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HISTORIES

CHAPTER TWO

Remembering Respectability: Collective Memories of Working-Class Dress in Wartime Lancashire

Alison Slater

Figure 2.1. Working-Class Women in their Local Community, Hollinwood, Oldham, 1939, Unknown Photographer. Author's own photograph.

This chapter explores memories of working-class female dress during the Second World War. It draws from oral evidence gathered through interviews with nine women, aged between seven and twenty-two years old in 1939, who lived in the area to the north of Manchester, England, during the war.[1] The parameters of the study recognized that experiences of war and wartime dress varied according to social status and geographical location (Walford 2008). The interviewees were categorized as 'working class' if they (or their father or husband) worked in a lower class occupation and they lived in a working-class neighborhood.[2] Interviewees also self-defined their class status by opting to take part in a

[1] 'Oral evidence' refers to the interviewees' words, which were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim; my analysis contextualizes their oral evidence into oral history (following Lummis 1987). The ages of the interviewees were determined by the methodology which required women who were old enough to remember their wartime dress, and physically and mentally capable of being interviewed. The 1939 ages correlate with the start of the war, by 1945 the age range was thirteen to twenty-eight years. The grouping of 'women' recognizes that we meet these women as mature individuals recalling their younger selves. For other sources on oral histories of dress, see Lomas (2000), Taylor (2002), Biddle-Perry (2005), Slater (2014, 2020) and Atkin (2016 and in this volume).

[2] Occupations were categorized using the Registrar General's Social Classification, the principal system for socio-economic analysis for most of the twentieth century (Rose 1995). The term 'social group' is used for subsections of the working classes. For more about fashion and class, see Worth (2020).

study of working-class wartime dress (Roberts 1995: 6-7; Bourke 1994; Slater 2011).[3] Focusing on this geographical area, around the towns of Bolton and Oldham, situates the interviewees' recollections in a strong non-conformist religious tradition and in small, local communities where clothes played a significant role in the presentation of public identity.[4]

The chapter draws heavily upon oral evidence, which is informed by two types of memory. The first is autobiographical, which begins with first-hand experience and ends with "subjective remembering" (Tulving 1983: 11). William Brewer (1986) suggested that autobiographical memories take three forms: personal memory (including mental images of recollected experience), factual information about the self, and generic personal memory (including a general image of the past but not of a specific event).[5] Autobiographical memories provide the "basis for an individual's life story" (Paller, Voss, and Westernberg 2009: 187), that reflects both an "autonomous sense of self" and more generic recollections of "social conventions and relations" (Ross and Wang 2010: 403). Individual circumstances and the wider culture at the time of remembering affect how we access memories of the past and how important we deem them to be (Ross and Wang 2010). Personal recollections are "mediated" by cultural codes (Sangster 1994: 23). Therefore, in research that relies upon autobiographical memory, the role of culture and 'collective memory' must also be considered.

The social frameworks of collective memory, a concept developed in the 1920s by Maurice Halbwachs (1992), provide a scaffolding against which personal memories are framed.[6] When we think about the events of our past, including preparation for and

[3] Interviewees were recruited by newspaper advertisement, leaflet distribution and word-of-mouth. They are identified by initials to adhere to consent agreements and contextual information relevant to 1939-1945 is provided in footnotes. My initials (AS) reference any questions cited from the interviews.

[4] Non-conformists are protestant groups who have dissented from the Church of England. Many of the interviewees were Methodists, a movement founded by John and Charles Wesley in the eighteenth century. Non-conformist traditions informed an association between visible cleanliness and respectability that continued to impact the lives of my interviewees in the 1940s.

[5] See Çili in this volume for a more comprehensive discussion of autobiographical memory.

[6] See Coser (1992), Wertsch (2002, 2009), Olick (2008), and Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy (2011). As discussed in the Introduction to this volume, collective memory is one of several terms used to describe the social and cultural aspects of memory. Whilst the term is attributed to Halbwachs, a French philosopher and sociologist, his work was informed by and sits alongside work by others from history, philosophy, psychology, psychiatry, and sociology in the early twentieth century (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy 2011).

answering questions during an interview, we reflect upon it. Memories of childhood and adolescence, like those of my interviewees, are based on autobiographical recollections but are also informed and sometimes changed by subsequent experience.[7] This can include wider social and cultural references that are used to "orientate" our own recollections (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy 2011: 19; Lummis 1987; Ross and Wang 2010). Memory practices do not happen in a vacuum: belonging to different social groups influences what and how we remember. As Sue Campbell (2008: 42) explains: "we remember with and in response to other people" and sharing "shapes" memories. Memory is framed from the perspective of the present self but is influenced by the many experiences and voices that have spoken into an episode, from the time a memory was formed, to the time it is reported. The sharing of memory enables the survival of cultures and social practices from one generation to the next (Halbwachs 1992). Thus, shared memories reach "into the most minute and everyday details of our lives" (Connerton 1989: 2), including memories of dress.

