlets in 1981 and distributed them to sister missionaries, either with their mission calls or through direct mailings to sisters already in the field. The pamphlet's goal was to improve the appearance of sister missionaries, which should communicate "order, cleanliness, neatness, tasteful femininity, freshness, reasonable stylishness, dignity and modesty."⁷⁰

Many sister missionaries were upset at the attention placed on their appearance and felt that “learning to be more attractive was superficial and valueless.” Buehner also noted, “But the First Presidency of the Church stressed the importance of each Sister attending the classes concerning personal appearance . . . They recognized the fact that the Sisters could be more effective missionaries if they felt better about themselves and if they had a more professional appearance.”⁷¹

Both the pamphlet and class included pattern and style selection, color selection, fabric selection and care tips, examples of appropriate dress, examples of color-coordinated wardrobes, and a wardrobe worksheet. Buehner noted that the elders already wore professional attire (suits, white shirts, and subdued ties), and that the same “business executive” look, primarily composed of suits or a dress and jacket, were likewise most appropriate for the sisters.⁷² The pamphlet concluded: “All that the Lord created is beautiful, and He created YOU. It is His desire that every one of His daughters develop herself in every way: spiritually, intellectually, socially, and physically.”⁷³ Church leaders had added yet another reason for women to dress appropriately and modestly: to improve the Church’s image.

In 1980, the Church also published a pamphlet for its own employees, stating that Church employees in particular should follow Elder Kimball’s injunction to create “a style of our own.” It read, “A personal appearance that reflects the image of the Church is an important part of our Church employment. . . . Both proper dress and grooming habits combine to create the Church employee look.” Church employees were instructed to always be clean and neat; women could not wear “pantsuits and immodest clothing.” They were also required to wear nylons. Men were instructed in areas of hair, hygiene, clothing, mustaches, and shoes. “A neat, well groomed haircut and clean-shave are essential.” Above all, “whatever our work may be, we should be sure that our appearance befits that of individuals engaged in the Church’s important work, that we add to and not detract from the positive impression the Church communicates everywhere.”⁷⁴

A 1967 *Church News* editorial thirteen years earlier had asked a frequently recurring question, “Why shouldn’t Latter-day Saints

just decide to forget the world—and not be so much OF the world—and dress beautifully in becoming clothes that preserve the decency which the Lord expects of his lovely daughters?”⁷⁵ The preponderance of grassroots efforts and new “modest” clothing companies in the last decade indicates that some LDS women are attempting to create a “style of their own” and influence others to buy into that style. Women have organized and participated in ward and stake “modest fashion shows,” as well as collaborations with major department stores. New and expanded business ventures, many of them internet-based, advertise cap sleeve undershirts meant to make any shirt modest (and disguise garment lines), swimsuits, knee-length shorts, wedding, prom, and trendy dresses, and a wide variety of clothing that meets the standards in the *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlets.⁷⁶

The first published instance of young women trying to create a style of their own occurred in 1976 in southern California. Not all of the Young Women from the La Cañada First Ward could find or afford to buy modest one-piece swimsuits for their stake swim meet. They finally found “47 yards of chlorine-proof, stylish, inexpensive, and two-way-stretch” orange and purple fabric. The article applauds the young women for winning the meet, sewing their own suits, and being modest.⁷⁷

A 1987 article in the *New Era* highlighted young women from Austin, Texas, and their girls’ camp experience. “Even the heat and the exclusive company of other girls are no excuses for dressing immodestly. Short shorts and tank tops are not allowed.”⁷⁸ Instead, the girls got together each year to make camp shorts that were knee-length, baggy, and brightly colored. Two articles in the September 1990 issue, both titled “The Strapless Dress,” discussed this struggle. The first, a short fiction piece, ended when a girl’s father fashioned her strapless gown into a modest dress, minutes before the prom. The second was a practical guide to finding modest dresses. It advocated sewing your own, renting or borrowing, looking in catalogs, going “ethnic,” and being creative.⁷⁹

Ten years later, modesty became a hot topic, particularly regarding prom dresses. A group of LDS young women from Kansas campaigned for modesty and attracted attention throughout the Church and even internationally; they were interviewed by the BBC and the *Wall Street Journal*. When they had difficulty finding

modest clothing, they took their complaints to their local department store. Through a presentation to several stores, the young women stressed, “Modesty is not a trend. Modesty is a style” and succeeded in influencing the store’s purchasing decisions. Young women from Slidell, Louisiana, to Rancho Cucamonga California, to Midvale, Utah, have held fashion shows modeling modest clothing. A particularly well-organized group in southern California worked with a local Nordstrom’s to put on “A Class Act,” a modest fashion show. Over 900 people attended the show, aided by a front-page *Los Angeles Times* article, support from a local, large Christian church, and nearby Latter-day Saints.⁸⁰

In 2004, Chelsy Rippy founded Shade Clothing, the first business to successfully market “modest clothing” to young women, not all of whom are Mormon. Since then, the Mormon clothing market has exploded with more than thirty retailers marketing “modest clothing.” The trend started with cap sleeve undershirts, intended to make fashionable clothing modest. Companies have now branched out to also offer swimsuits, formal dresses, and a variety of other clothing options. Some brands have been picked up by small boutiques and major retailers, even outside of the Wasatch Front.⁸¹ Mormon women are not the only segment of the American population interested in modest clothing; in the last few years, media outlets as varied as PBS, Dr. Phil, the *Catholic Courier*, the *Washington Post*, local news channels, MSNBC, *Good Morning, America*, and *Newsweek* have run features on the “Modesty Movement.”⁸² Other religious groups have played a large role in this movement, including Pure Fashion, a Catholic girls organization that is “an international faith-based program designed for girls 14-18 to help young women re-discover and re-affirm their innate value and authentic femininity.”⁸³

