University of North Carolina Asheville
Journal of Undergraduate Research
Asheville, North Carolina
May 2015

"The Answer to Laundry in Outer Space": The Rise and Fall of the Paper Dress in 1960s American Fashion

Virginia Knight
History
The University of North Carolina Asheville
One University Heights
Asheville, North Carolina 28804 USA

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Daniel Pierce

Abstract

In 1966, the American Scott Paper Company created a marketing campaign where customers could send in money to receive a dress made of a cellulose material called "Dura-Weave." What began as a way to sell more products became a defining trend of American fashion in the late 1960s. The paper dress created a market for paper clothing while simultaneously capitalizing on broader social issues. The advent of paper clothing was directly related to the rise in consumer and disposability culture, and as Americans looked to space as "the last frontier," paper clothing seemed a feasible solution to laundry on the moon. Paper clothing also acted as a vehicle for artistic expression, best seen in the Pop Art movement. Despite projections that paper clothing would come to dominate the fashion industry, the paper dress was all but obsolete by the end of 1968. Paper clothing and the enthusiasm surrounding this style was an indicator not only of the American mindset in the late 1960s but of American projections for the future.

1. Body of Paper

A woman stands in front of a mirror in a dressing room, a sales assistant by her side. The sales assistant, with arms full of clothing and a tape measure around her neck, beams at the woman, who is looking at her reflection with a confused stare. The woman is wearing what from the front appears to be a normal, knee-length floral dress. However, the mirror behind her reveals that the "dress" is actually a flimsy sheet of paper that is taped onto the woman and leaves her back-half exposed. The caption reads: "So these are the disposable paper dresses I've been reading about?" This newspaper cartoon pokes fun at one of the most defining fashion trends in American history: the paper dress of the late 1960s.[1]

In 1966, the American Scott Paper Company created a marketing campaign where customers sent in a coupon and shipping money to receive a dress made of a cellulose material called "Dura-Weave." The coupon came with paper towels, and what began as a way to market Scott's paper products became a unique trend of American fashion in the late 1960s. The paper dress created a market for paper clothing while simultaneously capitalizing on broader social issues. The advent of paper clothing was directly related to the rise of consumer and disposability culture, and as Americans looked to space as "the last frontier," paper clothing seemed a feasible solution to laundry on the moon. By 1969, however, the enthusiasm for paper clothing was all but forgotten. Paper clothing and the enthusiasm surrounding this style was an indicator not only of the American mindset in the late 1960s but of American projections for the future.

There are a limited number of secondary sources specifically about paper clothing in the 1960s. Paper dresses are usually mentioned as a "fad" of late 1960s fashion within larger fashion histories, and in-depth analysis of the paper dress is slim. This thesis will include sources that cover a variety of topics in order to examine the significance of the paper dress from multiple perspectives and to see how, in turn, the paper dress influenced different areas of 1960s culture.

The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960s is the broadest secondary source used. Topics in this essay collection cover everything from Civil Rights and the Vietnam War to sixties culture and science and technology. This source serves as a reference point for situating many arguments within the context of 1960s culture.[2] *The Conquest of Cool* focuses on business culture, counterculture, and the rise of "hip consumerism." This work provides context for advertising/production culture in the 1960s.[3]

"Toward a Throw-Away Culture: Consumer, 'Style Obsolescence,' and Cultural Theory in the 1950s and 1960s" is an article written by Nigel Whiteley for *Oxford Art Journal.* This article traces the concept of "style obsolescence" back to post-World War II America and discusses how the system of obsolescence continued and changed in the 1960s. This article will be used to supplement the background information on 1960s fashion.[4]

The importance of art in the 1960s, especially Pop Art, had major consequences for the popularity of the paper dress. *Pop!: Design, Culture, Fashion, 1956-1976* traces the rise of pop art and explores the impact of music and art on design and fashion. A large section on "Pop" fashion in the 1960s illustrates the close the link between pop art and fashion design.[5] *Pop Art and the Contest Over American Culture* discusses the relationship between pop art and mass culture. This work provides information on the relationship between pop art and the paper dress as a medium for pop art expression.[6]

Several of the sources focus on women and women's issues of the 1960s. *Material Women, 1750-1950: Consuming Desires and Collecting Practices* is a collection of essays centered around the idea of consumption as a gendered social practice. This source supplements arguments relating to women and the consumption of disposable/paper goods—not just limited to paper clothing—in the 1960s.[7] *Impossible to Hold: Women and Culture in the 1960s* is a collection of essays focusing on the experiences of specific women across a variety of fields. "The 'Astronautrix' and the 'Magnificent Male,'" by Margaret Weitekamp, touches on women's relationship with one of the biggest topics of the 1960s: space travel. The paper dress was often advertised as "the answer to laundry in space," and this source helps draw connections between space travel and paper fashion.[8]

In the 1960s, TWA airlines began using paper dresses as a stewardess uniform. *The Jet Sex: Airline Stewardesses and the Making of an American Icon* explores how multiple forces, including business strategies, advertising, and sexuality, cultivated an image of the stewardess that reflected America's vision of itself. This source not only provides historical background on the role of the stewardess in American culture, but also helps explain the significance of the TWA's decision to use paper clothing as the "clothing" of choice for stewardesses in 1968.[9]

The most specific group of sources deals directly with the fashion of the 1960s. *Fifty Years of Fashion: New Look to Now* covers fashion history from 1950-1990.[10] Chapter Three, "Youthquake: The 1960s," supplies general background information on 1960s fashion, pre-paper dress. *Sixties Fashion: From Less is More to Youthquake* focuses only on the fashion of the 1960s. This source provides more detail on the foundations of 1960s fashion and how radically fashion changed from the 1950s to the 1960s.[11]

The collection of essays in *Dress and Popular Culture* aims to provide an understanding of how clothing functions in a culture. Alexandra Palmer's essay "Paper Clothes: Not Just a Fad" examines what the popularity of paper clothing said about the post-war generation, and how the paper dress united art, fashion, and entertainment.[12] *Ready to Tear: Paper Fashions of the 1960s*, by Jonathan Walford, is the only book that focuses exclusively on the paper dress. However, this book is incredibly short, and the majority of the information is in other, broader sources relating to 1960s fashion.[13] Several theses about paper clothing have been written by university students, however, these were not accessible due to copyright restrictions.

