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She Has Good Jeans: A History of Denim as Womenswear

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She Has Good Jeans:
A History of Denim as Womenswear

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Arts
of Bard College

by
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Table of Contents

Introduction ................................................................. 1
Chapter I: Domestic Denim ............................................. 7
Chapter II: Levi’s, but for Ladies .................................... 21
Chapter III: DIY Denim .................................................. 46
Conclusion ....................................................................... 78
Bibliography ................................................................. 84
Introduction

Half the world is wearing blue jeans at any given moment.¹ This percentage is made up of people of different genders, sexualities, social classes, religions, races, etc. Today, jeans can be worn by anyone; but this has not always been the case. The goal of this project is to explore how jeans, an overlooked garment by modern standards, came to be universally accepted as womenswear, from the 1880s to the 1980s.

Objects we encounter daily, such as jeans, construct our lives, but are often ignored. Jeans, and clothing more generally, convey intrinsic information about the wearer and serve as a reflection of the period and culture they exist in. In Object Lessons: Thinking about Material Culture, the author explains why everyday objects are often ignored: “we experience these material forms every day, the ways in which they convey ideas and influence our movements and lives does not usually register in our consciousness and often goes without notice.”²

Similarly to society's ignorance to jeans, scholarly writing has, for the most part, not given jeans and denim thorough attention either. For example, James Sullivans Jeans: A Cultural History of an American Icon focuses on the gold rush, and seems to jump to the designer and Japanese markets, mainly in the 1980s and then onto the present. In addition to Jeans presenting a large gap between the origin of jeans and their modern existence, the author writes the history through a masculine lens. In this book, women’s history is used anecdotally and unchronologically, as if not part of the history at all. For example, women’s designer jeans in the


1970s are mentioned on page 70, but 1950s Levi’s women’s Ranch Pants aren’t mentioned until page 120. Within the masculine history, he focuses on brands themselves rather than how products were received by the consumer; information is specifically lacking on non-traditional or unintended consumers. In this project, I focus on an unexplored perspective: the female consumer from the 1880s to the 1980s.

Despite the simplified histories of denim in the example mentioned previously, the material has an nondefinitive history. The accepted history relies on tradition rather than documented events. Denim, or as it was known serge de Nîmes, originated in Nîmes, France around the 16th century. The materiality was a heavy cotton and wool twill blend. Twill means that the fabric is woven from two different threads, the warp and the weft. On a loom the warp is vertical and the weft is horizontal. To make denim, the warp is dyed indigo and the weft is left undyed, so it remains a natural color. On the loom the indigo warp and the natural weft would cross to create the recognizable blue tone of denim.

Originaly denim and jean were two separate materials. Jean was a blend of cotton, wool and sometimes silk and the name was anglicized to jean after originally given a name relating to its origin of Genoa, Italy. According to the Oxford English Dictionary the term jean dates back to 1567. The two materials, jean and denim, created the same goods, so were used interchangeably.

Denim is most well known as sturdy workwear in the American West. In 1873, after being used as workwear material for decades, Jacob Davis, a tailor, and Levi Strauss, a fabric supplier, patented the process of strengthening trousers with rivets. These garments were called

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‘patent riveted overalls,’ as the rivets were placed on all pocket corners and at the cinch and base of the button fly.⁵ In “Blue Denim by the Bay” a brief history written by a Levi Strauss & Co. historian, Lynn Downey, she explains: “Strauss and Davis chose fabrics that working men were accustomed to wearing. Laborers had worn trousers made of denim and duck for many years it was the addition of the rivet that created the new category of workwear that is today called blue jean.”⁶ This new category of workwear was marketed towards male laborers.

Pants for women were not introduced into popular fashion until 1911, when French designer Paul Poiret debuted the garment. Prior to this, women in pants were considered inappropriate.⁷ Studies of denim marginalize women because their historic interactions with the material does not conform to the established masculine history. But women did use and wear denim, despite a lack of inclusion in scholarly histories.

This project begins at the point of convergence between women and denim through its use in the home. In the late nineteenth century, denim entered women’s lives through interior design. Denim’s popularity during the 1880s and 1890s is evident from the frequency it appeared in publications such as The Decorator and Furnisher. In September 1884 The Decorator and Furnisher published an article suggesting that denim fabric be used as a curtain. The recommendation for a denim curtain came only eleven years after jeans were patented by Levi


⁶ Downey, "Blue Denim," 153.

⁷ In nineteenth-century France wearing pants was illegal for women. Women could petition to wear pants, for occupational reasons and be granted permission de travestissement which was a cross-dressing permit valid for three to six months. (Anna Klumpke, Rosa Bonheur: The Artist's (Auto)biography (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), xxxi.)
Strauss & Co., in 1873. From denim’s first mention in 1884 and its regular reference until the end of the publication in 1897, *The Decorator and Furnisher* makes it clear that the material was a staple in the middle-class home. Women interacting with denim allowed for a smoother transition when women began wearing the material in later periods.

After use within the home, denim entered womenswear in the early twentieth century. In my second chapter I discuss how denim became an integral part of women’s wardrobe by 1940. First, I investigate wearing jeans out of necessity during World War I. In the 1910s there was a heightened demand for women to enter the workforce and they needed clothing to adapt to their new lifestyle, which often came in the form of denim. Following the introduction of garments, such as “freedom-alls” and “union-alls” for working women, jeans were adopted by the upper-class women on vacations to the American West.

The World Wars curtailed travel to Europe, so wealthy urbanites visited dude ranches instead. Dude ranches gained popularity through popular films, such as *Stagecoach* (1939), folk tales of outlaws and wild western shows, all of which promoted a cowboy uniform of jeans, boots and a Stetson hat. Despite these fashions not being contemporary with the setting of the movie, the 1880s, viewers emulated the western style for their leisurely trips to dude ranches. In order to be prepared for the rough-and-tumble lifestyle of the ranch women bought jeans, something unfamiliar from their more metropolitan wardrobe. Brands, like Levis caught on and by the 1930s issued the first women’s jeans. When transferred back to the east coast, women in the laid back garment were criticized for not dressing in traditional womenswear. In 1943 when

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female Wellesley College student gained publicity for wearing jeans, a local newspaper, *The Wellesley Townsman* deemed their look “unattractive and untidy.”

Despite adverse opinions, denim was becoming a staple in a modern woman's wardrobe. By the 1960s and 70s jeans were worn regardless of gender or class, although specific styles were associated with different subgroups. As a way to rebel against American materialism and conformity, women began to embellish their jeans as a means of self expression. Individuals who participated in 1960s counterculture movements published DIY books such as, *Native Funk & Flash* and *The Stitchery Idea Book*, in order to provide inspiration and instruction as to different modes of ornamentation for later generations. Brands caught on to this phenomenon and held promotions, such as the Levi’s Denim Art Contest or their “Crazy Legs” collaboration with the television program “Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In.” By the 1970s modes of advertising shifted to appeal to the counterculture demographic. Advertisements featured more psychedelic art, which was popular amongst counterculturists. Through later advertisements, the impact of 1960s women’s folk designs on the denim industry can be seen.

In the late 1970s counterculture began to fade and jeans were solidified as an American staple. By 1988 *Vogue* magazine first featured Levi’s on their cover. An influential American fashion magazine featuring jeans on the cover showed female consumers the universality of the garment, and how it was widely accepted.

In a 2014 documentary called “Blue Gold: American Jeans” notable denim designer Tommy Hilfiger states in an interview: “They never made real jeans for a woman until the mid to

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9 *Wellesley Townsman*, Thursday, March 25, 1943.
late ‘70s,’” this statement is untrue.10 In this project I clarify the historic interactions between women and denim resulting in jeans as an accepted part of womenswear.

Chapter I

Domestic Denim
The Use of Denim by Women in the Home During the Arts & Crafts Movement
In 1889 the use of denim for interior design exploded. Published in articles such as, “Blue Denim for Decorative Purposes”, and “Decorating an Unpretentious Home,” which appeared in The Decorator and Furnisher, a magazine for women which ran from the early 1880s to late 1890s. Prior to 1889, denim was first mentioned in September 1884 in only one article. The Decorator and Furnisher and other similar publications, such as McCall's Magazine and Godey's Lady's Book, influenced women on taking care of and decorating their homes. While denim began to appear regularly in late nineteenth-century home decor, denim clothing was made exclusively for men when introduced by Levi Strauss & Co. in 1873.

Women’s nineteenth-century use of denim within the home is often ignored in modern written histories on denim, such as James Sullivan’s 2006 book Jeans: A cultural History of an American Icon. This book focuses on denim as clothing, never mentioning denim in interior decorating. Yet, the home became a new site for denim in the late nineteenth century. Articles within the The Decorator and Furnisher advised readers to use denim material as home decoration, for sofa cushions, table covers, rugs and wall hangings. Through the presence in the home, denim became associated with women which represents a significant moment in the history of denim.