In 2003, Janiece Johnson and I surveyed almost five hundred women regarding modesty. Trying to ascertain how contemporary LDS women define and understand the Church’s current standards of modesty, the survey asked two questions regarding modesty: (1) What are the Church’s dress and grooming standards? Have they changed? and (2) Why does the Church teach modesty? Although the respondents were not a representative sample of LDS women, 496 women, ages sixteen to eighty-three,

responded. Living in forty different states, with varying educational accomplishments, marital statuses, and activity levels in the Church, the women responded to the survey, disseminated by email, over a one-week period.

In response to the first question, 53 percent answered that Church standards of modesty had changed; 37 percent disagreed, and 10 percent were undecided or did not answer the question.⁸⁴ Some women listed specific aspects of modest dress; others quoted directly from or invited me to look at *For the Strength of Youth* or the BYU standards; some merely stated that the Church taught its members to be “neat and clean.” A twenty-seven-year-old woman from Florida wrote, “As a general rule (sports the biggest exception), clothing should not be backless, sleeveless, or extremely tight. It should also be at least knee-length.” She concluded that modesty was to preclude women from becoming “hyper-focused” on their bodies.⁸⁵

When answering the second question, half of the women named multiple rationales for modest dress.⁸⁶ When these responses are sorted by themes, the results are striking. Forty percent of the women listed respect for the body as a sacred gift from God and as a temple for their spirit as an important reason to be modest. Twenty-five percent cited the importance of promoting and protecting chastity. The same number felt that recognizing one’s status as a child of God/having self-respect/not objectifying one’s body was an important reason to be modest. Twelve percent cited the wearing of temple garments, either currently or in the future, as impetus for dressing modestly. Other reasons mentioned by less than 10 percent of the respondents were the importance of being an example to the world and representing the Church, a link between dress and behavior, a link between dress and a general feeling of respect, and the idea that modesty of dress represents modesty of person.⁸⁷

A twenty-four-year-old New Yorker wrote, “[The Church teaches] modesty as a symbol of the inner spirit. If you wear clean, modest clothes, you yourself will inwardly be reminded of what you believe.”⁸⁸ A thirty-three-year-old from Alexandria, Virginia, commented, “Dress[ing] modestly . . . helps us keep our other covenants. We often behave how we dress. Clothing is a powerful symbol of identity.”⁸⁹ Many women linked clothing to both their iden-

tity and their behavior. A Centerville, Utah, woman responded, “I think that modesty is an eternal law and that’s why the church teaches it. It is a law of happiness. I think that people act as they dress. If one is to be modest in behavior, one should be modest in dress.”⁹⁰ A forty-four-year-old Californian argued, “If we are trying to be pure on the inside we need to show it on the outside.”⁹¹

Chastity was an important reason to be modest for many women. A Colorado woman made an explicit connection between immodesty and immorality: “Satan has a strong army fighting against the [sic] morality. It is my experience that once modesty goes then it doesn’t take long before there are issues of immorality and sexual sins. Modesty is like the skin—it is the first line of defense against disease.”⁹² Many women felt modesty of dress helped deemphasize the body, thus leading to healthier self-concepts and relationships. A twenty-six-year-old Palo Alto woman remarked, “The spiritual purpose is for self-respect and recognition of yourself as a literal daughter of God. I wish we could, as a culture, focus more on this purpose, as I see many young women focusing more on their appearance than the purpose and significance of our bodies.”⁹³

A forty-year-old New Yorker wished the Church would emphasize modesty of dress less: “Modesty is a way to behave and live, not a way to dress. Modest apparel changes over time and culture, but behaving respectfully towards one’s own self and others does not. This, in my opinion, is what should be taught.”⁹⁴ Not everyone was completely sure why the Church taught modesty. Some remarked that they had never thought about it before, while others were still ambivalent. A twenty-five-year-old Provo resident identified the Church’s dress and grooming standards with the BYU Honor Code and *For the Strength of Youth*. She wrote, “I suppose [dress standards exist] because we should respect our bodies and not tempt others with the way we dress, but sometimes I wonder.”⁹⁵

Many women focused on respect, whether for themselves, their bodies, others, or the Lord. A thirty-five-year-old woman from Florida commented, “Modesty shows respect for our own bodies, that they are not for all to see. It also shows respect for our souls by not placing all emphasis for beauty and attractiveness on the outward appearance.”⁹⁶ One Lake Havasu City woman differentiated

between being attractive and being provocative: “Attractiveness, in my definition, implies an attention to the entire woman or man. It requires a recognition of body *and* soul. Provocation, on the other hand, really is about the body *alone*. . . . Of course, modesty does not guarantee that men and women will always see each other as complete beings, but it certainly is a step in the right direction.”⁹⁷ Finally, a sixty-eight-year-old woman wrote, “When one goes before the Lord, one wants to convey respect. . . . Modesty is one way we make ourselves worthy of his inspiration.”⁹⁸

As these responses indicate, modesty of dress has had many meanings for many people, perhaps because the specific guidelines and rationales for modesty have fluctuated in response to changes within the Church and within the broader American culture. Definitions of modest and appropriate dress have symbolic importance, simultaneously maintaining and blurring boundaries between Latter-day Saint women and their broader culture. Subtle changes in both dress standards and rationales for modest dress in the latter half of the twentieth century in part reflect the LDS Church’s teachings and attitudes toward chastity and women, the feminine ideal, and changing women’s roles.