This thesis will combine many of these different perspectives on 1960s culture into an analysis of the paper dress. The popularity of the paper dress was directly related to many of the themes present in these sources, such as space travel, the rise of disposability culture, pop art, and the women's liberation movement. In addition, this work draws on a wide variety of primary sources to provide an in-depth analysis of the initial response to the paper dress. This thesis will put these topics and sources in conversation with each other and demonstrate how the paper dress was more than just a fad: it was symptomatic and indicative of both the hopes and fears of Americans in the late 1960s.

The paper dress and the popularity it received built on the foundation of early 1960s fashion. The sixties was a period of complete upheaval, politically and socially, and is often described as the most "revolutionary" decade in contemporary fashion history. For three centuries, women's fashions had been almost solely the invention of Parisian couturiers. By 1962, however, the haute couture tradition was in jeopardy and Paris' monopoly over fashion was dwindling.[14]

One of the most important fashion changes in the 1960s was the prevalence of the mini skirt. 1966 was the year the mini skirt truly "took off" in the fashion world. The general consensus was that a true mini rose to mid-thigh level, but there seemed to be no end to how high the hem would go. One San Francisco designer told *Time* Magazine in December 1967 that "There is the micromini, the micro-micro, the 'Oh My God,' and the 'Hello, Officer'."[15] The

introduction of the paper dress in 1966, the same year as the "arrival" of the mini skirt, meant that almost all paper dresses were designed in the popular "mini" style.

The mini was not popular because it was flattering or because it attracted male attention. Rather, it was a way of rebelling against protocol. As part of the 1960s social revolution, the mini became a symbol of change in fashion that dismantled the old establishment. It suppressed prudery and brought power to a new generation of young stylists who were plugged into the here-and-now tastes of youth. Young, modern women wanted to look striking, sexy, vibrant and wild, and they wanted their clothes to be carefree, unbinding, colorful, kooky, liberating, and revealing. The combination of the paper dress and mini skirt—both a new material and a new length—encapsulated everything the modern woman wanted.[16]

The paper dress began as an advertising gimmick promoted by the Scott Paper Company. In 1966, an article in *Time* titled "Paper Capers" boldly proclaimed "gone are laundry bills and cleaner's bills." "Available next week throughout the U.S. for the easily disposed of price of $1 will be Scott Paper Co.'s easily disposable paper dress." Made of a flexible triple-ply, fire-resistant paper reinforced with rayon scrim, the dress was a sleeveless shift with two pockets and came in four sizes and a choice of design—"gay bandanna print or eye-arresting op." This dress was good for four or five wears, depending on the "clemency of the weather, and the intensity of the wearer's frug (a type of dance move popular in the 1960s)." With the paper dress, a needle and thread were no longer needed to make alternations. Now, scissors could be used to shorten the hem and lower the neckline, and in the case of rips, tape provided instant repair.[17]

Though the paper dress was a novelty, paper clothing was not a new concept. Work garments made of paper were popular, and Pan American World Airways planes carried cartons of "attractive" paper aprons which matched the hostesses' light-blue uniforms. Chains of beauty shops bought paper gowns by the thousands—pink with white piping—for customers to wear in salons. These gowns were manufactured by Zimmon & Co., a California firm specializing in disposable items: paper coats for laboratory works, paper gowns for food processors, and paper shoe covers to prevent tracking dust and dirt into hospital operating rooms.[18]

Harold Zimmon, president of the firm, was confident that "Within a decade, any industrial firm with jobs that soil clothing will be using disposable smocks or coveralls." This abundance of paper clothing was made possible by two large paper companies, Scott and Kimberly Clark. Each company "perfected" reinforced materials, with a thin netting of rayon or nylon sandwiched between layers of specially processed paper, which "look, feel, and wear much like cloth." The materials, before being made into dresses and other appeal, could be treated to make them fire-retardant, water- and abrasion resistant, or even luminous, as in jackets for highway workers.[19]

Doctors and hospitals were already using disposable paper garments ranging from jackets and examination gowns to surgical drape sheets. The economics were simple: a throw-away examination gown costing 25 cents took the place of a cloth gown with a typical laundering charge of 35 cents. One gynecologist in private practice reported that paper gowns had other advantages besides savings: they came in a compact box of 50, were easily stored, and involved no problems with stains, tears, or missing ties. Most importantly, patients liked having a gown that had never been used before.[20]

With these clear advantages, paper fabric began to be used in other areas. Two firms brought out disposable academic caps and gowns made of paper. Men's swim trunks, made from synthetic fibers bonded into paper-like sheets, were soon available on the market: Du Pont developed the material for book bindings and wall coverings, then tried it successfully on swimsuits. Good for several wearings, motels bought paper swimsuits at $8.50 to $9.50 a dozen, then sold or gave them away to customers. One wearer of the paper trunks reported that "I have used them: they stand up remarkably well and look much better than you'd think."[21]