In the 1800s, women of all classes were often in charge of their domestic space, both in terms of care and appearance. In contrast, men took on jobs ranging from laborers to lawyers. The domestic responsibility women assumed made them the main consumers of household goods. To capitalize on this, new women’s publications started to appear in the later part of the century. Magazines informed contemporary women on fashionable housewares and how to best utilize them within the home. These publications designated women to take care of household
duties, reinforcing the idea that women should remain at home, as a consumer. Articles featured in *The Decorator and Furnisher* addressed middle to upper middle class female readers with pieces such as, “How to Furnish a Flat for $250,” which would be about $6,500 today. In recommending denim to be used by this demographic, the material was able to take on a new identity.

*The Decorator and Furnisher* initially advocated denim to its female readers for its cleanliness and durability. The materiality of denim allowed it to withstand cleanings without altering the state of its appearance. In addition to denim’s physical traits, the material could be used for upholstery, curtains, wallpaper and rugs. Denim upholstered chairs, couches and pillows. Wallpaper could cover the whole wall, sections of the wall and even the ceiling. Denim was also used as a floor covering. In “Articles of General Interest,” an article from 1897, the author provides different ways to use denim as a floor covering: “When left plain, [denim] it makes an excellent and durable all-over floor covering as a base for rugs, or for large rugs for floor centres. In the latter case the denim is usually bordered with a wide stripe of the same material, wrong side out.” Denim could either be used beneath a rug, or as a rug itself. A rug constructed of denim often had fringe at the side, as a regular rug would. As curtains or portieres, *The Decorator and Furnisher* suggested denim to function as a door between rooms.

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13 “Articles of General Interest,” *The Decorator and Furnisher* 29, No. 5 (Feb., 1897).

The material was heavy and durable, but not as solid as a door, so it created a more seamless flow between different spaces.

Denim was also used to add an element of comfort to a room. In “Cosy Corners,” an article from an 1894, The Decorator and Furnisher, suggested denim to create a cosy corner, a comfortable place for respite near a window. An image accompanying identified the cushion and window framing curtains as a light green printed denim (Figure I). Denim was plush enough to relax on while also providing piece of mind that it could withstand use without showing wear.

Portieres, similar to the curtains in the first illustration, were by far the most suggested use for denim. These furnishings were meant to be constantly interacted with, so denim was an ideal material to used because of the material’s durability and ability to be cleaned frequently. An illustrated prototype of a denim portiere appeared in “Decorative Novelties,” an article in The Decorator and Furnisher from 1891 (Figure II). The full curtain itself is light denim, which then had a small band of unbleached muslin attached. To accent the blue denim, blue Barbour thread was used to embroider a floral design on the muslin. The use of denim as the base of the curtain, to be accentuated by other materials and treatments, acknowledged the solidity of denim. The visual malleability of denim was referenced in its ability to transform through aestheticization seamlessly from a workwear material into a design element.

The Decorator and Furnisher established denim as a staple material for curtains by providing different ways to approach the material. “Portieres,” an article from the August 1889 issue of The Decorator and Furnisher described denim as, “a heavy cotton material, which until

16 “Decorative Novelties,” The Decorator and Furnisher 18, no.3 (June 1891): 109-112.
now has been relegated to the use of the farmer and workingman for overalls and blouses, is now coming to the fore as a suitable and effective material for portieres, curtains, and even in some cases it is used for upholstering furniture.”

The writers who suggested denim were well aware of its low class origins by referencing that it was normally worn by “farmers” and “workingmen.” The awareness The Decorator and Furnisher establishes in the connection denim had to the lower class is juxtaposed with the suggestion to use it within a middle class home. The mention of these two very separate facets of denim acknowledged a transition of the use and class associations of the fabric.

The Decorator and Furnisher encouraged denim both for its physical attributes and price. Denim was sold for very little because it was intended to be used for clothing by the working class, before it was recontextualized. Compared to an expensive fine material, like silk, denim could be acquired for much cheaper and therefore in greater amounts. An article called “Decorative Art” from November of 1891, noted that two yards of denim sold for seventy-five cents, which would be about thirty-eight cents per yard. This cheapness applied to both plain denim and denim used in furnishings, such as wallpaper. If the average roll of wallpaper was 10 yards long and each yard was about $0.38, then a roll of denim wallpaper would cost about $3.80. By contrast, silk could cost up to $2.00 per yard. At this price, a roll of silk wallpaper could cost around $20.00. So, if a room had 100 square feet to cover, it would require about 6


rolls; this means it would cost $22.80 to cover a room in denim wallpaper, compared to $120.00 for silk wallpaper.\footnote{20}

Denim was typically used because of its functionality, although it could be made to look more expensive. The available styles of denim expanded as it became increasingly popular. In 1889 only brown and blue denim were mentioned in *The Decorator and Furnisher* as possible colors.\footnote{21} By 1893 the color red became available.\footnote{22} By 1894 denim exploded with color such as green, yellow, gray and pink also introduced to the market.\footnote{23}

In addition to new colors, the effect of expensive wallpaper on a budget was achieved through printed denim wallpaper. Candace Wheeler, a prominent late nineteenth-century interior designer, was the first to experimented with denim. Wheeler published books such as, *Household Art* and *Principles of Home Decoration, with Practical Examples*. According to an article from *The Decorator and Furnisher* in 1895: “Lest some reader exclaims in dismay against the expense of such fittings, it may be well to state, in antithesis, that blue denim, the common blue-jeans now so much in vogue, were first used in decoration by Mrs. Candace Wheeler, the head of the Associated Artists Company.”\footnote{24} The Associated Artists, were a group of predominantly female artisans and designers who made housewares in addition to designing whole interiors. In 1882,
for example, they remodeled The White House for president Chester A. Arthur. The popularity of home decorating in the late nineteenth century spawned art movements which focused on the decorative arts. These movements gained a specifically female following because they highlighted women’s work. Women’s craft was traditionally understood as sewing, weaving and other work that was excluded from the fine arts sphere. The Arts and Crafts movement, which Candace Wheeler and the Associated Artists were involved, gave women a platform to display their work and experiment with new ideas, such as Wheeler’s pioneered use of denim.

Designers, such as the Associated Artists, worked to make denim as aesthetically pleasing as possible to properly assimilated into the home. In her book, *Household Art*, Wheeler insisted that the denim needed to aesthetically mesh with the rest of the home. In order to fulfill this proclaimed necessity, Wheeler experimented with printing on denim to make wallpaper. In the 1880s she began to use a process called “discharge printing.” This process involved using bleach to etch a white design on blue denim. She used this technique for her Carp Pattern, which depicted different sized Japanese fish overlapping waves and bubbles (Figure III). Over the years different decorative techniques for denim became popular; printing, embroidery and painting.

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Printing in general was a cheaper way to achieve a refined look. It allowed for a crisp pattern without the labor and uncertain outcome freehand painting or embroidery entailed.

Similar to the Carp Pattern wallpaper designed by Wheeler, printing on denim was discussed in *The Decorator and Furnisher* article “English Wall-paper” from July 1891. The author explained how the “discharge printing” process works, with which Wheeler began experimenting with denim in the 1880s. Denim was ideal for this technique because the denim stood up to the acid involved in the process, in a way that a more delicate material could not. Of the treatment and achievable designs the author wrote, “There are blue denims treated by a peculiar process, which, instead of printing on the color, simply takes it out, leaving the pattern in white on the blue.”

Rather than printing an image or pattern on top of the denim the acid striped the color away, leaving a negative space. This process shows how denim was elevated through visual transformation and its low class origins were recontextualized. In Wheeler’s Carp wallpaper, pairing denim with the exoticism of Japanese imagery, seen in the Carp Pattern, the previous associations with denim and labor were reimagined in favor of stronger, more aesthetically pleasing visuals.

Printing not only recontextualized denim by elevating the aesthetics of the material, but did so frugally. For example, the Associated Artist’s printed denim cost 75 cents per yard, whereas plain denim cost 30 cents per yard. The 45 cent difference between and printed and plain denim is not striking, especially considering how a printed design could positively transform a room. Printed denim fabric was mass produced by the Associated Artists, so an

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average middle class consumer could have achieved the effect of more expensive wallpaper in their home on a budget.

When used as wallpaper, denim could be used on its own or in combination with finer materials. *The Decorator and Furnisher* article “Denim for Decorative Purposes” provides multiple scenarios of using denim on the walls. The article first suggests covering a full wall of denim accented with a Japanese calico, a floral printed cotton fabric, frieze; if this material could not be acquired then a lighter denim could replace it. The article features a mock up of “Arabian” designs which could be printed on the denim (Figure IV). Along with the illustrated design the author writes about the accessibility of these fabrics, “These designs are available in any town where perforated patterns are made, as they can be enlarged to the desired size.”30 The assurance that this pattern is available everywhere means that it can be achievable through most means. The implementation of exotic Arabian inspired designs were used comparably to Japanese designs. By printing Arabian designs onto readily available denim, the decorator was able to achieve an sophisticated appearance on a budget.