Recollections of personal possessions are reported according to an individual's sense of self that "extends forwards and backwards in time" (Belk 1990: 674). This is particularly the case with clothing memories. As Julia Twigg (2013) explains "clothes anchor people's understandings of the past and measure the passage of time" (76) and recollections of dress connect "personal and historical time" (77). Collective memories of dress are found in this connection: where individual experiences of dress map onto shared experiences of belonging to different social groups, for example, a family, a group of friends, a school, a workplace, a local community. This chapter considers how this sense of social belonging impacted what was worn and what was reported as oral evidence. The study of women of a similar age, social circumstance, and geographical location assists this exploration of collective memory, particularly as it is framed within a specific period of history.

[7] What is reported as oral evidence is grounded in personal experience but can be influenced by multiple factors. Some memories remain largely the same from origin to reportage, others change over time (Bernstein and Loftus 2009; Paller, Voss, and Westerberg 2009). There is no pure access to the past either through memory or history (Kuhn 2002). Contextual research plays a key role in the interpretation and verification of memory and, as the chapters by Atkin and Webb in this volume discuss, the process of reflection that informs and accompanies the narration of memory is part of the creative act of human memorial practice.

Memories of Working-Class Wartime Dress

The Second World War was a unique period in modern British history,[8] when government restrictions dictated how many clothes were permitted and what the styles of these clothes should look like (Sladen 1995; Reynolds 1999; Walford 2008; Howell 2013; Summers 2015). Clothing rationing was introduced on 1 June 1941 and required everyone above the age of four to provide coupons for new items.[9] At first, sixty-six coupons a year were issued, this soon dropped to forty-eight, and by 1945, adults received thirty-six coupons a year (Wilson and Taylor 1989; Zweiniger-Bargielowska 2000). Whilst the scheme placed all citizens in a similar position, it was never intended to level social boundaries and dress continued to signify status.[10] Colin McDowell (1997) recognized the efforts of working-class women to keep "decently, let alone smartly, dressed" when their average 1940s wardrobe included "one of each item, except underwear, and lots of gaps … a little sentimental jewellery and, for decency, a hat" (39). When my interviewees were asked "did you have a lot of clothes during the war or not?," their responses emphasized the limited quantity of clothing owned:

> AW2: No, no, no we didn't.[11]

> DS: Oh not a lot, no, no, cos you couldn't get them.[12]

[8] Great Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939. Victory in Europe was declared on 8 May 1945 and over Japan on 15 August 1945. The official start and end dates are 1 September 1939, when Germany invaded Poland, to 2 September 1945, when Japan signed the formal declaration of surrender (Bartrop 2022).
[9] Oliver Lyttelton, President of the Board of Trade signed the order to introduce clothes rationing on 29 May 1941 with an embargo for publication until the 1 June to limit advance purchasing (Hansard, HC Debate, 10 June 1941, 373: 9-10). The order to end clothes rationing, signed by Harold Wilson, President of the Board of Trade, on 14 March 1949, took effect the next day (Hansard, HC Debate, 14 March 1949, 462: 1738-44). Examples from a 1941 list of the number of coupons required include: dress (non-wool): 7, wool skirt: 6, blouse: 4, sweater/cardigan: 8 (two ounces of knitting wool was 1 coupon), underwear: 1 or 2 per item, pair of shoes/sandals: 5 (*Daily Sketch*, 1941, 'New Official List of Coupons Needed for Clothing and Footwear,' 1 July: 4). Childrenswear required fewer coupons, but growing children needed more frequent clothing changes.
[10] See Calder (1969), Wilson and Taylor (1989), McNeil (1993), Kirkham (1996), Zweiniger-Bargielowska (2000), Howell (2013) and Worth (2020).
[11] AW2 (2009), interviewed by author, 17 February. Aged fifteen in 1939, AW2 worked in a factory office, then in a shop. She lived with her father (Royal Air Force driver), mother and two siblings in Rochdale. The identifier AW2 was used to differentiate her from another research participant and is retained here for consistency.
[12] DS (2009), interviewed by author, 29 October. Aged eighteen in 1939, DS lived with her father (postman), mother, and up to five siblings in Pendleton, Salford. She married in c.1942/3 and had three sons. At some point she was a florist.

AL: No [Laughs], no love: just enough to put on my back and wash![13]

HB: Not a lot no … I mean money was tight, you know?[14]

Clothes were generally considered "basic" (HB), "adequate" and "nothing outstanding" (AW2). The interviewees' wartime wardrobes tended to consist of: one or two dresses, a skirt and a blouse, a small number of homemade jumpers and cardigans, one coat, two or three changes of underwear and one, maybe two, pairs of shoes (Slater 2011).[15] One interviewee emphasized the minimal storage needed for her whole family's clothing:

JS: It sounds ridiculous but do you know that we didn't possess a wardrobe in our house! ... My mother in her bedroom had a very big old-fashioned chest of drawers … and our clothes had to be folded carefully and placed in these drawers, so you can tell we didn't have many.[16]

The limited quantity of clothing owned meant that frequent clothing changes, including practices considered necessary for hygiene today, were not always possible.