The consumer demand for paper products was not solely dependent on cost. Facial tissues, one of the most "fabulously successful" disposables of all time, did not save money, but offered convenience and sanitation. Paper napkins were not as economical as the old system of individual cloth napkins. In an article in *Reader's Digest,* author Don Wharton used the example of vacuum-cleaner bags: "For years, housewives laboriously emptied the vacuum-cleaner dust bags; when the handy throw-away bag came along, they adopted it enthusiastically without a thought to increased cost." A similar trend could be seen with disposable diapers. These had been available for some time, but used ones were difficult to dispose of. The newest type could be flushed down the toilet, and sales in test markets increased tenfold. Convenience, not economy, was the driving factor responsible for the success of many of these products.[22]

Though the demand for paper clothing was on the rise, the technology needed for production was not yet available. In his article "How Soon Will We Wear Paper Clothes?", Wharton was skeptical that there would be a major expansion into everyday paper clothing until "there is a significant breakthrough in fabrication." In 1966, it cost as much to have a garment worker sew on ten-cents-a-yard paper fabric as on ten-dollars-a-yard silk. The opportunity for profit from paper dresses, Wharton speculated, would perhaps drive companies to seek a solution, such as

"machines which die-cut and heat-seal dozens of garments in a single operation." Wharton predicted that "The time may not be far off when we will regularly be buying inexpensive paper garments, in cartons of a dozen or so, at the local supermarket."[23]

Disposable products were a fixture of the 1960s consumer market, but the novelty of the paper dress quickly gained the attention of popular magazines and media. An article by Helen Carlton ran in *Life* Magazine in November 1966, proclaiming that "The Wastebasket Dress Has Arrived." In the words of Carlton, "The women's apparel industry, after years of coping with crackle, droop, and flame, has now brought paper out of the laboratory and put it onto the backs of fashionable ladies." The cost of paper dresses ranged all the way from $1.39 for a beach shirt to a thousand-dollar paper ball gown. These ball-gowns were created by fashion designer Tzaims Luksus for a museum's fund-raising ball and became part of its permanent collection.[24]

At the commercial level, prices varied depending on the style, but on the whole were attuned to the short life of the dress—for an inexpensive dress, about six or seven wears. Carlton wrote that "They are soft and comfortable to the touch, may be pressed with a cool iron, and are reasonably sturdy." Perhaps as a warning, Carlton mentioned that "A shoulder-strap did give way on one of the museum ball gowns but was quickly repaired with Scotch tape."[25]

One of the chief attractions of the paper dress was that from a distance, it did not look like paper—more like a cotton fabric. The "paperlike characteristics" were visible only under close scrutiny. Kaycel, the paper fabric produced by Kimberly-Stevens, had a slightly bumpy surface "resembling paper toweling, though its next-of-kin is actually Kleenex." The nylon, pressed inside the cellulose wadding, gave the paper dress two qualities essential to wearability: strength and "drapability," the ability to hang like cloth. Paper dresses had a flame retardant finish, which meant the dress would char but not flare up if a lighted match was held to the paper. However, since the retardant tended to come off in water, it was "advisable to throw away a dress that has been rained on or pushed into a pool."[26]

Those who had been singing the praises of paper apparel for years were looking towards a boundless future. "Five years from now 75% of the nation will be wearing disposable clothing," said Ronald Bard, vice president of Mars Manufacturing Company in Asheville. Mars sold over 300,000 paper garments between June and November of 1966, and a New York department store which carried paper dresses was swamped with orders—including one from a lady who cabled from London asking for two styles to be air expressed immediately. Bard planned to expand the firm's line from dresses to include football jerseys, uniforms for service personnel, graduation gowns, children's wear, and undershorts (three for $1) for the traveling salesman. In the words of Bard: "In paper, you are only limited by your imagination."[27]

That very imagination was the source of many new proposed uses for paper clothing. Julian Tomchin, a textile designer, became fascinated with paper when he printed some for the Hartford Museum's Paper Ball. "It's right for our age," he said, "After all, who is going to do laundry in space?" Carlton gave emphasis to this idea with the subheading of her article: "The answer to laundry in outer space." As Americans looked toward the "last frontier" of space, the paper dress seemed a natural fit for where future explorations might lead.

The paper dress, though not designed for longevity or durability, was a run-away hit with American women by late 1966, and the success continued into the next year. In August 1967, *Good Housekeeping* published "An Institute Report on Paper Clothing." The report opened with this preface: "We've been investigating nonwoven materials and garments for the past year in our Institute laboratories. We've worn them, torn them, stretched them—even washed them, though washing is of course not recommended. We've checked them for tear-strength, fiber content, colorfastness, construction. Here's what we've found."[28]

According to the report, paper clothes, when used according to directions, could be worn several times. The material would weaken, especially under the arms, after several wearings, and small rips might appear at the seams. Garments of spun-bonded polyester or ones reinforced with nylon scrim had greater tear-strength than clothes made of nonwoven materials of 100% rayon or cellulose without reinforcement. Colors resisted rubbing off, unless materials were wetted. Colorfastness to sunlight is "adequate for these short-lived clothes." Wetting the garments changed the texture of some of the fabrics. More importantly, it removed the fire-retardant finish and made the garments unsafe for wear. The report advised that "Care must be taken not to spill liquids on paper clothes; and unless they've been specially processed or coated with vinyl, never wear them out in the rain."[29]

The report included a section called "Why buy paper clothes?" and pointed out that "Aside from the sheer fun of it, paper has its practical side, too." Because prices were so reasonable for paper dresses, paper clothes added "variety to your wardrobe without straining your budget." Women's dresses, for example, cost as little as $1.50, $2 for a maternity dress, and full-length gowns sold for $4. Paper garments were also "ideal" for special-event occasions, such as graduations or birthday parties, "for which you might otherwise buy a more expensive outfit and only wear it a few times anyway." Paper clothing was practical for travel, as it took up less luggage space and required no laundering. Simple styles were perfect for chores at home, and alterations and repairs needed only

scissors and tape. The report offered "Because the clothes are inexpensive and short lived, you can be less conservative in your selection of color and pattern, choose something brighter and bolder than usual."[30]