For example, Church leaders and publications have emphasized that Mormon women should avoid particular fashions, such as miniskirts, pants (especially casual ones), and unfeminine dress in general. During the late 1960s and 1970s, these articles of clothing were prohibited as symbols of the counterculture and feminism, two movements that LDS Church leaders did not want its women to be involved with, sympathize with, or even look like. In a time of professionalism for the Church in the early 1980s, the Church wanted its employees and sister missionaries to project a “business executive” image. Dowdy housedresses and funky florals, although modest, did not fit this professional image, and women employees and sisters missionaries were asked to alter their clothing according. (These guidelines are still in force.) This new professional image for sister missionaries was for the benefit of those with whom the missionaries came in contact. These instructions blurred the lines between what a Mormon woman, at least as a missionary, was supposed to look like and represent, namely a professionally accomplished businesswoman, and women of the world who were professionals. Based on the earlier

fears that dressing progressively (i.e., in pants) would encourage Mormon women to become part of the women's movement, it is surprising that the dress and grooming standards for sister missionaries emphasized the business executive look.

Symbols and image have been and remain very important to both the leadership and the general membership of the LDS Church. Dress matters. Definitions of modest and appropriate appearance are somewhat fluid. As the larger culture and society change, fashion as a boundary matters, not necessarily because it produces immorality or because Zion's daughters must emphasize their femininity, but because dress fundamentally represents not only the individual, but the Church in general.

Notes

1. Joseph F. Smith, Anthon H. Lund, Charles W. Penrose, *A Call to the Women of the Church* (pamphlet), September 22, 1916, Historical Department Library and Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter LDS Church Library).

2. In response to the First Presidency's letter, the General Auxiliary Boards (General Boards of the Relief Society, Deseret Sunday School Union, Young Men's and Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Associations, Primary Association, and Religion Classes), with the First Presidency's approval, sent *Communication on Dress*, pamphlet, 1917, to "All Women Officers and Teachers in the Church," LDS Church Library. The short pamphlet asked women to be more modest in dress, and to eschew the fashions and fads of the world, particularly the "sleeveless gowns and such extremely low-cut bodices and short skirts at evening parties as to bring the blush of embarrassment to the cheek of the truly modest man or woman." The pamphlet reaffirmed that a dress could be beautiful and still be modest, specifying that it should "cover up the shoulder and upper arm; the round or V neck should not be extreme; and the skirt not immodestly short." General Auxiliary Boards, *Communication on Dress*, [1917].

3. Spencer W. Kimball, *A Style of Our Own: Modesty in Dress and Its Relationship to the Church*, An Apostle Speaks to Youth, No. 4 (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1951).

4. Although other General Authorities gave talks and Church magazines published articles concerning modesty in dress and grooming in and around 1951, Elder Kimball's talk seems to have made a more lasting impression. For example, Matthew Cowley, also of the Quorum of the Twelve, gave a talk at Ricks Academy exhorting his audience (an el-

ders' quorum) to "be narrow minded about dress and other important things." Cowley, Address to elders' quorum, November 30, 1951, photocopy of typescript, LDS Church Library. However, no other publication or talk appears to have made the same impression, either in scope or phrasing, as *A Style of Our Own*.

5. Kimball, *A Style of Our Own*, not paginated. Kimball quoted President George Albert Smith who taught that all shorts were immodest and should only be worn in women's rooms. Any activity, including baton twirling, queen competitions, and beauty contests, "especially where the participant was required to wear a bathing suit or shorts, was inappropriate.

6. Dallin H. Oaks, "A New President Speaks to Brigham Young University" *Speeches of the Year* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1971), 12, commented: "I can vividly recall the furor that followed [Elder Kimball's] criticism of strapless evening gowns on this campus." Oaks's talk was reprinted as Dallin Oaks, "Standards of Dress and Grooming," *New Era*, December 1971. See also Ralph O. Brown, "Warning of a Prophet," *Daily Universe*, February 20, 1951, 2; and "Post Mortems by the Editor," *Daily Universe*, February 20, 1951, 2. One woman who participated in a July 2003 "Modesty Email Survey" conducted by the author and Janiece Johnson, also a July 2003 Joseph Fielding Smith Institute Summer Fellow wrote, "In my mother's era of teenage hood (1950's) there wasn't near the emphasis on modesty. She had strapless prom dresses and nobody questioned her religious commitment." Modesty Email Survey, #435, age 45, Centerville, Utah.

7. For more information about the beginnings of the Honor Code, see John J. Hunter, "History of the Formal Honor System at Brigham Young University during the First Ten Years, 1950-1960: A Compilation of Documents and Other Materials for the Dean of Students," Brigham Young University, 1960; Ernest L. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University: The First 100 Years*, 4 vols. (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1976), 2:488, states: "[The] Honor Code was a joint attempt by students, faculty, and administration to place the responsibility for conduct in keeping with gospel principles on students themselves."