MF: Well you didn't used to change your knickers every day like we do now … You used to put one pair on and it used to have t'last all week … When you come to think how long you wore your knickers and things like that![17]

[13] AL (2009), interviewed by author, 16 January. Aged eleven in 1939, AL was a scholar then a shop seamstress, living with her father (bus driver) in Bolton. Her mother had died in April 1939.
[14] HB (2009), interviewed by author, 27 October. Aged nine in 1939, HB was a scholar living with her father (cotton mill worker, then factory worker), mother, and older brother in Oldham. During her childhood the family income was impacted when her father was out of work and then later injured in a workplace accident.
[15] The quantity of clothing reported accords with a 1941 survey, by Mass-Observation for the Advertising Service Guild, into early experiences of Clothes Rationing of 188 working-class women in Gloucester who had on average 2.88 dresses, 0.35 costumes (matching jacket and skirt), 1.00 skirts, 1.35 coats, 0.31 mackintoshes and 1.92 pairs of shoes. Researchers noted that "wardrobes were not checked on, and people had to remember them as they stood on the doorstep which must lead to incredible inaccuracy" (Change 1941: 13), although accuracy probably increased when fewer items were owned.
[16] JS (2009), interviewed by author, 19 February. Aged seven in 1939, JS was a scholar, attending grammar school on a scholarship from 1942. She lived in Chadderton, Oldham, with her father (laborer, then in the army), mother, and younger sister.
[17] MF (2009), interviewed by author, 29 October. Aged sixteen in 1939, MF worked in an aircraft factory. She lived with her aunt (cotton mill worker, then munitions worker) and uncle (coal miner) in Westhoughton, Bolton, and later lived with friends. She would visit her father who lived in Colne, Lancashire; her mother had died in 1934.

> MH: Underclothes … we changed every day but top clothes, no ... you just wore them … unless you spilt something on them – probably for two or three days and then you would put clean on.[18]

Cleanliness was important as clean clothes signified care in appearance. Garments were looked after to ensure they lasted as long as possible by folding or hanging them up after wearing, brushing to remove visible dirt and laundering (by hand) when needed. But it took considerable effort to maintain cleanliness with such a limited stock, as JS recalled:

> JS: With my school shirt – I only ever had one on the go at one time. My mother would wash them when I took them off a night and sit up until they dried and get up very early the next morning and iron them and she'd do that with knickers … she would have to keep on top of it like that.

Different levels of cleanliness were accepted depending on the type of garment and whether it could be washed; looking and feeling clean was what mattered most.

> DS: I never remember going down feeling – going out – feeling dirty, yet they weren't always spotless! [Laughs].

> JS: It sounds awful because my mother was immaculate and spotless clean and scrupulous about washing things but I think in some ways we put up with more dirt. I'm sure that's true, like in your coats and stuff.

Working-class wartime dress reflected economic circumstances, wartime restrictions, and a wider conservative attitude towards dress, particularly among those with less interest in fashion.

> MH: Clothes … [were] just something you had to have to keep warm I think in the winter and err as I say, partly because of my upbringing, I was just never very fashion conscious, as long as it was comfortable, serviceable … I think that was partly erm of the

[18] MH (2009), interviewed by author, 17 February. Aged seven in 1939, MH was a scholar, attending grammar school on a scholarship from 1942. She lived in Chadderton, Oldham, with her parents (green/grocers – her father was also a special constable), and older brother.

> war but also partly because of the attitude of mind and the fact that we couldn't afford a lot, but it would also have been considered rather frivolous.
>
> AW2: I suppose I wasn't you know erm how should I say it? Very aware of appearance, I always wanted to look right. I can't say fashionable, I wasn't a fashionable person, so I can only say that I wanted to look fairly smart enough without [being] over the top.

Whilst unnecessary frivolity was criticized for failing to fit the spirit of wartime (Rouse 1989; Ewing 1992; Breward 1995; Kirkham 1996), this was not a new concept among working-class families in Lancashire. A consideration towards appropriateness was evident in the interviewees' pre-war, wartime, and early post-war clothing.[19] Everyday clothing acquisitions were prioritized according to what was needed, how long it would last, and what was available; personal preferences often came last, much to the dismay of those who wanted more fashionable styles. Working-class women had "good clothes sense" (Kirkham 1996: 170) but dressing up tended to be reserved for best or special occasions.