Women were not the only group who benefited from the practicality of the paper dress. "Paper Dresses Ideal for Little Cutups" ran in *The New York Times* in January of 1967. "Little girls will soon be able to spill ice cream, draw pictures, and make cutouts on their clothes while their mothers smile benignly at their creativity." Just like the adult-sized versions, these dresses were meant to be worn several times (or less, for more destructive children) and thrown away. Designers marketed this as an advantage, as paper clothes could be taken on trips and then discarded, leaving room in the suitcase for souvenirs and "saving mothers the prospect of a big wash when they get home."[31]

Mothers were often the most vocal champions of paper clothing for children. Perri Wolfman was a dress designer for Mon Amie who complained that "My child is so messy…he stuffs food into his mouth with both hands and then wipes them on his clothes. I'm becoming obsessed with a way to keep him clean at parties." Although her child was a boy, as a designer of children's clothing Wolfman was concerned professionally with keeping little girls' clothes clean. She came up with a flowered paper smock that could protect a white party dress. Then she added a striped smock for additional protection. "The mother can take along both of them in case her child is a real slob," said Wolfman. The dress and two smocks were packaged together and sold for about $10. Concern for a child's appearance, which reflected directly on the mother, was a chief motivator for buying disposable clothing.[32]

Like the staff at *Good Housekeeping*, *Consumer Reports* ran a similar article after asking several women to examine and wear the paper dresses. This article had a more critical view of the uses for paper dresses. The dresses examined were found to be "rather sloppily made," had seams that easily opened at the ends, panels that were not well aligned, and patterns that did not match. One wearer, who wore a belt, put her finger through the dress when pulling the skirt down. Another found that her purse tore the dress rubbing against it as she walked. The printed color had a tendency to rub off if it got damp, but as the color was only on the outer layer of paper it would not stain a slip worn underneath.[33]

The paper dress was not strong enough to hold up to "rough" chores and tasks around the household. Also out were any tasks where water might spill on the dress, as the label warned that soaking the dress made the fabric "dangerously flammable" after it dried, which was confirmed by the textile laboratory at *Consumer Reports.* Reviewers argued that paper dresses were not a great solution for travel either, as they wrinkled easily when sat on. One wear-tester suggested that the "Paper Caper" might be all right as a substitute garment in case a guest got caught in a soaking rain, but not for much else.[34]

Despite some of the more critical views of paper clothing, sales were only positive. "The paper dress is here to stay, and so is the jump suit, the maternity dress, children's wear, and even bathing suits made of paper," proclaimed an article in *The New York Times* in December of 1966, titled "Paper Dresses Show Increase in Sales." Ronald Bard, vice president of sales at Mars Manufacturing Company of Asheville, N.C., reported that his company, at this point, had sold 500,000 paper dresses in the six months previous. Bard anticipated selling close to one million units in the next half-year. For a dress that could only be worn five or six times, these high sales were all the more impressive.[35]

Paper dresses found an unlikely foothold with airlines, as non-woven fabrics became a popular material for stewardess outfits. In March of 1968, TWA Airlines announced the "end of routine air travel" with the launch of their "Foreign Accent" flights. The flights came in four styles with hostesses dressed to match: Italian (toga), French (gold mini), Old English (wench), and Manhattan Penthouse (hostess pajamas). Not only were these costumes over the top—they were made out of paper. TWA catered their ads to the consumer who was "as bored with routine flying as we think you are." If seeing these paper costumes made a traveler long for one of their own, they were available to order for $6.95.[36]

In the TWA ads, the stewardesses wearing the paper uniforms were spread out on the floor and looked ready to go on a date—or to stay home in bed (especially the stewardess with the "hostess pajamas"). In her book *The Jet Sex*, author Vicki Vantoch wrote "On these theme flights, stewardesses were outfitted in disposable paper uniforms, which ripped easily."[37] The implication here seems to be that the fragile nature of the paper dress, which might tear and reveal a glimpse of female skin, was the reason TWA decided to clothe its female employees in these paper uniforms. Not only was this a strategy for tapping into current popular culture, but as the old adage goes: "sex sells."

The debate over whether paper fashion was on its way to permanence within the fashion industry or just a fad had strong support on either side. A conference of the American Apparel Manufacturers Association in May of 1967 turned up many enthusiastic backers. Thomas H. Hall, Jr., product director of the Non-Woven Fabrics Division of Chicopee Mills, Inc., commented that "This morning, many of you may feel that the disposable dress is a fad, a hula hoop. Well, if it is…it's the world's biggest…When this short-term interest subsides and premium offers expire we believe we will see a strong new industry emerge." Oliver J. Sterling Jr., president of James Sterling Paper Fashion, predicted that "By 1980…disposable clothing in dollar volume will amount to at least 25% of the apparel industry."[38]

However, many doubted the longevity of the paper dress. Elisa Daggs, a fashion designer, pointed out that: "The market's been impossible. A shortage of the best type of paper came in January…We couldn't fill spring orders. The stores lived through a period of horror. It's a miracle anyone survived." One critic commented that: "The whole thing's premature. The product's not good enough yet. People are buying not because it's cheap, not because it's disposable, but because it's a new material. It's high fashion." At this time, the industry was still waiting for the technology to bring down prices. The material was as expensive as conventional fabrics, and production required the same cutting and stitching as regular garments.[39]

Many involved with design and marketing aspects of paper fashion felt that the industry was not fully capitalizing on paper apparel's unusual appeal. According to William Guggenheim III, owner of a New York boutique that sold nothing but paper fashion: "The lack of imagination has been appalling. All the unique features of paper are being neglected. Manufacturers are using it as if it were fabric." Because the disposable apparel idea was still so new and experimental, the industry itself was split over how to best produce and market paper clothing. One camp included the manufacturers who hailed the material as ideal for low-cost mass production. The other camp included the designers who saw the new material as a medium for high fashion. Oliver Sterling described the two approaches as follows: "The first I call the grind 'em out like sausages theory…The second theory I call the attractiveness theory…I happen to believe that both these theories are correct if applied to the right markets." Sterling had two companies, one built around each theory.[40]

While many in fashion predicted that paper clothing would be a permanent addition to clothing options, those on the business side could not see paper clothing sticking around.