8. Bertha Clark, Conversation with Katie Clark Blakesley, Erda, Utah, July 6, 2003. Another woman remembered, "When I was growing up, there were no particular dress standards until Pres[ident] Kimball gave instructions against strapless dresses." Modesty Email Survey, #199, age 71, Salt Lake City.

9. "Post Mortems by the Editor," 2. A letter to the editor by Ralph O. Brown makes it clear that responses to Kimball's talk ranged from de-

light to horror about his denunciation of strapless dresses. Brown, "Warnings of a Prophet," 2.

10. See, for example, Associated Students of Brigham Young University, *Your Passport to Honor* (pamphlet), 1957, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter Perry Special Collections). From a study of general conference talks and *Improvement Era* articles from the 1950s, it appears that dress was not considered as contributing to unchastity. For example, Elder Mark E. Petersen's October 1959 conference address, *Improvement Era* 62 (December 1959): 922-23, lists early dating and lack of parental control as causes of early marriage, illegitimate children, and unchastity among youth, perhaps because 1959 preceded the sexual revolution and the miniskirt. His omission of immodest dress is particularly interesting because he so frequently linked immodesty and sexual sin during the 1960s. See also Hunter, "History of the Formal Honor System," 385.

11. Associated Student Body, *Your Passport to Honor* (1957) [pamphlet]. See also Hunter, "History of the Formal Honor System," 397. Ernest L. Wilkinson, "The Importance of Honor," *Speeches of the Year* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1959), 5, in his opening address on September 30, 1959, to the returning student body, recognized the ten-year anniversary of BYU's adoption of a Code of Honor and reaffirmed its importance. He specifically heralded "the maintenance of standards of honor and integrity, of graciousness in personal behavior, of Christian ideals in every day living, of a single standard of morality, and of abstinence from the use of alcohol and tobacco" as expected from BYU students.

12. Ernest L. Wilkinson and Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young University: The First 100 Years* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1976), 3:280. Arrington was a coeditor on Volume 3 and associate editor on Volume 4.

13. "Modesty Is the Best Policy" (Salt Lake City: Mutual Improvement Association, 1957), LDS Church Library. The front of the card has an illustration of a man and woman dancing, with the phrase "Modesty Is the Best Policy" written at the top and "Be Honest with Yourself" at the bottom. The back of the card discusses the "many-sided virtue" of modesty, including modesty in speech, manner of dress, and manner of conduct.

14. Hunter, "History of the Formal Honor System," 385.

15. "To a Teenage Girl—On Being a Lady," Pt. 1: "Sit Tall, Stand Tall, Think Tall," *Improvement Era* 62 (September 1959): 710. See, for example, "To a Teenage Girl—On Being a Lady," Pt. 2: "A Shining You," *Improvement Era* 62 (October 1959): 777-78, and "To a Teenage Girl—On

Being a Lady,” Pt. 4: “Graciously Receive,” *Improvement Era* 62 (December 1959): 996–97.

16. Edward L. Ayers, Lewis L. Gould, David M. Oshinsky, and Jean R. Soderlund, *American Passages: A History of the United States*, 2 vols. (Fort Worth, Tex.: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000), 2:963, 977. The authors describe the 1950s as characterized by the “cult of motherhood,” where fulfillment for women meant serving others. They also describe television images of families living “charmed lives,” where the father had a good, stress-free job, the mother was a housewife who did not work outside the home, and children were well-behaved. Robert A. Goldberg, *Grassroots Resistance: Social Movements of the Twentieth Century* (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1991), 196, discusses women in the 1950s, saying that “ideals of female selflessness and nurturing drew strength from a media celebration of domesticity.” Women were expected to be content “living in the suburbs and caring for a husband and three or four children,” and fashion dictated that fashions “featur[ed] long, full skirts, small waists, defined bust lines, and high heels.”

17. Karen Greenspan, *The Timetables of Women’s History: A Chronology of the Most Important People and Events in Women’s History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 364.

18. “This Week in Church History: 25 Years Ago,” *Church News*, January 3, 2009, 2, in a retrospective article based on Elder Petersen’s obituary, published January 15, 1984, quoted from that obituary: Petersen “had written the editorials in the *Church News* since the beginning of the publication in 1931.”

19. As an example of local concern, Alma P. Burton, president of Sharon Stake in Utah Valley, addressed the parents and youth in one session of his stake’s 1969 quarterly conference. He denounced: “SHORT SKIRTS . . . Don’t let anyone fool or mislead you. This is one of the most serious evils among us today.” Burton chided parents for letting “young women come out of their homes in short skirts” and asked the young women to think again about the message their skirts sent to young men. He encouraged parents to deny their daughters access to a car, tuition money, or money for new clothes until they wore longer skirts, because short skirts were “a thing of temptation to their boy friends” and something that “also makes it more likely that our daughters themselves will lose their virtue.” Alma Pexton Burton, “Youth—Be Modest in Your Dress,” Address, Sharon Stake quarterly conference, November 23, 1969, typescript, 1, LDS Church Library.