Embroidery was a more do-it-yourself approach to denim, compared to pre-printed wallpaper. The durability of denim made it an ideal material to be embroidered. Embroidery is done by sewing patterns and designs atop fabric using threads. In addition to thread, elements such as beads could be added to cultivate a sense of dimensionality in the design. This technique was not new; people had been embroidering long before doing so on denim. For example, embroidery became popular in the eighteenth century as prominent figures, such as Louis XV, as well as members of the Catholic church commissioned clothing and decorative items to be

embroidered by professional, often male, artisans. At the time, needlework itself was seen as a handicraft, women’s work, which was outside of the realm of professional embroidery. Women employed their embroidery skills to beautify their homes.

Embroidery, women’s traditional handicraft, was recommended by *The Decorator and Furnisher* to be applied on denim throughout much of its fifteen-year run. In an article in *The Decorator and Furnisher* written by the Associated Artists, the group suggested different embroidery techniques for denim: “A variety of stem - stitch embroidery in linen, or applique or cut work, may be used in their ornamentation, or they may be left plain.” These techniques were echoed throughout the publication. Designs, such as *Asiatic* and Greek scroll border were suggested, but by far the most popular motif was flowers. The suggestions of flower embroidery ranged from flowers and leaves with cascading vines and flowers on small twigs and branches, to water lily leaves, buds and blossoms. Embroidery could also be combined with painting. Embroidery could be outlined in paint in order to highlight the embroidery as well as beautify and disguise the denim surface.

An elegant paint application softened the rough materiality of denim. One method, suggested in *The Decorator and Furnisher* purposed a stencil to apply paint to the frieze. This method is recommended in a section which responded to reader’s letters. The reader’s question regarded how to make a home into a “cosy cottage” while remaining on a budget. First, a brown denim frieze was suggested. A frieze is a small section of the top portion of the wall. The responder wrote: “It is quite easy to improvise a stencil, using simple geometrical figures for a

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32 Poole, “Associated Artists,” 17.
design; by means of this stencil and some gold paint you can work a pretty design on the frieze.”

Stencils could range in motifs from geometric to organic (Figure IV). The result of the stencil would be clean and symmetrical, possibly making the painted denim look like a print. A stenciled design would not cover the entirety of the denim, so it would not hide the materiality. Instead, denim would visually be elevated to that of a print.

A design could also be applied with a freehand approach. For this method the author suggested creating a “Japanese Style,” on a denim rug: “By way of decoration add a Japanese border of gold by simply painting the desired width in gold paint, or outlining the border in gold, and filling the space between the outlines with a design of fine, irregular lines.” Cohesion was created through the use of a stencil because it can be applied to different areas of the home. As an example, a stencil on a denim frieze could potentially match denim curtains. This technique would not mask denim but beautify it.

Gold paint was suggested for the stencil and freehanded applications because the strong color could transform the typical, working class associations denim had. Gold has an inherent richness, a richness which is not normally imagined in conjunction with blue denim. Gold evoked precious jewelry or fine china, reassociating the denim and placing it in a context of which gold and blue denim can coexist. By using the color gold atop the denim, the material appeared more sophisticated, and was made visually appropriate for the interior of a home.

Publications, such as The Decorator and Furnisher and predominantly female groups such as the Associated Artists headed by Candace Wheeler, provided well-to-do women with


34 “Answers to Correspondents,” 30.
resources to decorate their home. These publications advised women on contemporary design styles, as well as how to achieve the design elements on a budget. Spearheaded by Candace Wheeler and echoed throughout later issues of *The Decorator and Furnisher*, denim was frequently suggested instead of more expensive materials. The malleability of denim allowed the material to be welcomed seamlessly into homes, especially through aestheticization with embroidery or paint. Through use by women, denim’s versatility made it a staple in the home.


Chapter II

Levi’s, but for Ladies
The Beginning of Women’s Jeans from Factory Workers to Vacationers
*Vogue Magazine* first featured denim in a 1935 article titled, “Boccaccio in Chaps.” The article itself was promoting dude ranch vacations in the western United States, but the illustration featured two women clad in blue jeans (Figure I). The caption that accompanied the pseudo-cowgirls read: “True Western chic was invented by cowboys, and the moment you veer from their tenets you are lost.”35 This manifesto of cowboy swagger continued with a description of how to wear jeans: “Your uniform for a dude ranch or a ranch near Reno is simple-but-severe blue jeans or Levis, turned up at the bottom once, laundered before wearing (to prevent stiffness), cut straight and tight fitting, worn low on the hips, in the manner of your favorite dude wrangler.”36 What struck me about this detailed approach was the uncasual nature of wearing this casual garment in its early stages of women’s wear. Here jeans were not being promoted for need but rather for the luxury of wearing them as a novelty. Prior to the 1935 *Vogue* article, denim had been worn by male laborers since the 1800s, then later by cowboys and factory workers who required the hardy material for their work. In the early twentieth century denim began to transition into women’s wear, I argue that the transition came from the influence of the dude ranch as well as from women’s entry into the industrial workforce.

In the 1910s as a result of WWI and the demand for women to enter the workforce women needed clothing to support their new lifestyle, which often came in the form of denim. In this chapter I delve into the role of clothing in transitioning a garment between different settings and classes, analyzing varied social responses to women’s adoption of jeans in their wardrobe. I


36 Ibid. 72-73.
want to create a chronological timeline to explain how women began to wear these pieces between the 1910s and 1940s.

To create this timeline I have consulted literature directly from denim brands, such as Levi’s. Other information I have gathered from books on general western wear, the early twentieth-century romanticization of the west, fashion during the World Wars and the Great Depression. When I talk about the transition of denim from the American West to everyday lifestyles of the East, I mainly rely on magazine articles from the 1930s and 1940s which criticized denim as inappropriate apparel for women. Overall, there is not much direct information on denim womenswear in the early twentieth century, which requires me to utilize a variety of texts from different outlets in order to create well-rounded support for my topic.

Early twentieth-century western-wear trends intended to evoke a visual nostalgia for the wild west of the previous century. Contemporary trends, like jeans, were anachronic because they were not consistent with actual trends of the nineteenth century. In The Cowboy, a 1922 memoir by Philip Ashton Rollins, a cattle driver turned lawyer, he critiques contemporary women’s western wear, especially that exhibited in Wild West shows: “[Women’s] clothing speaks of the present-day theatre and not the ranches of long ago.” In reality, the denim market was more focused on male laborers and railroad workers who made up a larger consumer demographic than cowboys. In 1897, Levi Strauss & Co. created an ad saying their products were: “Made expressly for miners, mechanics, engineers and laboring men,” (Figure II). This ad


did not mention cowboys or women in the consumer demographic because before 1920 jeans were primarily worn by male laborers.

It was not until the 1920s that Levi’s jeans, what were then called waist overalls, became more widespread and closely associated with cowboys. This transition was due to belt loops which were added in 1922. Prior models of waist overalls had straps in the back which allowed the pants to be cinched, the added belt loops enhanced the functionality of the already sturdy piece because it allowed the wearer to customize the size. Levi’s original rivet patent expired in 1909, which opened the denim market to other competing companies. For example, in 1924 H.D. Lee Mercantile Co., which later became the recognizable Lee brand, released “The 101 Cowboy Pant,” said to be the first pant made specifically for cowboys, (Figure III). The association Lee created between cowboys and jeans stuck and throughout the next few decades other brands followed suit. In 1947 Wrangler commissioned a well known rodeo personality, Rodeo Ben, to design a cowboy friendly pair of jeans. His design featured a rise and crotch suited to saddle riding. Brands, such as Levi’s, also featured western imagery in their advertisements well into the 1960s. This helped created a romanticized notion of the west and western clothing, (Figure IV).

Despite jeans not infiltrating the cowboy market until the 1920s, films set in the wild west of the late nineteenth-century outfitted their cowboy characters in jeans. Films such as, *West


of the Pecos (1945) set in 1887, The Virginian (1946) set in 1885 and Yellow Sky (1948) set in 1867, relied on denim jeans and jackets to confirm the period setting. They did help to establish context but it was not because of historical accuracy. Based on popular culture, consumers often associated jeans with the late nineteenth-century wild west. Jeans featured in 1930s films, however were of contemporary twentieth-century styles. The 1939 film Stagecoach is one of the most notable uses of Levi’s in a western film. This film, set in the 1880s, follows a stagecoach of people travelling to New Mexico who encountered problems at every turn of their journey. The hero of the film, Ringo Kid played by acclaimed western actor John Wayne, is distinguished by his blue jeans. The film is set in a period when denim was mostly worn by laborers and railroad workers, Wayne, however can be seen wearing Levi’s jeans throughout the course of the movie (Figure V). According to former Levi’s historian, Lynn Downey, twentieth-century cowboys rejected the older styles of Levi’s and preferred pairs made after World War II when the riveting was reduced to just on the watch pocket. She comments that “cowboys and other consumers complained that the crotch rivet tended to heat up and become uncomfortable when crouching in front of a campfire.”