Memories of Dressing Up

In the context of limited clothing and finances, it was initially surprising that the interviewees discussed prioritizing the acquisition of best clothes.[20] The geographical focus of my research enables the oral evidence to be considered alongside reports from the Mass-Observation (MO) study of Bolton as *Worktown* from 1938-1942. This comparison assists an understanding of why dressing up was so important. A 1941 MO study found that "poorer people … 'dress *up*' to go *out*" (Change 1941: 45 [original emphasis]), a "special Bolton smartness" was also noted (46).[21] This was also echoed in memory:

[19] MH evaluated that behaviors continued from earlier periods of economic depression as "a mixture of both" necessity and habit: her parents "would have never overspent because they'd seen what could happen."
[20] The best clothing discussed here was worn regularly rather than being special occasion wear for a particular event, with two exceptions: one examines the reuse of bridesmaid dress, the other how funeral clothes stood out in memory as rare example of new clothing.
[21] The survey noted the impact of religious tradition and geographical location on this practice: "the difference is a valid and significant one, and representative of a considerable area of Northern England, especially the area of strong Nonconformist influence" (Change 1941: 46).

> AW2: In public you would try a little harder to look smarter, at home you would wear old things really because again you didn't want to spoil the other things you were saving for going out.
>
> AC: It was important that you looked nice and went out on a Saturday night! [Laughs] … we made the best of what we could I suppose.[22]

Commentary from MO suggests that what some working-class people considered to be 'smart' did not reach middle-class standards of dress. Investigators were "impressed … with the tendency for people in the very raggiest and shabbiest of clothes" to say they valued smartness over comfort (Change 1941: 45). However, in earlier research, JS had explained that the public display of a respectable class identity also presented an important visual distinction from a lower social group:

> JS: [A dress of floral print or gingham] would be what 'respectable' children wore. I won't say what some wore, but that was respectable … mine were always beautifully washed and ironed, where other children went in dirty or smelly clothes ... we were very class conscious ... You belonged to one class or another. We belonged to the class that wore caps, but there was this other 'lower' class … I didn't mix with them.[23]

The visual difference between best and ordinary clothing was observed by Tom Harrisson, the lead researcher for MO: "Broadly, we found the whole of Worktown went up the social scale at the weekend … and the visible class distinctions of Tuesday become inextricably confused on Saturday afternoon. Weekend Worktown was a place superficially populated by well-to-do middle-classes – on an ordinary weekday, a city of wooden clogs, grimy faces and manual workers" (Harrisson 1942 cited in Highmore 2002: 104). Contemporary evidence supports that dressing up in their best attire was a regular means for working-class people to change their appearance, signify their respectability, and even visually defy their class status.

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[22] AC (2009), interviewed by author, 10 August. Aged 17 in 1939, AC was an office worker and lived with her parents (cotton mill workers) in Middleton Junction, Oldham. She married in 1945.

[23] JS (2007), interviewed by author, 31 May, as part of my MA Textiles (2005-2007). The lower social group referenced has been labelled "roughs" by some historians (Roberts 1984: 5, 1995; Ross 1985; Thompson 1992); they probably could not afford aspirational attitudes to public identity.

The oral evidence explains how such appearances were achieved. Many families would save up for an annual 'best' outfit, usually purchased in spring, with a seasonal winter addition if finances allowed. HB would get a new outfit for Whitsuntide (Whitsun).[24]

> HB: You kept them for Sunday best then, until the year after and then you got some more you see. [Laughs] … Up to leaving school that carried on and then you started work and you know, you think you've grown up then! [Laughs].

DS also got a new "Sunday" outfit once a year:

> DS: We wore a hat when we went to church, you didn't go about without a hat in those days. Don't take much notice of me, this is just what I remember! [Laughs] … For work … you wore erm well old clothes, you know. Err, and then your other clothes went down for work clothes.

MH clarified that her newest clothes tended to be reserved for church on Sundays for a period of time, but she didn't think of these as a 'Sunday best.'

> MH: Sunday – well not necessarily – certainly clean you see because in a way we didn't have Sunday best. Except when they were new then they were kept for Sunday certainly for a while or going out but mostly for Sunday because we didn't go out a lot otherwise.

In a discussion of what her mother wore, JS explained the recycling process where clothing that was once reserved for best was eventually relegated to ordinary daywear and at the end of its use, retained to wear for housework to prevent damage to newer items.

> JS: My mother, in the morning, she would put on a very simple cotton dress, now it might have been a best dress at one time, I don't know … and she would wear an apron

[24] Whitsuntide marks the Christian festival of Pentecost. In Lancashire, Catholic, Anglican and Non-Conformist churches would parade in different Whit Walks on different days in their local communities. Dressing in white, new, or best clothes for Whitsun dates back to the nineteenth century (for further discussion see Slater 2011).