20. Mark E. Petersen, “Modesty Protects Virtue,” address, to officers’ meeting of the annual Relief Society general conference, October 3, 1962, published under the same title, *Relief Society Magazine* 50 (Janu-

ary 1953): 9, and summarized in “Relief Society Women Hear Leaders Appeal for Modesty in Dress,” *Church News*, October 6, 1962, 4.

21. Greenspan, *The Timetables of Women’s History*, 388, notes that a rape victim was “long assumed by the popular imagination to have caused her own violation by seductive dress or behavior. . . . [E]ven when it is reported, rape has the lowest rate of apprehension and conviction of any violent crime. . . . [M]en are not held responsible for their sexual aggression once their sexual drive has been aroused.” Petersen, “Modesty Protects Virtue,” 9–10, quotes an editorial from “a recent national publication” stating: “We must face the fact that more and more American women are unwittingly inviting sex crimes. . . . [A]t least one half of the rape cases . . . could have been avoided had the victim shown more discretion and good judgment.”

22. Petersen, “Modesty Protects Virtue,” 8–9, instructs mothers to have the “valor and courage to protect their children by helping them to live up to the Church standards of decency and right” (10). Petersen also felt that “many of these young women are innocent victims of a bad situation. From infancy they wear but little clothing . . . [and] become accustomed to exposing themselves. It is all they seem to know” (9).

23. Signed letter, Joseph Fielding Smith, “Pres. Smith Speaks Out against Immodest Dress,” *Church News*, August 8, 1964, 3, specifically mentions sleeveless dresses and attire that exposes the midriff. This article also faults men’s immodest dress and behavior to a lesser degree. It would be a mistake to think that Church leaders fault only women’s dress as being inappropriate. However, I have yet to read an indictment of men’s dress as a cause of immorality or sexual sin, either their own or that of their dates.

24. When trying to convince young women to be modest, Church leaders often quote Book of Mormon scriptures: “chastity and virtue are most dear and precious above all things” (Moro. 9:9) and God “delight[s] in the chastity of women” (Jacob 2:28).

25. “The Mini Skirts” (editorial), *Church News*, September 23, 1967, 16, states: “[Fashion experts] pointed to the ugliness of knees in general and of the fat ones and the bony ones in particular. . . . They explained that “thigh-high” dresses not only were unbecoming but distasteful, and approached the indecent.” This editorial quoted national radio commentator Paul Harvey as stating that, according to the FBI, “forcible rape had increased dramatically each year since 1964 when the mini skirt began. He reported that in England where the mini first appeared, the rape rate increased 90 percent in five years. . . . Eighty three per cent of the police interviewed by Mr. Harvey said that most cases of rape today are direct results of mini skirts.”

“Was Prohibition So Bad?” (editorial), *Church News*, August 22, 1970, 16, notes that the “side effects” of the mini skirt are as obvious as the side effects of liquor. The *Church News*’s tactic of quoting national figures was an attempt to convince LDS young women that others besides their parents and Church leaders opposed the new fashion. “The Mini Skirts,” 16, editorialized that no one approved of or even liked mini skirts, including young men, Church leaders, and women, all of whom were “disgusted by the new fashion.”

“Knees and Hemlines” (editorial), *Church News*, June 4, 1966, 16, quotes Veronica Papworth, a columnist for the *London Sunday Express*: “But the masses are not models. . . . Somehow, no one seems to have found the time for a single glance in the looking glass; so all over town right now we are being treated (?) to a surfeit of knees and thighs. Knocked or knobby, desiccated or dimpled, pallid or purple, in this excess of exhibition anything goes.”

26. “Mod Means Modest for These Girls,” *Church News*, April 29, 1967, 16, editorialized that a modest clothing campaign would actually increase the beauty of Mormon women because “no woman looks as lovely as when she is properly and fully clothed. What woman can suppose that ugly knees and bony shoulder blades can add luster to her charm?”

27. “The Mini Skirts,” 16.

28. “Time for Style of Our Own,” *Church News*, November 5, 1966, 16.

29. Greenspan, *The Timetables of Women’s Fashion*, 364, 368.

30. Goldberg, *Grassroots Resistance*, 196, 198.

31. *Ibid.*, 200, 204.

32. “Is This the Time” (editorial), *Church News*, June 27, 1970, 16, shows that Church leaders felt threatened on many fronts: “a world movement to destroy moral standards, . . . sex revolution . . . the new morality . . . infidelity . . . free abortion . . . short skirts . . . plunging necklines . . . and a disregard for religion and an acceptance of the teaching that there is no God.” The editorial asked young women to abhor worldliness, not only in fashion but also in behavior, and instead to “take pride in being different from the world.”

33. Introduction, *For the Strength of Youth* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1965), 2, microfiche, LDS Church Library.

34. “Y Board, Church System Establish Dress Standards,” *Daily Universe*, July 22, 1971, 1. The July 22 number was a “Special Issue” published by BYU’s Public Relations Department and mailed to all new and continuing students. The dress standards took effect on September 1.

35. According to a timeline called “The Honor Code,” available

from the Honor Code Office, Brigham Young University, January 2004, print-out in my possession, between 1959 and 1969 “Dress and Grooming standards were formally implemented.” However, I could not find any pamphlets dealing with the Honor Code that included a formal dress and grooming standard. For example, the pamphlet *You Are on Your Honor* (1963) outlines academic and nonacademic rules for BYU students but does not mention dress. Wilkinson and Arrington, *BYU: The First 100 Years*, 3:330, briefly discusses dress standards, reporting that “Wilkinson accosted students on campus and instructed them to abide by the standards.” However, it lists no actual standards before 1971. See also Gary James Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985), chap. 3, “Standards and the Honor Code.”