Actual cowboys in the period depicted in Stagecoach would have instead worn thick wool reinforced with canvas. This anachronistic approach to portraying denim allowed

43 Tyler Beard and Jim Arndt, 100 Years of Western Wear. (Salt Lake City: Gibbs-Smith Publisher, 1993), 21.


45 Downey. “Blue Denim by the Bay,” 155.

twentieth-century viewers to develop a historically incorrect idea of cowboy clothing, while simultaneously identifying a familiar garment with both the past and present. At this time Western films had became quite popular for their action and dramatic storylines. The popularity of Western films made objects featured in the films fashionable as well. When jeans were seen in Westerns they gained their own widespread popularity, just waiting to be emulated by excited viewers. Historical accuracy did not matter in this representation of jeans and was compromised for the pageantry of Americanness these garments exuded. In contrast to the imagined use of jeans on men, women’s fashion in Western films tended to be consistent with actual nineteenth-century clothing. In the 1880s and 1890s, both eastern and western women’s clothing was victorian in style which featured elaborate collars, trimmed hats, bustles, balloon sleeves and tight corsets. The juxtaposition between modernly dressed men and victorian styled women can be seen in *Stagecoach*, (Figure VI). This contrast could be attributed to fixed constraints of women’s wear to remain conservative.

Women in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were not included in any branded denim narrative because they did not wear jeans. Women were exposed to the possibility of wearing jeans themselves from women in early twentieth-century rodeos, Wild West shows, and stories of outlaws. When famed female outlaw, Pearl Hart, was arrested in Arizona in 1899 for holding up a stagecoach, her clothing was one of the ways she rebelled. When arrested Pearl wore a button up shirt, denim waist overalls signified by her thick suspenders, tall leather boots, a cocked hat with a firm grip on her gun (Figure VII). Her specific attention to the functionality of clothing allowed her to live a more rugged life than socially acceptable for women.

Upon Hart’s arrest she was asked to change into traditionally feminine garb for documentation photos (Figure VIII). The feminine clothing she was asked to change into consisted of an ornamented hat adorned with what appears to be flowers, a grid-patterned blouse with a bow tied tightly at the neck, and a full-length white skirt. In addition to a more womanly look, she also was pictured seated, clasping her hands and looking away from the camera. The initial image shows Hart with her leg up on a stump, eye straight at the camera and firmly grasping her gun. The initial picture expresses a disregard for conventions of gender, whereas in the second Hart’s clothing and gesture has been edited. The second edit is more demure, thus more consciously feminine and closer to the late nineteenth-century standard of dress.

These contrasting images of Pearl Hart appeared in the journal Cosmopolitan in 1899. A monthly illustrated magazine, Cosmopolitan featured articles ranging from “Candy-Making at Home” to “A Railway to the Klondike,” to appeal to a variety of readers. The images of Hart were featured specifically in an article called “An Arizona Episode.” Reader’s were exposed to the possibility of expanded gender norms and Hart’s feminist ideals stemming from the wild western tale. Both her actions and her choice in clothing were acts of defiance against the rigidly gendered status quo. She promoted women’s equality in her dress and her speech. When on trial she is documented as stating: “I shall not consent to be tried under a law in which my sex had no voice in the making.” She became well known, especially through her media presence, and though women may not have emulated her illegal actions, her revolutionary choice in neutralizing gendered clothing foreshadowed later women’s fashion trends. By 1940 her almost


exact outfit appears on the pages of Vogue Magazine, (Figure IX). In “At Home on the Range,” an article from June 1940, an illustration of clothing from Abercrombie and Fitch includes an outfit described as: “a blue chambray shirt tucked into White Stag Sanforized blue denim overalls.”

Though jeans for men were popular in the earlier part of the century and could be seen on female outlaws and in rodeos, it was not until the 1930s that average women adopted jeans as everyday wear. Prior to this period denim pants did not exist for women except in the case of factory workwear during the world wars. By the end of World War II in 1945, 19,570,000 women had entered the industrial workforce, compared to only 7,788,826 in 1910, before World War I. These newly working women needed to be outfitted to keep them safe while working with machinery. Men’s workwear had been readily available because of their history as laborers. However, the rapid move of women to the industrial workforce meant that they needed proper garments as well. At first women wore men's overalls which led to the term woman-alls. The lack of functional and durable clothing available to women was a problem outside of factory work as well and resulted in female factory workers and farmhands wearing men’s clothing.

In Cowgirls of the Rodeo (1999), historian Mary LeCompte includes an anecdote about a frontier women wearing a divided skirt, a garment similar to culottes, to do ranch work: “When newlywed Hallie Crawford Stillwell first appeared in her divided skirt to assist her husband with

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50 “Fashion: At Home on the Range.” Vogue 95, no. 11 (Jun 01, 1940): 103.

51 Beard and Arndt, 100 Years of Western Wear, 19.


the ranch chores on the Big Bend frontier, he immediately vetoed the outfit: ‘Hell, you can't ride in that thing...You’ll have to have some pants.’ Only after one of the ranch hands agreed to loan her a pair of trousers was Hallie allowed to proceed with her work.”54 Clothing on the women’s market was not conducive to the lifestyles of many modern women who needed clothing to function in their active lifestyles. A 1942 LIFE magazine article critiqued women’s factory work attire: “A new note in the American scene are the uniforms in which plants have dressed their women. Though a man can be as sloppy as he pleased, an unsightly female, employers find, ‘plays hell with morale.’55 Well known men’s brands soon noticed the necessity for women's workwear. In 1914 Lee made khaki union-alls for women and by 1918 Levi’s had done the same with their freedom-alls.56

Images of working women in denim garments began to circulate in American media sources like LIFE magazine. This exposure spread the new reality of women entering the workspace and doing so in traditionally masculine garments, frequently constructed of denim. When the figure of Rosie the Riveter gained popularity during the Second World War, it became emblematic of the shift in gendered labor. The famed female figures in both J. Howard Miller and Norman Rockwell’s propagandistic images are clad in blue denim overalls or coveralls, (Figure X and XI) In Rockwell’s Rosie, she sits in front of a flying American flag backdrop, with her denim overalls echoing the blue of the field of stars. Her deep indigo overalls are worn loose, unlike traditionally form-fitting women’s clothing. The specific image of women in

55 "Manpower." Life Magazine, October 26, 1942, 34.
denim, along with symbolic gestures of strength and power, all while retaining an element of femininity conveyed the strong sense of feminist achievement in working women. The necessity for women’s access to durable workwear, often in the form of denim, continued after World War II, which helped normalize women wearing pants and overalls in their daily lives.

Apart from being worn during times of war, cowgirls also wore denim while they performed in rodeo shows. Originally, cowgirl garments were made at home; or for rodeo stars, on the road. Beginning in the 1900s women made themselves bloomers and divided skirts. These billowy garments appeared like skirts but were cut and produced in similar materials to pants. Riding-skirts were often made of denim which gave the texture of jeans, while keeping with the traditional feminine silhouette of a skirt. Through exposure from sources, such as rodeo shows, cowgirl’s pant-like garments were spread to female western vacationers. A Vogue magazine article from 1935 titled “Dude Dressing” praised divided skirts calling them women’s “salvation” for allowing them to comfortably ride horses. When this article was produced in 1935, it was probably intended for easterners questioning what to wear in the west, rather than rodeo cowgirls. Traveling rodeos provided a platform for cowgirls to show their divided skirts and pants. The exposure of relaxed gender constraints exuded casualness as well as exoticism to foreign audiences, prompting them to gain further interest in western culture.

Though in the 1930s dude ranches were most popular, they first opened as vacation destinations for elite easterners in the 1880s. These ranches gained mass popularity during the First World War and continuing through the Second World War. Travel outside of the United

\[57\] Beard and Arndt, 100 Years of Western Wear, 24.

States was restricted during war periods, so wealthy Americans could no longer vacation overseas.\textsuperscript{59} As a result, there was an increase in travel within the continental United States, especially amid a wealthy demographic. Elite urbanites from cities like New York and Chicago found an alternative to the stresses of cosmopolitan life in primitive western dude ranches. This alternative, an ideal oasis away from the hustle and bustle of modern life, was situated in a constructed fantasy of the West. This fantasy was based on films, Wild West shows and media, such as advertisements, all overblown stereotypes of the actual laborious way of life. Visitors’ skewed ideals of western life and culture were actualized in the artificiality of ranch life staged by ranchers themselves looking for a profit.