An article titled "Who's Afraid of the Paper Dress?" contained commentary from people at a local textile market on the paper dress. Elaine Lynn of Chemstrand said: "I have very strong feelings. I think paper apparel is great for airport dispensers but I've seen paper dresses on women at parties and after three hours THEY look like THEY are disposable. In our jet age it has a place. In our chic age it'd be great for wallflowers." Herman Sonnabend was reported as saying "I don't think any woman who wants to be hugged by a man will wear it. I think it has a place but it's a gimmick. The kids will wear it. I could be wrong, but I don't think I have to go into the paper business yet."[41]

The majority of people in the manufacturing business seemed to be cautious at best. Stuart Levin of M. Lowenstein & Sons was concerned that "It's a revolutionary thing in our business and I don't think we understand what the ramifications will be yet. They could be monumental." Henry Baker kept his response vague with "It opens an avenue of great importance in certain fields and I think that is all I'd like to say at this point." Rem Burbank of Klopman Mills seemed to sum up the general feeling with his statement: "It certainly has caused a lot of notoriety and is something to be watched with interest."

Design and materials were not the only problems that faced the new industry. Manufacturers still fumbled around trying to decide how to market what might or might not be just another fad. Stanley Love was vice president of Joseph Love, Inc., a manufacturer of children's clothing which was, at the time, involved in the paper apparel business. Love emphasized that "Marking is terribly important. You can't handle it like ready-to-wear. There's no markdown because it's non-seasonal. It belongs in boutique centers and in department stores in a separate category."[42]

Department stores found that paper fashion sold best in a boutique on the street floor. Stern Bros. and Abraham & Straus were among the first to handle them this way in New York. Stern's vice president Lawrence Stone offered: "It's been very successful and means a lot of dollars." The retailers who did get behind paper fashions were most often little boutiques. In Chicago, the Paper Caper sold $5,600 worth of paper fashion in its first month of operation. Its neighbor, the Fig Leaf, reported selling 50 to 60 paper dresses a day.[43]

Once the popularity of the paper dress was cemented, designers and retailers looked for new ways to market paper clothing. One of these new enterprises was The Wastepaper Basket Boutique at New York's Abraham & Straus, where styles ranged from long silver "foil" shifts ($9) to paint-your-own paper dresses ($2 with paint set). Also opening at this time in Manhattan: a shop called Paperworks which not only outfitted "Him" with paper bathrobes and barbecue aprons and "Her" with hostess skirts and blouses, but decorated the entire house with paper curtains, tablecloths, and bed linens.[44]

The concept for Paperworks was created by industrial designers Inman Cook and Daren Pierce, who employed full-time designers at their store to dream up new patterns. Dresses in the store were patterned with giant squares, African and Indian motifs, red cherries, and stylized pink snowflakes. In the words of Pierce, "You can have a lot of gay colors, but you don't have to live with them forever." In addition, Paperworks drew on the talents of "paper couturier" Elisa Daggs, whose stripped caftans ($4.50) and baby pinafores were made of Kleenex pressed onto a nylon scrim. Daggs elaborated on her design process by saying "Paper needs a new architecture…it doesn't stabilize on you like cloth."[45]

In-Dispensable Disposables, a New York boutique dedicated to disposable fashions, opened in June of 1967. The shop carried virtually everything done in disposable fashion up until that point, from sun-glasses to a red, gingham-checked evening dress by Anne Pakradooni priced at $150. There were laminated raincoats, dresses, hats, and children's things, mainly in the $3.50 to $15 price range. A company called Insight created transparent shift dresses with patterns printed in paint that glowed in the dark (about $15). Metallic looking jewelry, designed by James Allen Reid, was actually made of lightweight paper. William Guggenheim III, who opened the shop, was quoted as saying "I believe implicitly that disposables are here to stay."[46]

Paper clothing appealed primarily to women who wanted to try a new style without spending much money. But for the "throwaway enthusiast with plenty of cash," more expensive options were available. In her Beverly Hills boutique, Judith Brewer offered custom-cut "fur" coats of shredded white paper for $200. Other Brewer paper creations included a tennis dress with holes punched around the bottom, a flounced "baby dress," and a mid-calf-length gown with a filigreed overskirt. Famous for "papering" well known socialites, Brewer even dressed the Beatles in neon-orange paper jackets during a visit to Los Angles. "Paper is definitely here," said Brewer. In addition, Ronald Bard was quoted as saying "Within ten years, most of the world will go disposable."[47]

The attitude of nonchalance and frivolity projected by the paper dress made it a perfect centerpiece for society parties. In October of 1966, Judy Klemesrud published an article in *The New York Times* covering the Wadsworth Atheneum's Paper Dress Ball. This art museum ball was the traditional opener of Hartford, Connecticut's social season and was sponsored by the museum's women's committee for the benefit of the building fund. The committee raised $5,000 and the chairman of the ball, Mrs. B. Rush Field, described the ball as "the most glamourous we're ever had."[48]