36. The notable exception is the case of sleeveless dresses and shirts, prohibited in later versions of the Dress and Grooming Standards, but I have been unable to determine the date they were first prohibited in writing.

37. Church leaders also appealed to a sense of attractiveness. *For the Strength of Youth*, 1965, 2, 4, stressed that “girls should dress to enhance their natural beauty and femininity” and that “few girls or women ever look well in backless or strapless dresses. Such styles often make the figure look ungainly and large, or they show the bony structure of the body.”

38. *For the Strength of Youth* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1968), 3, 6, microfiche, LDS Church Library. Although this paper focuses on dress and grooming standards for women, the BYU Dress and Grooming Standards and the *For the Strength of Youth* also listed approved clothing for young men, although most male counsel focused on facial hair. *For the Strength of Youth*, 1968 and 1972, 5, instructed young men not to wear “extremely tight-fitting pants” but permitted “shorts . . . during actual participation in active sports.”

39. *For the Strength of Youth*, 1965, 6. “Any apparel that suggests a house robe should not be worn in public but only in one’s home or apartment. Tight-fitting sweaters and figure-hugging clothes of any kind are not appropriate LDS dress.” Although women were asked not to wear pants, rather contradictorily, “pedal pushers, knee-knockers, bermudas, capris, or any pants which reach just above the knee are acceptable.” *Ibid.*, 7, 6.

40. *For the Strength of Youth*, 1968, 6.

41. *Ibid.*, 8, 9, 11.

42. Bergera and Priddis, *House of Faith*, 112.

43. It is not known whether students were unaware of dress stan-

dards, if the standards were unenforced, or if they were disregarded in general. Bergera and Priddis, *House of Faith*, chap. 3, seem to think that any dress standards were “unofficial” until the early 1970s. “The Honor Code” states that “Dress and Grooming standards were formally implemented,” but the Honor Code Office was unable to provide me with more detail.

44. Associated Students of Brigham Young University Dress Standards Committee, “Pardon Me!” 1968, Perry Special Collections.

45. *Dress Standards at BYU* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1969), Perry Special Collections. Accompanying this pamphlet, as an example of appropriate dress, is a picture of a young man and woman holding hands. The young woman is wearing a dress that is beautiful, but which certainly wouldn’t be allowed at a BYU function today. It is a strapless white empire waist gown, with a sheer polka dot overlay on the bodice; she is evidently not wearing a conventional bra.

46. *Dress Standards at BYU*.

47. Mormon women could go too far in trying to be feminine and beautiful. When this occurred, they were criticized for “bad taste” in dressing gaudily or emphasizing their sexuality. See Spencer W. Kimball, “Gems of Thought: Character Is Reflected in Dress, Speech,” (excerpt from Spencer W. Kimball speech, general session, MIA Conference, Tabernacle, June 1965), *Church News*, July 3, 1965, 16.

48. One of the primary means administrators had of enforcing the pre-1971 dress standards was “interviewing” women and men who were in violation of the standards at fall registration. For example, in the fall of 1969, Dean of Women Lucille Petty talked to 201 female BYU students whose dresses were too short. Wilkinson and Arrington, *Brigham Young University*, 3:328.

49. *For the Strength of Youth*, 1972, 4–5.

50. *For the Strength of Youth*, 1965, 6.

51. Wilkinson and Arrington, *Brigham Young University*, 3:329.

52. “Y Board, Church System Establish Dress Standards,” 1.

53. Oaks, “A New President Speaks to Brigham Young University,” 10–13. He made it clear that the dress standards applied only to students attending Church schools, not to Mormon youth in general.

54. *Ibid.*, 11.

55. *A Style of Our Own*, 1973, included the dress code, a message from CES Commissioner Neal A. Maxwell, and statements on modesty by Church leaders. Both women and men were asked to be neat and clean in their dress. Shorts and grubby attire were permitted only in living and athletic areas. Appropriate attire for women included “dresses, sweaters, blouses with skirts, culottes, slacks, or *modest* pant suits” but not

levis. "Women's hemlines (dresses, skirts, culottes) are to be *modest* in length." Sleeveless dresses were apparently acceptable, since one photo showed a young woman in a sleeveless (not spaghetti strap) dress. Men were required to be clean shaven, with hair "styled so it does not cover the ears." *Ibid.*, not paginated; emphasis pamphlet's.

56. *A Style of Our Own*, 1974, Perry Special Collections; emphasis pamphlet's.

57. *Code of Honor/Dress and Grooming Standards*, pamphlet, 1981, LDS Church Library. A sample from this code reads: "Clothing, including swimming suits, must be modest in fabric, fit, and style. Shorts, swimming suits, and gym clothes are acceptable wear only in the living and athletic areas. So-called 'grubby attire' may be worn only in the immediate areas of residence halls and at informal outdoor activities, but not in dining areas. 'Grubby attire' includes tank tops, sweat suits, jogging attire, bib overalls, clothes with holes or those which are noticeably frayed, cutoff, or patched. Shoes are to be worn in public campus areas. Thongs or slippers are allowed in living areas only." For the first time, the code explicitly condemned "dresses or skirts above the knee or those with slits above the knee. . . . Similarly, the no-bra look is unacceptable at BYU."