Dude ranches gained the reputation of being rugged paradises. However early on they were more similar to country clubs than cattle ranches. In the early twentieth century some frequently offered amenities included tennis courts, polo fields, sun decks and dance floors.\textsuperscript{60} One of the oldest ranches in Colorado, Bar Lazy J Guest Ranch, which opened in 1912, describes its early amenities as, “absolutely formal at first: coffee before breakfast served elegantly in demitasse cups on the lawn; polo played on the lawn; a croquet court between the cabins and river.”\textsuperscript{61} This was not the model that dude ranches took on. Visitors from the East were not looking for a sophisticated vacation but something opposite of their daily lives. Ranchers made big changes to the experience of their ranches to appeal to audiences looking for a more authentic experience. Seeking authenticity they took cultural cues from popular culture


\textsuperscript{60} Rodnitzky, “Recapturing the West,” 118.

and the past, tales of outlaws and pioneers and reverting to more primitive ways of American life to achieve the desired experience. By the 1930s, when dude ranches were at their prime, the activities changed to include horseback riding, hunting, shooting and hiking.  

Rugged activities were especially attractive when glamorized through the lens of magazines like *Vogue*, which frequently promoted western vacations throughout the 1930s. In “Boccaccio in Chaps” (1935), a description of the west read: “The high air is like wine, only it gives you no post drinking headaches or acidity. You feel young and vigorous, and you have trouble realizing that people are dying of heat near the sea,” the author continued: “...the summer climate of Switzerland isn't so different form the climate of the Rocky Mountains.”

By comparing the western United States to Switzerland, this article targeted an audience that was accustomed to vacationing in luxurious European locales. The article does not reference actual ranches, perhaps because the targeted audience was not concerned with details, but rather the premise and vogue of new exotic experiences.

The hardiness of available recreations attracted both men and women alike. Respectively known as Dudes and Dudines, terms used to refer to male or female ranch guests, the guests used the activities to experiment with gender in different capacities. Women specifically took the opportunity to explore and push gender constraints through traditionally masculine tasks. During the height of dude ranches in the 1920s and 30s, the idea of a “New Woman” emerged and was validated by traditional ranch experiences. By 1920, white women had gained the right

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62 In 1934, $12 million USD went into Wyoming dude ranches alone; according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator that is about $17 million dollars by today’s standards.


64 Downey. “Blue Denim by the Bay,” 154.
to vote and with that an air of increased freedom to be adventurous, sexually free and financially in control. By participating in activities such as hunting and shooting, wealthy white dudines were able to visualize gender changes at work and reflect this change in their clothing. In “Business Names Incorporate Social Change: Levis, Hard Hats, Cats” from 1973, author Peter Tamony talks about the different motives to go west based on gender. Tamony cites jeans as women’s main attraction to the region: “While writers, British royalty, affluent Easterners and yet-to-be-president Teddy Roosevelt had ventured into the West to experience lifestyles of the receding frontier in the last decades of the nineteenth century, it was what came to be called dude ranches that the American woman of fashion first saw Levis.” The exposure women had to Levi’s allowed them to be equipped, both physically and aesthetically, for the western lifestyle adopted on the ranch. If women were hunting and fishing, they could not comfortably do so in a constrictive dress or skirt. These activities which women experienced in the west enlightened women to the way in which clothing and increased function depending on the specific clothing, could increase ease in their daily lives.

In “Romancing the Dude Ranch” author Adrienne Rose Johnson writes about changing fashions in a western context: “Although western fashion clearly afforded women freedom of movement on the dude ranch, pants rarely appeared upper-class women's wardrobes of this period. Jeans, especially, became political statements, symbolizing ‘freedom from the norms of conservative society.’ Nearly all illustrations, advertisements, and photographs in this period show dudines in trousers or jeans.” Jeans provided physical manifestations of freedom in

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movement, so they were worn as opposed to skirts or dresses. This garment’s function gave women an excuse to experiment with how they presented themselves within the confines of a gendered status quo. In addition to jeans, women adopted other gender neutral pieces.

In a 1941 photograph taken by Marion Post Wolcott on behalf of the Farm Security Administration titled, “Dudes from the Quarter Circle U Brewster-Arnold Ranch, near Birney, at the Crow Indian Fair,” women can be seen in a spectrum of both feminine and masculine garb (Figure XII). The three women in the foreground are wearing jeans cuffed at the ankle, button up shirts with rolled up sleeves and cowboy hats. The two women towards the right are wearing cowboy boots, but the woman to the left is wearing penny loafers with white socks - a clear giveaway that she is not natively western. The masculinity of the women’s outfits is validated in the rancher to their right, wearing almost identically the same outfit to the three women and clenching a lasso. These costumed women are contrasted by the more traditionally feminine dressed women to the left, sitting on top of the truck. These women all appear to be wearing dresses, dark sunglasses and have their hair neatly pinned up. The disparity, but coexistence of the two groups of women, shows jeans creeping into women’s wear.

Though eastern women could purchase the necessary clothing on location, they wanted to arrive to the ranch prepared, as to not seem out of place. Catalogues became available and western stores opened in metropolitan centers like New York City. In 1920 H Bar C Ranchwear opened in Brooklyn, selling a range of western clothing and products.67 This store was originally founded to produce english riding style clothing, but the western market was more popular and

67 George-Warren and Freedman. *How the West was Worn*, 128.
profitable at the time.68 In the 1935 Vogue article “Dude Dressing,” the writer denounced traditional English riding clothing and instead advocates for western pieces, “What she does is to hurry down to the ranch store and ask for a pair of blue jeans…” The author then goes on to suggest how to make the blue jeans look worn-in, “she secretly floats the ensing night in a bathtub of water - the oftener a pair of jeans is laundered, the higher its value…” 69 The article implies a sense of shamefulness if one does not have properly worn-in jeans as it conveys that the wearer is a western novice. Rather than taking the time to break in the jeans, readers are suggested to skip those steps and instead artificially age the pants.

The same article also suggests women bring curlers to ranches and wear ribbons in their hair. The detailed suggestions make wearing the proper clothing into a performative effort, rather than one created out of necessity. It is reasonable that jeans must be worn because ranch activities require durable clothing, but hair ribbons and curlers do not factor into the need for durability. The addition of this suggestion renders the entire outfit prescribed a costume, for the sake of pageantry. On curlers and ribbons Vogue lobbies: “Long or short pigtails and curled bobs run an equal race in ranch hairstyles. If you use a pair of scissors on your head, bring your curlers; if your hair is long bring elastics and ribbons.”70

The wealthy vacationers gave Levi’s a broadened consumer basis. In 1935 Levi’s released the “Lady Levi” to keep up with the newly established market (Figure XIII). These new women’s jeans, the first to be released for leisure rather than workwear, were self

proclaimed “Dude Ranch Duds.” The succinct specificity of this catchphrase illuminated how impactful the niche Western market was to denim brands. These jeans looked similar to their male counterparts but tended to have a more feminine silhouette. Though adopting a male garment, women and greater society wanted to retain femininity. Brands accomplished this by making women’s jeans more body-contouring.

Though women’s jeans were mainly accepted as part of leisure wear for western vacations, when women on the East Coast started wearing them in everyday life they received mixed responses. In a 1944 issue of *Life Magazine* revolutionary female Wellesley College students were featured wearing jeans after stirring up controversy in the local publication *The Wellesley Townsman*. The local newspaper railed against young women for expressing themselves in jeans. An article with the *Townsman* from June 1943 issued a statement saying, “If ever a grown up gal looks unattractive and untidy, it is when she appears on the street with her shirt-tail out and with overalls the legs of which are rolled up to the knee.”71 This piece, written by a man, exudes sexism stemming from an apparently inherent feeling of superiority. Using terminology like unattractive and untidy to describe young women shows that he is reaping his freedom to judge young women’s looks, but they do not have the freedom to clad their own bodies. These negative terms are used intentionally to curb the sartorial independence of women, in order to deter wearing jeans by connecting them to terms of disgust.

Wellesley College women continued to wear jeans, despite negative reactions. In response to the original October 1944 *LIFE* magazine feature, a November 1944 “Letter to the Editor,” written by Wellesley girls declared, “We will fight to the death for our right to wear

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dungarees on the proper occasions.” The Wellesley girl’s resilient feminist efforts, and that of other women who fought through systematic masculine societal expectations, were validated as women’s jeans began to frequently appear positively in national publications.

As soon as December 1944 LIFE magazine defended girls wearing jeans in an spread focused on teen girls. Following mention of how young girls are shunned by peers if they do not keep up with fashion trends the magazine reports: “Their favorite fad is wearing men’s jeans and shirts which they borrow from their fathers, brothers and each other or buy in the boys’ wear department. They defend this costume on the ground of its great comfort and practicality...teachers, fathers and boyfriends find it shockingly sloppy. This makes the custom exciting as well as comfortable and keeps the girls firmly united against all protest.”