Costumes at the ball included a paper pants suit covered with sequins, a dress that was "whipped up in 45 minutes" out of white bathroom tissue by T. M. Prentice, a Manhattan architect for his wife, and Rudi Gernreich's transparent plastic dress with paper decals pasted on in strategic places. James Elliott, director of the museum, wore an orange and gold paper cummerbund that matched his wife's gown. He clarified that the paper ball theme was chosen because of the current interest in paper dresses and because the museum's first charity ball in 1936 had a paper theme at which the decorations were made of newsprint. "We like to combine tradition with innovation here," Mr. Elliot said.[49]

Mrs. Rebekah Harkness, philanthropist and art patron, wore a red, white, and blue paper gown designed by Tzaims Luksus. Wearing a black, gray, and white Luksus gown was Mrs. Robert Scull, a former model. At the museum's request, Luksus designed six dresses for the ball, and said he tried to match the dresses to the women's personalities. Other designers asked by the museum to create paper ballgowns were Elisa Daggs, Judith Brewer, Margot West, and Gene Neil. Many of the dresses they designed were donated to the museum's costume collection. One man interviewed said he was wearing paper underwear to "get in the spirit of things."[50]

Another dinner party themed around paper fashion was reported on by *The Wall Street Journal* in October of 1966. Clarence Newman opened his coverage of Mrs. Leon Meltzer's paper dinner party with the following:

> You're a bachelor, and you're invited to Mrs. Leon Meltzer's big dinner dance in Philadelphia Saturday night. You're to escort a lady you have never met. You're to meet her at the party. "I'll be wearing a floor-length gown with a green, white, and black paisley design," she tells you. "I'll be easy to spot." Don't go. For all 100 ladies at the affair will be wearing floor-length gowns with green, white, and black paisley designs. What's more, the gowns are made of that new wonder fabric: Paper.[51]

Mrs. Meltzer sent all the A-line dresses to her guests that week. She did it, she said, because she was intrigued by the idea of a party where all the women were dressed alike. "The function could prove a field day for sociologists," wrote Newman, "but it points out something else as well: paper clothes, talked of hopefully for some years by the paper people, are here."[52]

The paper dress' contribution to American design was recognized by the United States Information Agency in 1966. Robert Bayer, vice president at Mars Manufacturing Co., was asked to donate a variety of paper products to a United States Exhibition representing "excellent American Industrial Design." This exhibit traveled to Kiev, Moscow, and Leningrad in the USSR and to West Berlin, Germany, as part of the U.S. Exhibition in the German Industries fair. The paper items donated included: a silver foil dress, a ruffle sleeve dress, several floor length dresses, A-line shift dresses, and hostess and full aprons.[53]

In 1968, Mars Manufacturing Company received Honorable Mention in the 1968 Bobbin Magazine Prize Paper Contest for their paper dresses. In response to the award, Robert T. Bayer, vice president of Mars Manufacturing Co., penned an article for *Methods & Technology* titled "The Exploding World of Disposable Apparel." Bayer opened with the following:

> We are in reality just entering upon the borders, so to speak, of the genuine Paper Age. In a few short years, in our paper shirts and paper trousers, we shall sit down to our paper table upon our paper chairs, drink our coffee out of paper cups, and eat our eggs with paper spoons. When we go out in the morning, we shall make ready our paper shoes, paper overcoat, paper gloves, paper umbrella, or paper cane, and paper hat, kiss the baby in its paper pinafore, trip lightly down the paper stairway, to our paper carriage, and start down town, stopping at the club for an "eye-opener" out of a paper wine cup, and then continue our noiseless ride over the paper pavement, stopping once more possibly to order the latest paper novelty for our better half.[54]

This quote, however, was not written by Bayer—it was taken from an issue of Paper Trade Journal from January of 1885. Bayer used this quote to highlight the fact that the dream of a "paper world" was not a new one. More than 80 years later, Bayer seemed happy to report that "much of the above prediction is a reality."[55]

A fascination with and embrace of disposable objects was nothing new. However, the resurgence of disposables prompted satirical examination. In Anne Chamberlin's article "The Paper Caper," written for *Post* magazine, Chamberlin wryly opined "With gift wrapping the fine art it is in this country, it was only a question of time before they'd start packaging the people." Chamberlin argued that "Using things for something other than what they were built for—like planting nasturtiums in a rowboat—is what keeps America strong. We're not the kind of country to sit around using paper just to write letters or line drawers with, when with a dash of plastic, chemicals, rubber, glass, or fiber it can be used to build fences, chairs, milk bottles, fur coats, or bathing suits."[56]

With this penchant for using objects not as intended, paper gave Americans a rare chance to "pull ahead" of the French. "We may have lagged behind for years in *haute couture,* but our new crew of throwaway designers has been able to start from scratch," wrote Chamberlin. Chamberlin continued her analysis by stating that "The rush to paper has started an outpouring of self-diagnosis which has almost taken people's minds off Vietnam." A vice president of Kimberly-Clark was reported as saying it shows that "people no longer have a guilt complex about throwing things away."