> and this cotton dress ... or erm if it was winter she'd perhaps wear a kind of a tweed skirt and a blouse or something like that, but those were quite old and err poor looking, best way I can describe them. And she'd wear those until she'd finished her housework and then we would have our 'dinner' as we … called it in the middle of the day … then when … she'd washed up and cleared everything away she would go and have a good wash and change and these things that she wore in the morning ... she'd wear them to go to the shops but she wouldn't, not that she went to many other places ... I didn't realize 'til after the war that my mother would probably have loved to go to things at church but she wouldn't go because she didn't have smart enough clothes.[25] Erm so she didn't have much that she could change into, but she would change into a slightly better outfit for the afternoon … if we sent for the doctor, she'd change before the doctor came, she ... wouldn't be seen in these things.

This cycle of consumption, of having one best (or better) outfit assisted in the public presentation of a smart, respectable appearance and achieved a visibly better standard of dress than their circumstances might otherwise afford. The timing by many of a new outfit for Whitsun meant that this could be worn to parade the streets in Whit Walks: a moment where public appearances were particularly on show in the local community.

Occasions when working-class families knew a photograph would be taken were another time to dress up in best clothing. JS gave the example of wearing her best dress for an elementary school photograph, which ensured that the highest possible standard of appearance that could be achieved was presented on that day and preserved in the photograph in perpetuity.

> JS: I remember having a dress, I think it's on that photograph at school cos as I said it's funny, I think I've got my 'best' frock on because we always had a 'best frock', you know? That was important and the 'best frock' I can remember ... it was like err a silky

[25] Church activities were central in my interviewees' wartime social lives and "mapped key moments in community and family life" (Parker 2005: 217). For some this was about being part of local festivities (Chinn [1988] 2006), but for those with a Christian faith, including MH, a best outfit held fewer religious connotations. However, dressing up on Sundays was not linked to church attendance (Change 1941), and it was the local community rather than the Church that demanded new clothing at particular times (Bourke 1994; Tebbutt 1995; Parker 2005). JS's account of her mother wearing older clothes to go to local shops, probably covered with a coat, using better clothing for occasional trips to the cinema or beyond her local community, but having insufficient clothing for church events shows the complex social role of dress among this group.

> type of material … It was quite frilly and I thought I was the 'bee's knees' in that. I loved that!

JS's positive memory of this garment emphasized that she felt better about herself wearing that dress; the fabric and style stood out and was more memorable than her ordinary clothes. She was one of several interviewees who used the slang term 'the bee's knees' to describe the positive feeling of wearing a particular outfit.[26] Despite being uncommon today, the term was part of the interviewees' language at the time the memories discussed here were formed. Michael Adams (2009: 88) notes that the use of slang terms in everyday speech by young people is part of the "interlude" of youth, where they learn to fit into social structures and develop social identity towards adulthood. It is perhaps then significant that slang words used in the period being remembered also found their way back into an interviewee's vocabulary as they articulated their memories of adolescent dress.

Memories of Making Do

Starting work was memorable because of the challenge of sourcing appropriate clothing for the adult workplace after years of school uniform or children's wear.[27] AL left school on a

[26] Of US origin, dating from 1923, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as "the acme of excellence." See also Jenkinson in this volume whose interviewees used this term.

[27] The Education Act 1944 introduced the eleven-plus examination for all children in England. Working-class children who passed gained a scholarship to grammar school and those who did not pass went to Secondary Modern schools (Gillard [1998] 2018). Staying in school beyond the compulsory age of attendance (fourteen-years old from 1939-1946) usually required a girl's parent/s to value her extended education and be able to manage their finances sufficiently so that her potential wage was not essential towards the family income. For those at grammar school, including MH and JS, wearing their uniform outside of school hours and school days (even on holiday) was another way to address limited clothing and present a respectable status in public.

Friday around her fourteenth birthday in December 1941, and started work in a tailor's shop making bespoke ladies and men's suits the following Monday:

> AL: And what am I going to wear for my first day at work? Well, I've only got my gymslip and my school – and I'm not wearing those! My dad said 'Well you'll have to wear that lilac frock then. So … I had to wear a lilac taffeta bridesmaid dress, shortened, and a pair of silver shoes.[28]

In time, she utilized her developing sewing skills to make her old school uniform into a new skirt. The feeling of achievement was as memorable as her recalled anxiety of not having appropriate clothes to begin with.

> AL: My dad found me some white paint and I painted the shoes white. And then … being in the tailoring trade I'd learned a little bit about sewing ... I took my gymslip, I cut it off at the yoke and attached the belt to the top and it made a very nice pleated skirt … and I suppose I got a blouse from somewhere or knitted a jumper.

Although the remake was undated, AL's account shows that working-class women were using techniques associated with the government's 'Make Do and Mend' campaign in the early war years.[29] Most girls had been taught basic sewing and knitting at home and at school, which gave them the skills needed to make or alter garments to ensure their suitability for different occasions or to appear more fashionable (Slater 2010, 2011; Milcoy 2017). Recollections of regular and less creative mending and darning were more general, but these practices ensured that garments were serviceable for as long as possible.