58. Under President Jeffrey R. Holland, a group of faculty, administrators, and students updated the Honor Code and Dress and Grooming Standards in 1991, which included some supplemental pamphlets, including Honor Code Council, *On My Honor: From Students, To Students* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1992). *BYU Honor Code and Standards: The Faculty Role* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1992) instructed faculty to voice support for the Honor Code, include its requirements in their syllabi, counsel students in private, and refer serious offenders to Honor Code authorities.

59. Rita L. McMinn, "I Have A Question," *Ensign*, December 1973, 31.

60. Sterling W. Sill, "Personal Appearance," ca. late 1960s, 1, typescript, LDS Church Library.

61. As quoted in Peggy Hawkins, "Fads and Faith," *New Era*, October 1971, 15. The First Presidency Statement on Dress, *Priesthood Bulletin*, June 1971, cited in "Q&A: Questions and Answers," *New Era*, December 1974, 10-13.

62. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *For the Strength of Youth*, 2001, <http://www.lds.org/youthresources/pdf/ForStrengYouth36550.pdf> (accessed in December 2008).

63. Alice Buehner, "The Communicational Function of Wearing

Apparel for Lady Missionaries for the LDS Church” (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982), 2.

64. *Ibid.*, 2, 5–6.

65. The assumption that women would not be employed outside the home and the further assumption of traditional family dynamics and power structures reflect a middle-class LDS demographic. A new emphasis on professional dress for female missionaries also showed signs of a desire for middle-class acceptance of the gospel message. According to Kristine Haglund, “Issues of modesty and adornment are class issues. Our language betrays us on this point: a well-dressed woman is ‘classy,’ a too-scantly or brightly clad woman is called ‘cheap.’ Our Mormon notions of modesty derive not just from sexual protectiveness, but also from the vestigial aspirations to respectability and inclusion in polite society left over from the early days of the church, from being regarded as barbaric (in both senses of the word—primitive and strange, outlandish). <http://www.bycommonconsent.com/2008/04/modesty-and-adornment-spring-fashion-issues/#more-1885> (accessed April 2008).

66. Buehner, “The Communicational Function of Wearing Apparel,” 5–6.

67. *Ibid.*, 6.

68. *Ibid.*, 7, 10.

69. *Ibid.*, 15.

70. *Ibid.*, 40.

71. *Ibid.*, 41.

72. *Ibid.*, 5.

73. Susan W. Olsen, *Personal Development Program* (pamphlet), (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Publications, 1981), quoted in Buehner, “The Communicational Function . . .,” 18. Buehner quotes this pamphlet completely in her thesis. The class was eventually discontinued, and subsequent dress and grooming guidelines for sister missionaries were less explicit, instead suggesting what clothing to bring and what they could not wear. For example, a later pamphlet, *Clothing for Sister Missionaries*, 1994, LDS Church Library, in a section titled “Maintaining Your Appearance” states: “You will represent the Church best when you dress simply and attractively, taking care to always look your best. You can do this by keeping: Your face, hair, and hands clean and neatly groomed; Your shoes, handbag, and belt clean, polished, and in good repair; Your hems, buttons, and linings sewed securely in place.” In 1995, the Church published a similar guideline for elders.

74. Personnel Department, *Style of Our Own: The Church Employee Look* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980), LDS Church Library.

75. "The Mini Skirts," 16.

76. This list is not inclusive but highlights several "modest" clothing companies: <http://www.shadeclothing.com/>, <http://www.layersclothing.com/>, <http://www.modbeclothing.com/>, <http://www.Modestprom.com>, <http://www.divinemodestee.com/>, <http://www.modestbydesign.com>, <http://www.mikarose.com/>, <http://www.shabbyapple.com/>, <http://www.latterdaybride.com>; <http://www.ldsbridal.com>; <http://www.beautifullymodest.com>; <http://www.modestswimm.com>, www.LimeRicki.com, and <http://www.kneeshorts.com> (all accessed in July 2008).

77. "FYI," *New Era*, March 1976, 45.

78. Janet Thomas, "Deep in the Heart," *New Era*, July 1987, 28.

79. Joy Saunders Lundberg, "The Strapless Dress," *New Era*, September 1990, 44–46; Judith Rasband, "Dress for Celebrating," *New Era*, September 1990, 47.

80. The Church magazines have highlighted several of the more impressive efforts of LDS women to promote modesty in their communities. See, for example, in the *New Era*: Nikki Miner, "Dressed Up!" May 2003, 45 (a report of a Young Women's project in Saratoga California Stake); Caroline H. Benzley, "Evaluate Your Style," January 2002, 28 (Young Women in Red Bridge Ward, Kansas, met with local department stores to lobby for more modest attire); "Of All Things: Copycat Designers," March 2002, 41 (a department store fashion show in Rancho Cucamonga, California); and Lisa M. G. Crockett, "High Fashion," June 2001, 26, (Young Women in Slidell, Louisiana); and Naomi Frandsen, "News of the Church," *Ensign*, January 2003, 75 (a fourteen-stake fashion show in southern California). My home ward's Young Women (Union Park Third Ward, Midvale, Utah) put on a fashion show in the spring of 2003 for the ward. "Modest, Style-Conscious, and Frustrated No More," *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 2002, describes the 900-attendee fashion show as follows: "On Saturday, Nordstrom in Costa Mesa's South Coast Plaza will host a sold-out fashion show featuring 33 Mormon teenage girls from Southern California wearing stylish dresses with not a spaghetti strap in sight."