According to the thought process promoted by LIFE, if young girls did not follow the trend of wearing jeans then they would face problems socially. Despite retaliation from greater society, women’s efforts to dress as they please persevered. An image from the December 1944 article in LIFE shows a girl named Pat Woodruff, doing her homework in a pair of jeans. Accompanying Woodruff’s denim is a white collared top, a buffalo check flannel top worn open, bobby socks and moccasins. Despite the thoughtful casualness of her outfit, her hair is done up in tight curls, (Figure XIV). This snapshot represents a young girls daily life, one where she wears blue jeans. This piece serves as an example to show the popularity of jeans for women as a trend expanding from western vacations into the daily lives of eastern women. With teen girls as a case study, the mention of jeans juxtaposed with the description of teens having a pack mentality when it

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73 “Teen-Age Girls: They Live in a Wonderful World of Their Own.” Life Magazine, December 11, 1944, 93.
comes to fashion goes to show that denim was becoming a staple in a modern woman's wardrobe.

By the time of the Wellesley girls or the teens featured in LIFE magazine, Levi’s had to discontinue their “Lady Levi’s” due to war rationing. This temporary halt on women’s denim production did not stop the progression of the industry all together. By the late 1940s Wrangler produced the first pair of zip-up jeans for women, as opposed to previous button fly styles. The creation of different variations of women’s jeans expanded the industry.

By the 1950s, Levi’s came back with vengeance and produced “Ranch Pants,” which were released in a variety of colors, (Figure XV). The popularity and freedom that jeans afforded women ended up making its way away from the leisurely ranch to modern life. Through following this niche market, from solely western wear to the adoption of denim in everyday life, brands were able to create an ever growing market for women’s jeans. Sartorial efforts, such as “Lady Levi’s” were effective in outfitting women in denim throughout the west, but continued products such as Ranch Pants spread the trend nationally. The western popularity of denim stimulated the successful spread of jeans into the wardrobe of women all over the United States.

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74 Sullivan, Jeans, 77.

75 Beard and Arndt, 100 Years of Western Wear, 34.
Figure I: Burt, Strathers. "Fashion: Boccaccio in Chaps." *Vogue* 85, no. 10 (May 15, 1935): 73.

Figure II: Levi Strauss & Co. Advertisement. 1897. Accessed April 28, 2018.

Figure V: Wayne, John. *Stagecoach*. Walter Wanger Productions, Inc., 1939.

Figure VI: Wayne, John, and Trevor, Claire. *Stagecoach*. Walter Wanger Productions, Inc., 1939.


Figure IX: "Fashion: At Home on the Range." *Vogue Magazine* 95, no. 11 (Jun 01, 1940): 103.
Figure X: Miller, J. Howard, and War Production Coordinating Committee. "We Can Do It." 1942. Poster.

Figure XI: Rockwell, Norman. Rosie the Riveter. May 29, 1943. Saturday Evening Post Cover. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR.
Figure XII: Wolcott, Marion Post. Crow Agency, Montana. Dudes from the Quarter Circle U Brewster-Arnold Ranch, near Birney, at the Crow Indian fair. August 1941. Photograph.

Figure XIV: LIFE Magazine. *Pat Woodruff Does Homework with Radio Going Full Blast.* December 11, 1944. Photograph.

Figure XV: Levi Strauss & Co. Ranch Pants.
Chapter III

DIY Denim
The Influence of Female Folk Design on the Greater Denim Industry
In 1979 Levi Strauss & Co. executive, Alfred V. Sanguinetti reported to *The New Yorker* that by 1975 sales had surpassed one billion dollars, up from $50 million in 1958.\textsuperscript{76} This astronomic increase in sales between the seventeen-year span resulted in over two pairs of Levi’s jeans purchased per every person in the United States.\textsuperscript{77} The expanding market was due in part to Levi’s already being a staple in the fashion world. It also was due to the value of denim products within countercultural subgroups. In the late 1960s, women in movements, like the hippies, began customizing their jeans in order to produce individual expression. In order to do so, women used techniques such as, embroidery, reconstruction, painting and dying. The materiality of denim made it the ideal garment to act as a blank canvas. The popularity of these women’s designs resulted in the mainstreaming of countercultural folk art, art which was made at home according to the values and aesthetics of the hippie movement. The democratization occurred first by books published on customizing jeans at home and then through their appropriation by leading denim brands, such as Levi’s. In this chapter I question how denim companies, and specifically their womenswear sectors, responded to the popularity of customized denim. Through the influence of customization, I argue that female artisans in the 1960s changed the trajectory of the denim industry.

Though brands did not acknowledge their subcultural value until later, they did acknowledge the increase in female consumership through the products they offered. In 1968, Levi’s created a separate division specifically for womenswear called “Levi’s For Gals.” (Figure


\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, 11-12.
Although jeans, called “Lady Levi’s,” women debuted in 1935, the new surge in women buying jeans allowed the company to create a sector just for them. By 1975, *Women’s Wear Daily* reported that in 1974 “Levi’s for Gals” had earned an estimated $100 million dollars. This was a 45% sales increase which could be attributed to the value of Levi’s within cultural subgroups.

During the introductory period of “Lady Levi’s” in the 1930s, Levi Strauss & Co. adopted the cowboy as their mascot. Well into the middle of the twentieth century, around the 1960s, the brand was still promoting their clothing as western wear. In 1963, Levi Strauss & Co. released an advertisement promoting “Ranch Pants,” their women’s line of jeans which first appeared in the 1950s. This ad, featured in *All American Ads: 60s*, reads, “Our classic slim model with keystone belt loops, sculpted polo pockets -- tailored in cotton-nylon stretch denim for a snugger, smoother, smarter fit. Waist 22 to 32 at your LEVI’S Western Wear dealer,” (Figure II). This ad features the bottom half of a Jeaned woman whose hand is delicately holding a cowboy hat. The selective terminology used in the advertisement, with words like “classic” and “model,” create the sense that there is a long-standing tradition behind the product. The 1963 ad, which maintained Levi’s traditional heritage, shows that between the 1930s and 1960s the brand and its products did not progress to comply to contemporary trends. In a menswear ad from the same

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80 Ibid, 71.

year, the brand describes its product as: “When it comes to long wear and real comfort in action, the working cowboy picks LEVI’S jeans and jackets,” solidifying Levi’s product, regardless of gender, as western wear, (Figure III).

Though Levi’s was advertising towards their western demographics, their jeans were beginning to be worn by women from all walks of life. Despite “Lady Levi’s” introduction dating back to about thirty years prior, there were still societal concerns about women wearing jeans. In Dressing for the Culture Wars (2015), author Betty Luther Hillman reflects on the changing fashion styles in the 1960s in relation to traditional gender roles: “Changes in self-presentation for women fueled these concerns [that women would abandon their traditional roles], with social commentators worrying that women dressing in new styles, and men dressing in styles similar to those previously reserved for women, could further erode traditional gender roles.” Taking on a more traditionally masculine garment allowed women to express critiques of society and expand expected gender presentations.

Similarly to women who wanted to reject traditional gender roles, those involved in subgroups, like hippies, who rejected materialism could express their social critiques by altering their ready-made garments. Before their connection with hippies, jeans became associated with the countercultural Beatniks in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This group used jeans combined with black turtlenecks, to create a bare and basic uniform to rebel against mainstream materialist


culture.\textsuperscript{54} By the late 1960s jeans were again adopted by the hippie subculture and used similarly, often to rebel against materialism and conformity. In order to maintain this symbolism, wearers personalized their jeans to express themselves.

In her study \textit{Dress and Popular Culture} (1991), author Beverly Gordon categorizes jeans worn in the 1960s as anti-fashion arguing: “By 1967 the anti-fashion statement was screaming across the land, for jeans were one of the most visible symbols of the rapidly increasing numbers and disenfranchised youth...Soon counterculture youth were glorifying their jeans -- decorating and embellishing them, making them colorful and celebratory, and making them into visible, vocal personal statements.”\textsuperscript{85} Despite jeans being a staple within 1960s counterculture subgroups, brands did not seem to pick up on this demographic until later.

The hippie movement occurred during the same time as the height of suburbanization. Between 1950 and 1970 the population of American suburbs grew to 85 million people, almost double what it had had been in 1940.\textsuperscript{86} Following the social instability caused by both World Wars and the Great Depression, Americans wanted a secure way of life, which they found in the comfort of the suburbs. Many young suburbanites saw their limited outlook on the world culminating in an oppressive culture, which lacked any individual expression.\textsuperscript{87} Unlike their conservative parents who were content with their traditional lives, the younger generation was interested in communicating with people outside of their community, those that did not share the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{84} Gordon, \textit{Dress and Popular Culture}, 34-5.
  \item \textsuperscript{85} Gordon, \textit{Dress and Popular Culture}, 34.
  \item \textsuperscript{86} Robert Fishman, \textit{Bourgeois Utopias : The Rise and Fall of Suburbia} (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008), 182.
  \item \textsuperscript{87} Robert L. Hillard, \textit{Media, education, and America’s counter-culture revolution : lost and found opportunities for media impact on education, gender, race, and the arts} (Westport, CT: Ablex, 2001), 4.
\end{itemize}
same comforts or experiences they had. As a result, children of the suburbanization generation rejected their parents way of life as being rooted in conformity and materiality and joined movements like the hippies.