The chairman of the department of sociology at the New School for Social Research in New York took the opposite approach, arguing that "the older notion of the future in terms of God and home is gone. Without a future or for that matter a past, emphasis is on the present—a more instantaneous present. The result is narcissism…Today the kick is paper dresses. Tomorrow, and that may be ten minutes from now, it may be something else." Chamberlin concluded her article by noting that: "They [companies] are even developing 'third generation' non-wovens which can be washed and dry-cleaned, but once you start *that* they won't be disposable any more, and we'd be right back where we were. And nobody wants to go *there.*"[57]

The rise in disposable objects was a concern for some groups. The Tennessee Valley Authority Division of Forestry Development addressed paper clothing in their Progress Report for April-June 1967. The report opened with the mention of Mars Manufacturing Co. and Mars' "Wastebasket Boutique" line of paper dresses. "This is not a forest industry, of course, and the paper from which the dresses are fashioned is not a Valley product, but Wastebasket Boutique does typify a whole new host of disposable paper products which will increase the demand for pulpwood and the need for more productive forests." At the publication of this report, production of paper garments totaled 100,000 pieces a week. The Mars company line included an A-line shift, jumpsuit, floor-length sleeveless dress, maternity dress, tent dress, and several children's dresses. Prices ranged from $1.25 to $5.[58]

The report observed that disposable fashions filled a variety of consumer desires. Vacationers were the biggest users, as they enjoyed the ease and convenience of throw-away clothes. Travelers could ship wardrobes ahead and carry only a few paper dresses in a small travel case. Most users of paper clothing claimed they got six to twelve wearings from a garment. Wrinkles and creases could be smoothed out with a cool iron. Motels and hotels often stocked paper clothing, and the Defense Department tested paper shorts for American troops in Vietnam. Bayer reported that Mars had, at the time, put paper apparel into 80 percent of the nation's department stores. Overseas shipments went to South Africa, most European countries, Australia, Canada, Mexico, Japan, and Israel. Inquiries were also coming in from several "Iron Curtain countries."[59]

The TVA recognized that "Paper garments appear to be here to stay and the Valley has a pioneer in the rapidly developing field." Mars officials were sure there was a place for "disposable clothes at disposable prices." The industrial-institutional uniform market, which had barely been tapped, had the potential to become the mainstay of the industry. Men's vests, shorts, and swim trunks were on the way. Sheets and pillow cases, curtains, draperies, and tablecloths were all feasible. The TVA report wryly concluded with "In the past, most new disposable articles have led to new litter problems. Hopefully, the wearers of disposable garments will be discreet enough to forego public disposal."[60]

Despite the many kinds of paper clothing available, people continued to come up with creative suggestions. A man wrote in to Kimberly-Stevens Corp. to ask where he could buy a paper business suit so that he could use the cuffs for jotting down notes. "A tongue-in-cheek suggestion, perhaps," said President Claiborn M. Carr Jr. of Kimberly-Stevens Corp., "but it shows that we have all kinds of people thinking about all kinds of uses for our products." A company fashion consultant added: "What seemed to be a gag is now serious business." A U.S. Department of Commerce survey in 1967 reported that the market for disposable, nonwoven (a euphemism for paper) products was growing by 15% to 20% a year. Other sources reported that sales of disposables for hospitals and physicians in the form of sheets, pillow cases, surgical gowns and masks were already at $125 million and could more than double by 1970. [61]

The versatility and popularity of paper clothing created the perfect medium for artistic expression. Ready-to-wear posters were the "new thing in nonchalance—for a party, for the beach or for that matter any time when the point is not to take it all too seriously." These "Poster Dresses," as they were called, were made from a disposable "paper" fabric, tough and soft-surfaced, with oversized photographs front and back. Poster Dresses were the invention of Harry Gordon, an American graphic artist living in England. Gordon wanted to treat paper as paper, instead of pretending that it was cloth. The dresses cost $3 each and offered several motifs to choose from: a cat, a rose and eye, a rocket, or an enormous hand making the "peace" sign. As a bonus, the hand dress had a poem by Allen Ginsberg printed on it.[62]

By 1968, the paper dress craze was already beginning to cool. Although these garments were never intended to last more than a few wearings, there seemed to be disappointment from buyers when this turned out to be true. In addition, paper suggested easy access, "like gift-wrap on a parcel." Many women who wore paper dresses to parties recalled incidents of "accidental" drink spills and tugs on hemlines to see how tear proof the material really was. Paper dresses could bring unwanted attention, and the growing women's movement in the late 1960s was supporting more sexually equalizing styles.[63]

Along with the women's movement, there was the "hippie" movement, which, with its back to nature viewpoint and strong anti-pollution message, was effectively changing public perceptions on the subject of a "disposable society." The Disposables Association held a seminar in 1971 to address the shift in public opinion. One of the concerns was to change the name of the organization, as "The word 'disposable' itself can be a red flag to the youth culture, because of the widespread concern with the problem of solid wastes." What had been associated with modernism was now considered wasteful.[64]

When the paper dress first became available to the American consumer, some observers predicted it would dominate fashion market for years to come. Prominent fashion experts were certain that paper would replace cloth as the preferred material for clothing. However, by 1969 the paper dress—and the general infatuation with paper clothing—was out of style and out of mind. Though the 1980s and 1990s would see a resurgence of "paper clothing," disposable apparel has never reached the success it once had in the 1960s. The paper dress remains iconic for its ability to be in style with current fashion with simultaneously capturing the essence of American culture in the 1960s.

2. References

1 Robert and Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Folder BAY011. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

2 David R. Faber and Beth L. Bailey, *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960s*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

3 Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

4 Nigel Whiteley, "Toward a Throw-Away Culture: Consumerism, 'Style Obsolescence' and Cultural Theory in the 1950s and 1960s." *Oxford Art Journal* 10, no. 2 (1987). http://www.jstor.org/stable/1360444

5 Geoffrey Rayner, *Pop!: Design, Culture, Fashion, 1956-1976.* Suffolk: ACC Editions, 2012.

6 Sara Doris, *Pop Art and the Contest over American Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

7 Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Material Women: 1750-1950: Consuming Desires and Collecting Practices.* Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009.

8 Avital H. Bloch and Lauri Umansky, *Impossible to Hold: Women and Culture in the1960s.* New York: New York University Press, 2005.