81. Shade Clothing touts itself as "the first company to infuse modesty into today's hottest fashion trends." <http://www.newsweek.com/> (accessed in December 2008). In November 2008, I was surprised to see Shade Clothing T-shirts at my local Costco in Virginia.

82. See, for example, <http://www.purefashion.com/> (accessed in December 2008); "Girls Gone Mild(er)," *Newsweek*, July 23, 2007; and "Girls Gone Mild: Teenagers Try on Modesty," March 13, 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/23596656/> (accessed in December 2008).

83. According to its website, "Pure Fashion has continued the momen-

tum by growing into an international faith-based program that encourages teen girls to live, act, and dress in accordance with their dignity as children of God. Pure Fashion focuses on guiding young women ages 14 to 18 to become confident, competent leaders who live the virtues of modesty and purity in their schools and communities. Through an eight month Model Training Program that covers public speaking, manners and social graces, hair and make up artistry, personal presentation, and much more, Pure Fashion models learn the importance of living a life in accordance with God's will and fostering a life of grace through purity of heart, mind, and body. The Pure Fashion program culminates in a city-wide fashion show featuring clothing that is pretty but not provocative, trendy but still tasteful." <http://www.purefashion.com/about/media> (accessed in December 2008).

84. I placed those who did not explicitly answer the question in the "undecided" category. Several women made the distinction that the standards hadn't changed but either the interpretation or practice has. Others felt that they had just become a little more specific. Many women cite changes in standards from their own experience, including one who wrote: "Yes, I think dress standards have changed. When I was a teenager in SLC, we all wore sleeveless dresses. They might have been tight and short" but people could still tell the difference between a 'good' and 'bad' girl." Modesty Survey, #32, age 65, Anchorage, Alaska.

85. July 2003 Modesty Email Survey, #6, age 27, Lantana, Florida.

86. Only a handful of women felt that modesty was a means for the male hierarchy to control women; the overwhelming majority felt that it was important for women (and men) to be modest.

87. Interestingly, many people expressed regret and frustration that the Church had gotten more casual in Sunday dress standards. People were either very happy or very upset that women no longer always wore skirts in the chapel and while visiting teaching. Other examples of casualness included not wearing nylons and closed-toed shoes, and the preponderance of jean skirts and flip-flops on Sunday. All cited a decrease in feminine dress. Some said the standards had gotten stricter over time; others felt they had been relaxed. Others differentiated between practice and principle, reasoning that although the principle of modesty has not changed, its expression has. A good number of women wrote, "Obviously, the standards have changed," or "obviously, they have not." I find this difference very interesting, especially based on the wide range of responses, from "the church has no standards" and "I model nude for my University's Art Department and feel that modesty is not connected to dress" to "we must wear skirts below the kneecap" and "BYU's standards apply to the whole church" or "one must always dress, even in childhood,

so that one would be able to wear the garment.” It appears to me that some believe modesty is not an obvious standard but one that is interpreted by individuals.

88. Modesty Survey, #51, age 24, New York City.

89. Modesty Survey, #80, age 33, Alexandria, Va. Respondent #199, age 71, Salt Lake City, emphasized that modest dress is “a preparation for the time when young people go through the temple and will be wearing temple garments.”

90. Modesty Survey, #66, age 33, Centerville, Utah.

91. Modesty Survey, #104, age 44, Fremont, California.

92. Modesty Survey, #93, age 28, Eagle-Vail, Colorado.

93. Modesty Survey, #365, age 26, Palo Alto, California.

94. Modesty Survey, #142, age 40 years old, New York City.

95. Modesty Survey, #74, age 25, Provo, Utah.

96. Modesty Survey #106, age 35, Florida. Echoing a T-shirt sold in 2003 in the BYU Bookstore, one woman wrote, “Remember the motto: Modest is Hottest!” Modesty Survey, #494, age 49, Emmett, Idaho. Not all of the respondents were intent on deemphasizing the body.

97. Modesty Survey, #387, age 37, Lake Havasu City, Arizona; emphasis hers.

98. Modesty Survey, #281, age 68, no residence given. The woman shared a story to demonstrate more casual Church standards. “One weekday afternoon as a young mother I had driven ten miles to attend a stake Relief Society chorus practice. When I found that the women were practicing in the chapel, not the Relief Society room, I drove to a nearby shopping center to buy a long skirt, so I could change out of pants and not violate the sanctity of the chapel. Now neither I nor others would worry about slacks anywhere in the Church building. If we have inactive members or friends who want to attend Sunday services but don’t have a skirt or dress, I would invite the woman to come and feel comfortable wearing nice slacks.” Although modesty seems to mean different things to different people, very few seemed to feel that modesty of dress was *not* an important virtue. A recent *Ensign* article by Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve cites a myriad of reasons that women should dress modestly and appropriately, noting that too casual clothing is not “modest” either. Robert D. Hales, “Modesty: Reverence for the Lord,” *Ensign*, August 2008, 34–39.