This new generation of counterculurtists emerged from mainstream society young, white, middle-class people, but rejected traditional values. This curious counterculture group gained exposure when major publications like *The New York Times* began reporting on them in 1965. In a *New York Times* article from 1967, author Hunter S. Thompson defines the group, saying: “Hippies despise phoniness; they want to be open, honest, loving and free. They reject the plastic pretense of 20th-century America, preferring to go back to the ‘natural life,’ like Adam and Eve.” Hippies resented the pressure to conform, whether it be traditional career paths, gender roles, family structure or appearance. Their departure from traditional society was most visible in their clothing.

Hippie’s made conscious considerations when it came to their means of self expression through clothing, veering as far away from mainstream styles as possible. Fashion gives wearers a new means of identification through new modes of self expression. Hippies used this medium to create a visual identity of their movement, so those who dressed with similar values would be clearly associated with the group and their principles. The clothing of this group reflected their rejection of materialistic mass culture. Their garments were often home-made or ready-made with personalized elements to reflect the wearer’s values and replace conformity with

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88 Ibid 51.


individualism. In the introduction of *Dress and Popular Culture*, the author brings up how clothing as “anti-fashion” can both reject and cultivate new cultural cues: “The dress functions as a sign of rejection of the norm and hence the status quo, as well as an adherence to thought and ideas of the fringe of society.” Their strategic unkemptness showed that they had dropped out of general society and were manifesting an alternative society of their own.

Hippie culture did not seem to be taken seriously during its time and the lasting cultural impact was not acknowledged until later decades. In a 1976 *Women’s Wear Daily* article, “The ‘60s: Helen Gurley Brown remembers,” the author reconciles the impact of counterculture style which originally went unacknowledged: “The hippies with their long, flowing hair, addiction to jeans and their put-down of pretentious dressing influenced every other segment of society.” It seems that it was not until a mass cultural acceptance of the hippie movement in the 1970s, at least in terms of clothing, that their lifestyles were documented. For this reason, DIY books, articulated in the 1970s were a culmination of artistry from the late 1960s. These books showed readers different techniques and designs which could help to add individuality to plain clothing. As articulated in *Native Funk & Flash*, “All those people who took acid in the sixties are ten years older now. I remember wondering what would happen when we got older and began to form our own culture, infiltrating the old one by ingenious drug-crazed peace-and-love tactics.”

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By 1975, around when DIY books were published, the folksy woodstock styles went mainstream.95

The Stitchery Idea Book (1974), Creating Body Coverings (1973) and Native Funk & Flash (1974) are just a few examples of DIY books which promote clothing personalization. The information in the books seems to be mainly directed towards women. In The Stitchery Idea book, the author Beverly Rush advocates for embroidery because of its use by women throughout history, designating women as the ones embellishing clothing, whether it be for themselves, their families or their male companions.96 For this reason, it seems that women spearheaded the DIY clothing movement.

An overarching theme in each book is adding individual character to plain clothing to enhance the personal experience of wearing it. In Creating Body Coverings, the author explains the reasoning behind altering clothing: “Mass production has made reasonable, serviceable clothing available to almost everyone. But it has also deprived clothing of any personal character. To feel unique, or special, it is important to do something to personalize, or individualize, the garment.”97 To follow this manifesto people used basic clothing as a blank canvas on which to add their own decoration. One of the most prescribed pieces of ready-made clothing for women to design upon were jeans.

By the 1960s jeans had strong associations with both past counterculture movements and leisure wear for the middle class, so it was one of the most universally worn garments. In

95 Will Kaufman, Twentieth Century American Culture EUP (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 130.


Creating Body Covering, the author advocates for jeans on the basis that they have a “down-on-the-farm simplicity that everyone enjoys.” The unpretentiousness of jeans were capitalized upon; jeans were imagined as a blank canvases, rather than recognized for any stylistic attributes. In Native Funk and Flash, the author attributes the inspiration for the book to a pair of damaged Levi’s she was mending, questioning why make them look new when you could make them look better than new? In addition to this author’s denim provoked epiphany, the material also had physical attributes which made it the ideal material to design upon. Denim is sturdy so paint does no transfer through the fabric and it does not fray or rip when sewn on.

The sturdiness of denim was put to the test in the November 1970 issue of Rags Magazine, a short-lived publication directed at counterculture youth. A Rags exposé on the durability of denim emphasized its versatility and why it was the perfect material to work with: “The Rags Road Test, No. 1: Jeans” put nine pairs of jeans, each from different brands ranging from Levi’s to Sears through five different tests. The two most extreme tests were “The Pull Test” and “The Wear Test,” (Figure IV). The first used rope to tie each leg of the jeans to separate Volkswagens. One car put its emergency brake on, while the other accelerated to ten miles per hour. This test determined the stress capability of the products, the best being Lee Rider, which took 7.5 seconds for the leg to tear and the worst was Mavericks, which took only 2.5 seconds for the crotch seam to burst. “The Wear Test” involved the jeans being tied to a

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98 Laury and Aiken, Creating Body Coverings, 128.
99 Jacopetti, Native Funk & Flash, 56.
100 Ibid, 9.
single Volkswagen, with a nine pound brick secured in the leg. The car then drove ten miles per hour testing how long it took for the denim to wear and the brick to be dislodged. In the end, the best product was again the Lee Rider, which took three minutes to breach, whereas the worst were Seafarer’s, which only took 37 seconds. Though these tests were were lighthearted and satirical, their existence proved the quality of jeans.

Unlike the forced wear during the “The Rags Road Test,” denim naturally wears. When embellished, the denim and the application on top will wear together, making both the applied embellishments and the original garment feel naturally like one. Preexisting denim garments can also be deconstructed and reimagined. The seams of jeans or overalls can be undone and reworked to function as dresses or skirts, or just to give the garment new elements of constructional design.102

On page 8 of *Creating Body Coverings*, is a photograph of a young woman in a pair of completely altered overalls, (Figure V). The straps of the overalls have been reversed, so the clasps are at the back. Attached to the new bib-style top is a knit doily. From the center of the doily extends dark branch-like motifs atop a smaller circle of thin thread. The doily then extends into six rounded edged which each feature a similar small circle of thin thread as in the center of the doily. The doily is framed by embroidered dots and branches. At the waist a button, which may have been from the side of the original overalls, is placed and outlined by embroidered leaves. Although not pictured, the book offered the information that the legs had been split and sewn together into a long skirt. The new long skirt was then embroidered with thread and yarn.

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102 Laury and Aiken, *Creating Body Coverings*, 124-5.
The top of the skirt, which is slightly visible in the available photo, appears to feature similar natural plant forms and dots as the bib.

This design is explained in *The Denim Book* (1978), a publication in which authors Sharon Rosenberg and Joan Weiner-Bordow provide new ways to rework old jeans. In the section “Recycled Skirts & Jumpers,” there are instructions to make a jumper with either two or four inserts, depending on the desired volume of the skirt, (Figure VI). This book as well as others such as, *Make it in Denim*, (1977) by Hazel Todhunter provides readers with ways to specifically utilize denim. In the introduction to *Make it in Denim*, Todhunter writes: “Its [denim] appeal has extended beyond the casual and everyday into the limelight of style because this versatile, comfortable material lends itself perfectly to the do-it-yourself trend.” She not only acknowledges DIY as a trend, but that denim and jeans are the perfect material to experiment with because they are casual, versatile, and durable.

A similar garment to the jeans-turned-jumper can be seen fully on page 124 of *Creating Body Coverings*; a short jumper dress which has pockets with Levi’s iconic stitched design placed on the front of her skirt, (Figure VII). The entire jumper was made out of old blue jeans, so even the top, which featured overall-like straps, was made with scraps. The construction, from jeans to skirt, can be seen on the front of the skirt, as the middle where the legs would have been connected was replaced with a darker piece of fabric. The author states that the creator of the jumper, Bea Slater chose to repurpose Levi’s: “Because she always liked clothes best when they were worn out, and never liked new things, [so] she started making new clothes out of worn

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clothes.” A good pair of Levi’s was essential to the wardrobe, so when they got worn out they were hard to part with. Rather than discarding worn jeans they could be given a new life.

In addition to reworking the construction of denim garments, embellishment on top of ready-made garments was even more popular. Embellishment came in the form of embroidery, painting, patching and other more niche artistic traditions, such as macrame.

In *The Stitchery Idea Book* chapter, “Materials” the author, Beverly Rush suggests the use of denim jeans due to the informality of the garments, referring to them as play clothes. She states: “denim jeans and workshirts are fun to stitch on quickly and spontaneously because the doing is more important than the durability.” Denim is a good material to practice on and stitch on informally because of their expected wear, this makes it a good material because one can feel free to express themselves and not worry about the final outcome. Page 77 provides an example of jeans which have been embroidered on with flowers, attributed to Sandy Bean, (Figure VIII). This pair of dark jeans has a button fly, some of the button holes are reinforced with embroidery, showing how the artist aestheticized her mending. Near the upper pocket there is a sun surrounded by small birds. The right leg is ornamented with a natural design, composed of different flowers and leaves, which begin at the waist of the jeans and trail down to the hem. Although the combination of the sun and the flowers do not express a continuous narrative, it shows the artist expressing her creative freedom and having fun.