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[28] Transcribed verbatim from recording. A gymslip is a sleeveless overgarment consisting of a "pleated skirt on a yoke," worn for school uniform in this period (Craik 2005: 152). AL explained that the lilac dress and shoes were acquired (probably gifted) when she was "previously … a bridesmaid at an old lady's wedding." Earlier discussions in this chapter around appropriate dress and the avoidance of unnecessary frivolity emphasize why this outfit was deemed inappropriate for work.

[29] What is now remembered as 'Make do and Mend' was launched by the British Government in June 1942, but by December 1942 it was still known as 'Mend and Make Do' with the advertising slogan "to save buying new" (Zweiniger-Bargielowska 2000: 120). The official 'Make Do and Mend' booklet, still available in reprint, was published in September 1943 to offer advice and technical guidance for clothing repair, maintenance, and methods of making new clothes from old items. The campaign has seen a resurgence in popular memory in line with ethical trends towards vintage fashion, recycling, and home craft. It features in almost all literature related to wartime dress, including Norman (2007), Howell (2013), and Summers (2015). For more about working-class experiences, see Slater (2010).

The interviewees all reported activities that were later promoted as part of Make Do and Mend, and are now culturally associated with the campaign, but did not discuss when the phrase entered their lives. It was the oldest interviewees who implied that official propaganda had a limited (if any) impact.

> DS: Oh I don't know anything about that … I do now but I didn't then … Well I think we probably did do some mending but I can't think of it as 'Make Do and Mend.'
>
> MC: I couldn't tell you … my mother would do it for us you see.[30]

Instead, a mentality of making do, including repairing clothes, was presented as a continued feature in the interviewees' memories of everyday life: from watching their mothers' mending in their early years; to helping with basic techniques in wartime; to taking over these responsibilities as they got older. The younger interviewees suggested that these practices continued long after the war:

> MH: I still think I have a bit of that attitude! [Laughs] It's ingrained!
>
> JS: My children say that's my motto 'Make Do and Mend' because I've still kept up with that in a way.
>
> AL: Oh I still 'Make Do and Mend' love, to be honest! Although now I can afford to buy clothes, but for many years after the war: if something got too tight, I let it out; if it got too short, lengthened it; the fashion made things shorter, I shortened them; for many years I made do, yeah.

The interviewees had at some point in their lives adopted the phrase 'Make Do and Mend,' and its popular memory meaning, as a catch-all term for generic memories of pre-war, wartime and post-war mending and making do.

[30] MC (2009), interviewed by author, 30 April. Aged 22 in 1939, MC lived in Chadderton, Oldham, and worked in a cotton mill, with her father (warehouse man), mother, and five siblings. Her only brother died on a Royal Navy submarine in October 1940. MC married in 1942 and had two children.

What making do meant in reality was most evident when the younger interviewees discussed their mother's clothing. Marriage changed working-class women's experiences. The majority gave up work, had children, and entered what Carl Chinn ([1988] 2006) termed "the hidden matriarchy" where they took on responsibility for household budgeting and gained a significant role in their local communities.[31] Working-class mothers were judged by their children's dress and public appearance. Their everyday decisions and actions were self-policed by a fear of becoming the subject of criticism and local gossip and, in the worst-case scenario, ostracization from their neighbors.[32] As JS explained:

> JS: Me mother wouldn't want me to wear anything that made me look what she would've called 'cheap' … anything that made me look common! … she was a bit of a snob in some ways, she would want my clothes to look as though they'd come from a quality place even if they hadn't! [Laughs] … As I say, I learnt two things very early on in life when I look back: one was that we were very poor and the second was that we didn't let anybody know and I think those two things dominated most of this that you've asked me.

The interviewees with older female relatives in their lives – mothers, grandmothers, aunts and even sisters – reported that these women had a significant impact on, and sometimes dictated, their experiences of dress. The impact of the lack of older female guidance in was emphasized by AL:

> AL: My father and I … we just sort of … I don't know: I had no mother to guide me. I have no brothers or sisters, so I had no guidelines … I didn't mix … very much with other girls … and mothers and things like that. I had to use my own common sense and initiative to be able to wear something that was reasonably suitable.

[31] The oral evidence supports Chinn's research from Birmingham, England, that despite the presumed patriarchal structures of society, the working-class family was dependent on the hard work and dedication of the working-class mother and her household management of limited financial and social resources.
[32] See Roberts (1984, 1995), Ross (1985), Alexander (1990), Davin (1996), Tebbutt (1995), and Chinn ([1988] 2006).

The two interviewees who married and became mothers during the war, DS and MC, had little recollection about their own clothing once they had children, probably because there were few new or memorable items. As MC explained when asked about clothing purchased after clothing rationing ended:

> MC: I had my family [by then], so I couldn't, so who come first? Children didn't they?