9 Vicki Vantoch, *The Jet Sex: Airline Stewardesses and the Making of an American Icon.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.

10 Valerie Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion: New Look to Now, New* Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

11 Jonathan Walford, *Sixties Fashion: From Less is More to Youthquake*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2013.

12 Patricia A. Cunningham and Susan Voso Lab, eds, *Dress and Popular Culture.* Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991.

13 Jonathan Walford, *Ready to Tear: Paper Fashions of the 60s.* Canada: Kickshaw Productions, 2007.

14 Jonathan Walford, *Sixties Fashion: From Less is More to Youthquake* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2013), 6.

15 Walford, *Sixties Fashion,* 73.

16 Walford, *Sixties Fashion,* 73.

17 "Fashion: Paper Capers," *Time*, March 18, 1966. Robert and Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Scrapbook. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

18 Don Wharton, "How Soon Will We Wear Paper Clothes?" *Reader's Digest*, August 1966. Robert and Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Scrapbook. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

19 Wharton, "How Soon Will We Wear Paper Clothing?", *Reader's Digest*, 1966.

20 Wharton, "How Soon Will We Wear Paper Clothing?", *Reader's Digest*, 1966.

21 Wharton, "How Soon Will We Wear Paper Clothing?", *Reader's Digest*, 1966.

22 Wharton, "How Soon Will We Wear Paper Clothing?", *Reader's Digest*, 1966.

23 Wharton, "How Soon Will We Wear Paper Clothing?", *Reader's Digest*, 1966.

24 Helen Carlton, "The Wastebasket Dress Has Arrived," *Life*, November 25, 1966.

25 Carlton, "The Wastebasket Dress Has Arrived," *Life,* 1966.

26 Carlton, "The Wastebasket Dress Has Arrived," *Life,* 1966.

27 Carlton, "The Wastebasket Dress Has Arrived," *Life,* 1966.

28 "An Institute Report on Paper Clothing," *Good Housekeeping,* August 1967. Robert and Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Scrapbook. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

29 "An Institute Report on Paper Clothing," *Good Housekeeping*, 1967.

30 "An Institute Report on Paper Clothing," *Good Housekeeping*, 1967.

31 Bernadine Murris, "Paper Dresses Ideal for Little Cutups," *The New York Times,* January 7, 1967. Robert and Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Folder BAY002. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

32 Murris, "Paper Dresses Ideal for Little Cutups," 1967.

33 "The Paper Dress Caper," *Consumer Reports,* September 1966. Robert and Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Scrapbook. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

34 "The Paper Dress Caper," *Consumer Reports,* 1966.

35 "Paper Dresses Show Increase in Sales," *The New York Times,* December 4, 1966. Robert and Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Folder BAY002. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

36 TWA advertisements, 1968, Robert and Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Folder BAY011. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

37 Vicki Vantoch, *The Jet Sex: Airline Stewardesses and the Making of an American Icon.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, 180.

38 "Now It's the Little Paper Dress," *Business Week,* July 22, 1967. Robert and Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Scrapbook. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

39 "Now It's the Little Paper Dress," *Business Week,* 1967.

40 "Now It's the Little Paper Dress," *Business Week,* 1967.

41 Donna Kepner, "Who's Afraid of the Paper Dress?" *California Apparel News,* March 3, 1967. Robert & Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Folder BAY005. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

42 "Now It's the Little Paper Dress," *Business Week,* 1967.

43 "Now It's the Little Paper Dress," *Business Week,* 1967.

44 “Papered Over,” *Newsweek,* October 31, 1966.

45 “Papered Over,” *Newsweek,* 1966.

46 Angela Taylor, “An East Side Boutique Dedicated to Disposability,” *The New York Times,* June 10, 1967. Robert and Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Folder BAY002. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

47 “Papered Over,” *Newsweek,* 1966.

48 Judy Klemesrud, “But Will Paper Dresses Pass the Test of Time?” *The New York Times,* October 24, 1966. Robert and Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Folder BAY002. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

49 Klemesrud, “But Will Paper Dresses Past the Test of Time?” *The New York Times,* 1966.

50 Klemesrud, “But Will Paper Dresses Past the Test of Time?” *The New York Times,* 1966.

51 Clarence Newman, “Wrap Her in Paper: Cheap, New Frocks Are Hit With Women,” *The Wall Street Journal,* October 4, 1966. Robert and Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Folder BAY002. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

52 Newman, “Wrap Her in Paper,” *The Wall Street Journal,* 1966.

53 George R. Bridges, letter to Robert Bayer, October 10, 1966. Robert & Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Folder BAY017. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

54 Robert T. Bayer, “The Exploding World of Disposable Paper Apparel,” *Methods & Technology,* April 1969. Robert & Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Folder BAY006. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

55 Bayer, “The Exploding World of Disposable Paper Apparel,” 1969.

56 Anne Chamberlin, “The Paper Caper,” *Post,* 1967. Robert & Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Scrapbook. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

57 Chamberlin, “The Paper Caper,” *Post,* 1967.

58 Progress Report for April-June 1967, Tennessee Valley Authority, Division of Forestry Development. Robert & Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Folder BAY006. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

59 Progress Report for April-June 1967, Tennessee Valley Authority, Division of Forestry Development.

60 Progress Report for April-June 1967, Tennessee Valley Authority, Division of Forestry Development.

61 “Wardrobes for the Wastebasket,” *Dunn’s Review,* June 1967. Robert & Audrey Bayer Paper Clothing Collection, OS2007.12.01, Scrapbook. Special Collections at Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina Asheville.

62 “Fashion: Put On Posters,” *Life,* April 5, 1968.

63 Walford, *Ready to Tear: Paper Fashions of the 60s,* 43.

64 Walford, *Ready to Tear: Paper Fashions of the 60s,* 44-45.