The absence of distinctive clothing memories once the older interviewees had children were explained by the younger interviewees who recalled their own mothers' clothing in their formative years. JS remembered her mother having new black clothes to attend her maternal grandmother's funeral.

> JS: I don't know how on earth she got it because she wouldn't have much money … I can remember her wearing the black dress for years and years after … it was unusual for me: unusual that my mother had new clothes – that was very unusual – but that she had black.
>
> AS: So you don't remember your mum having new clothes during the war?
>
> JS: I don't remember my mum – I've thought and thought and thought – 'did my mum ever go and buy herself anything during the war?' and really can't ever remember her buying new clothes. Again, she had a lot of 'pass-ons' and my grandma … was wonderful at jumble sales. [Laughs] … she didn't buy clothes for us from jumble sales, because I don't think there were many children's clothes in the jumble sales, but she used to buy clothes for my mother. My mother had to have an operation on her feet when she was older and I'm sure it was through wearing shoes that crippled her because … it didn't matter what size they were – if there were a pair of shoes, she'd have to wear them.

It is likely that her mother prioritized black clothes because of the fear of what other people might think if she did not achieve the appropriate image of a respectable daughter mourning for her mother.

During her interview, MH presented two snapshot photographs taken on holiday, the first dated towards the end of the war and the other a few years later (Figures 2.2 and

2.3). She had chosen these in preparation for her interview as visual evidence that her mother's clothing did not change for several years.


Figures 2.2 and 2.3. MH (left) with her mother, c. 1944 and MH (right) with her parents, c. 1945/6, Unknown Photographers © MH. Reproduced with permission.

> MH: Now I've put those two together because they're different ages – I've grown – but my mother is still wearing the same hat.
>
> AS: And the same skirt, and the same jacket as well?
>
> MH: I think it is. Now that might have been an effect of the war; you didn't discard things just because you fancied a new one.

Whilst having one outfit for many years may have been an impact of war, the oral evidence suggests it was more likely that MH's mother prioritized the clothing needs of her growing children and sacrificed new items for herself, instead making do with her existing clothing for a longer period of time.[33] Under the eyes of their local community, working-class mothers stage-managed their own and their family's public appearance to perform respectable identity that both denied and disguised their true circumstances, and demonstrated their abilities to cope in times of hardship. As a result, memories of dress suggest that working-class mothers played a more significant role in their daughters' public identity than the occupation of their father, which was traditionally used for social classification.

[33] AW2 emphasized that, while parents "did without" for their children, her mother would not have considered this a sacrifice but an act of love and care for her family.

Collective Remembering

The complex notion of respectability was demonstrated through appearance and behavior at the time of wearing and was also reflected in the oral evidence, where dress, class, gender, identity, family, and community "interweave and bind together a narrative" (Sandino 2007: 6). This narrative of self was told through a sense of belonging to a particular social group: to a community of women with something in common including, but not limited to, social class, economic circumstance, and geographical location. Autobiographical recollections were framed within the interview subject of wartime dress but presented to acknowledge the passage of time between then and now. Each interviewee recognized that she was both the same person in the past and the present, but like the world in around her, she was also different and changed. An acceptance of the potential fallibility of her own memory was also evident (Lummis 1987). Although there were variations depending on individual circumstances, a consistent desire towards respectability was shared by all interviewees. This shared sense of past implies a shared collective memory (Halbwachs 1992; Belk 1990; Misztal 2003; Wertsch 2009; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy 2011), a collective remembering of dress among this group, that overlaps and interweaves personal experience and social connections.

The first- and second-hand perspectives of mother and daughter expressed generational differences between individual and collective recollections. The age of the interviewees during the war means their memories of this time are within the "critical period" for early memory (between the ages of five and thirty years) where reminiscence bumps, points of heightened recollection, occur in both autobiographical and collective memories (Schuman and Corning 2014: 157).[34] Living through a significant historical event, such as the Second World War, means personal experiences can be presented through a

[34] See also Çili in this volume. In empirical research, Schuman and Corning (2014: 152) found: the "reminiscent bump for personal memories" was between five to sixteen years old; the bump for "national or world events" was between seventeen to twenty-four years old; and the "critical period" for early memory covered both age ranges from approximately five to thirty years of age (Schuman and Corning 2014: 157). The age ranges of my interviewees, from seven (the youngest in 1939) to twenty-eight (the eldest in 1945), map onto these findings. More recent research suggests that collective memory assists in the organization of autobiographical memories on a neurological level (Gagnepain et al. 2020).

"collectively conceptualized" narrative of the period (Schuman and Scott 1989: 377). The generational differences between the youngest interviewees (born in c.1930), who remembered their youth and their mothers' clothing, and the older interviewees (born in c.1920), who experienced the changes brought about by marriage and children, highlight an older group of women with the personal experience to reject the collective memories of their children's generation (Lummis 1987; Mills 2016), and a younger group, whose personal experience was to some extent protected and influenced by their parents' generation. The memories of dress from the older interviewees may be particularly salient because they come from within "late adolescence and early adulthood when adult identity is crystallizing" (Belk 1990: 673). This is considered a key time for the formation of generational collective memories (Schuman and Scott 1989; Belk 1990). Significantly, it was the older interviewees who were able to reject collective narratives of the period and the passage of time and changes in life stage – from daughter, to mother, to grandmother – enabled the younger interviewees particularly to look back on the role their mothers played in their formative years in new light.

Conclusion

While wartime dress was a point where autobiographical memories and collective memories of a significant world event coincided (Schuman and Corning 2014), the oral evidence suggests that personal circumstance is as important as age in framing personal memories and defining generational collective memories of dress. For example, the fact that leaving school to begin work meant a sudden change in clothes, reflecting a shift in both self-identity and visible appearance, provided a memorable marker at the start of the transitional journey from childhood to young adulthood. But mothers offered guidance and support for their daughters through this period of adult identity formation; it was the absence of AL's mother that made her memories of this change so stark. While the adult workplace was the beginning of a new social identity for working-class girls, it was getting

married and having their own children that most impacted the experiences and memories of dress among the older interviewees. Interestingly the older interviewees with first-hand experience were silent about this role and narratives of maternal roles were narrated second-hand in the younger interviewees' memories of their mothers.

For working class people, and other marginal groups, telling their own stories and sharing their memories is particularly important (Kuhn 2002). Research by Christina Buse and Julia Twigg (2016: 16) has shown that talking about clothes enables "storytelling at an embodied, material level" that is less impacted by impairments associated with ageing. The sense of self identity embodied in working-class memories of dress empowers those whose garments and experiences are under-represented in traditional methods of storage, histories, archives, and collections. Peter Stallybrass ([1993] 2012: 75) wrote that "in the transfer of [physical] clothes, identities are transferred," and a similar process happens when we share memories of dress. But memory also transfers "responsibilities" from past to present (Poole 2008: 149). My interviewees had responsibilities, as the last in their generation able to preserve oral accounts of working-class dress and social life of this period, to ensure the survival of their familial and communal memories for the future (Samuel and Thompson 1990). Since the time of my interviews in 2009, all but one of the interviewees that I remained in touch with have died. It is now my responsibility to honor their memories of working-class wartime dress which ended up, as Weber and Mitchell (2004: 4) predicted, "being about so much more." A story about working-class wartime dress in Lancashire becomes a story about social relationships within a family and local community. Where (primarily) working-class mothers drew upon traditional coping strategies to manage their family's dress and public appearance, and ensure their reputational survival, despite socio-economic circumstance and wartime austerity. It is no surprise that against this backdrop the feelings of dressing up or successfully achieving a desired look, often shared in the colloquialisms of their youth, were particularly memorable.

Epilogue

Just as the autobiographical and collective memories shape oral evidence, my own memories shape this interpretation. As Cheryl Buckley (1998: 167) acknowledged, writing about dressmaking in her own family, it is sometimes hard to separate ourselves from our research as we "partly share" the memories that we report. I was born in Oldham, Lancashire, in a lower-middle class family in the early 1980s, but my knowledge of this geographical area was shaped by the stories of my paternal grandmother, who died in 2009. Lillian was born in 1922 in Gatley, Cheshire, the eldest girl of seven children and moved to Oldham as a child. Her father was a cobbler and she worked in a munitions factory during the war. She married my grandfather in the early 1950s, and five years later they adopted my father. My research into working-class memories of northern dress is shaped around a general sense of working-class life in Lancashire in this period – an understanding that she imbued in me. An essence of the memories she shared with me has inevitably shaped what is presented here (Buckley 1998; Misztal 2003; Campbell 2008).

Three years after my grandmother Lillian's death, my father applied for his adoption records. In 2013, I discovered that my northern heritage comes solely from my adopted grandparents. My paternal birth grandmother Elsie, who died in 2021, was also working class and grew up with her mother and siblings in Bristol. Her parents' lives had been transformed by events of the First World War. They had four children together but never married and separated soon after Elsie and her twin brother were born. Until Elsie was reunited with her son in 2014, she told very few people about the baby she had and was made to give up for adoption in the late 1950s. Her silence about her past, part chosen, part enforced by others, offers stark evidence of the extent to which social attitudes towards public respectability underpinned all aspects of everyday life in the period of this research. Becoming pregnant before she was married set her on a hushed journey north to a mother and baby home in Cumbria and set in motion the events that would form my personal connection with this story. This collective memory of working-class dress is dedicated to both my paternal grandmothers and the role they each played in its creation.