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105 Laury and Aiken, *Creating Body Coverings*, 128.

Rush also says that the artist should embroider for sheer joy, rather than a desired outcome. In this way ready-made and personalized garments differ. Ready-made garments are made to look uniform, whereas with personalization the garments are cherished for both the unique appearance and the experience of making wearable art as an extension of themselves.

Although each source says that personalizing clothing is a good way to express oneself for others to see, in *Native Funk and Flash* author Alexandra Jacopetti conveys that although private life is made public through clothing, the process of ornamentation is intimate and often done by a woman for her family. Although the 1960s and 70s saw the second wave of feminism, Jacopetti provides a personal narrative that seems to rely on traditional female values. In the introduction Jacopetti talks about why she began embroidering on clothing, attributing it to when her husband ripped the knee of his favorite Levi’s, saying plainly “Fix them. I just had them feeling right and now they’re ruined.” The author also tells of trying to use embroidery as a friendly gesture to two other men, both of whom reject her offer because they saw it as too intimate for someone else’s partner to embroider their clothing. Freely decorating clothing was not necessarily part of traditional societal expectations of women; tending to the man of the house was.

Examples such as, *Native Funk and Flash*, include jeans within larger conversations about personalization, but other sources like *The Jean Scene* focus solely on decorating denim. *The Jean Scene*, a 1973 book by Eve Harlow provides over 100 ideas and techniques to embellish denim garments. In her introduction, Harlow deems that jeans are “the most universally worn garment since the fig leaf,” so if you’re going to wear them why not

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differentiate yourself from others? Her argument is in tune with the hippie movement where the trend originated. In order to reject conformity, women involved in the hippie movement recontextualized jeans.

In the late 1960s Levi’s began to capitalize on customization themselves, by releasing jeans in different colors-combinations and in collaboration with pop cultural icons. In 1967 Levi’s released the “Crazy Legs” line, which was inspired by the popular Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In television program, a variety show which ran from 1967 to 1973, (Figure IX, X & XI). This TV show brought counterculture to the average American, by referencing topics such as Vietnam, birth control, drugs, race and hippies. One example of the “Crazy Legs” style featured different whimsical illustrations, like a bitten apple, cherries, grapes and a snake. On the back of the pants read, “Don’t Bite...Adam’s Apple....Have We Met Before?” and featured an apple, flowers and the male and female symbol. The strategic placement of symbols, like the male and female, referenced the changing gender politics of the 1960s, an important topic to young people. When asked about this collaboration, Levi Strauss & Co. historian, Tracey Panek remarked that customization and personalizing was so popular that it led Levi’s to sponsor it themselves. By collaborating with this television show and producing a garment specifically

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111 This collaboration was reissued by Levi Strauss & Co. in their Summer 2017 “50th Anniversary Summer of Love Collection.” This collection featured the style describes as well as a white pair which read “Love Trip,” and another with a painted blue zipper on each leg and a small smiling face within the unzipped section.

112 Tracey Panek, interview by the author, Phone, April 6, 2018.
for women, Levi’s was appropriating ideas from the predominantly female DIY subculture to 

further appeal to the subculture itself.

Similarly, in the June 1971 Lady Wrangler collaborated with artist Peter Max. Max rose 
to fame for this dreamy psychedelic art which featured organic and cosmic shapes articulated in 
vibrant colors. The strong influence of Max’s art can be seen on the September 1969 cover of 
LIFE magazine, which shows his face on a field of brightly-colored sun beams and stars, (Figure 
XII). When reflecting back on his inspiration in the 2013 book The Universe of Peter Max, the 
artist lists outerspace his inspiration, stating: “The cosmos has inspired me throughout my 
childhood and adult life. It is a mysterious and magical realm, with new planets, moons, suns, 
stars and galaxies constantly being discovered.”113 Max’s whimsical designs attracted counter 
culturists, because his artistry matched their freeformed drug-influenced aesthetic values. His 
work was also commissioned for prominent musicians, like Bob Dylan.

There is very little information on this collaboration. The only documentation seems to be 
vintage garments, simple advertisements and a 2017 reissue of the collaboration to celebrate the 
50th anniversary of the summer of love. In March of 1971, Women’s Wear Daily wrote a small 
piece titled: “Max to Design for Blue Bell,” the parent company of Wrangler. This anonymous 
except describes Max’s anticipated collaboration: “For the Lady Wrangler division, Max has 
designed four groups of jeans, and each group has six color combinations. He also designed 
HotPants.”114 According to vintage garments, documented for the sake of resale, original garment 
came in a variety of colored denim. One pair of shorts, listed on the popular resale website Etsy,


are mustard yellow with red belt loops, blue front pockets, and green back pockets with a small leather patch proclaiming “Peter Max,” (Figure XIII). The colors available were described in a WWD article called “Max’s Latest” from March 1971: “No patterns...strictly colors like the yellow, orange, gold, green, striped and mustard…” The associations Peter Max had with the counterculture movement and his artistry being transferred onto jeans, shows that art from this period, both commercial and folk, was infiltrating the denim industry.

Like Wrangler’s efforts to appeal to their expanding female audience, in 1969 Levi’s followed suit by introducing the orange tab denim line. When this line was revitalized in 2017, Levi Strauss & Co. characterized that the original line: “symbolized style and youth during the counterculture of the 1960s.” Previously, Levi’s popular 501 jeans were distinguished by their red tab sewn into the back pocket, which read Levi’s in white lettering. The orange tab was used to distinguish more fashionable and on-trend garments from the traditional styles. Orange tab garments included bell bottoms and bootcut jeans, and some of the back pocket stitching was different from the classic V design. The differentiation between traditional and on-trend, which the orange tab signified, acted as a sector within itself to appeal to a younger more fashion conscious demographic. By doing so, Levi’s retained their usual clientele while also appealing to new consumers.

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117 Ibid.


Levi’s continued their sponsorship and mainstreaming of the do-it-yourself denim movement in 1974 when the company held a Denim Art Contest. Though the contest was not specifically market towards women, it acknowledged the DIY artistry that was being spearheaded by women. Featuring contestants of both genders attests to the span women’s customization has extended to, showing both genders participating in traditionally female handicraft.

A total of 2,000 submissions in the form of 35mm color slides were received from 49 different states, Canada and the Bahamas. Out of all the entries 25 were selected as winners and 25 as runners-up. The 50 winners and runner-ups were then featured in the book Levi’s Denim Art Contest: Catalogue of Winners, published by Baron Wolman, who was the editor-and-chief of the defunct Rags Magazine and chief photographer at Rolling Stone Magazine. Wolman, with his prior roll at Rag’s, a counterculture publication, was at the forefront of capitalizing on the art and culture of the late hippie movement.

The 2,000 submissions were judged by a prestigious panel of eight judges. This panel included people such as, Lanier Graham, a curator at San Francisco’s De Young Museum and Tom Albright, an art critic at the San Francisco Chronicle. By allocating judges who were involved in the fine arts the embellished clothing was viewed more as fine art than wearable clothing. As Wolman states in his introduction, “As you can see by looking at the slides that follow, denim has transcended uniform now. For the new Levi’s pioneers, it has become a canvas

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121 Ibid, 1.
for personal expression.” By comparing jeans to a canvas, Wolman was comparing the embellishments to fine art. The art of at home artists was further elevated when the winning designs participated in a museum tour around the United States, beginning with The Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York City. The contest’s 18-month museum tour exhibited the designs all over the country, exposing the creations to people of all walks of life in the context of fine art within a museum rather than designs created to be worn.123

Techniques exhibited in the work by the featured contestants includes studding, deconstructing and reconfiguring the denim, embroidery, sequining, quilting and adding other fabrics, painting, knitting, airbrushing, tie dying, macrame and adding elements like buttons, feathers, stuffed animals, rhinestones, fringe, pins, zippers and in one case gloves painted with red fingernails.

A standout design was produced by Ann Polesny from Altamont, New York who was one of the fourth place winners, (Figure XIV). The image shows the back of her customized denim shorts, with embroidery in a rainbow of colorful organic shapes. The surface of the denim is completely covered, whereas most of the other submissions worked to compliment the denim by allowing negative space to show through. Polesny completely transformed the garment by disguising the material. She covered the denim as if it was a blank canvas and the embroidery was her paint. The only way in which she stuck to the iconic Levi’s brand was the silhouette. Polesny decided to maintain the recognizable Levi shape, but alter the aesthetic appearance of it. In this way the artist truly adapted the garment to fit her vision and lifestyle and assimilated

122 Ibid, 2.

123 Levis Denim Art Contest, 1.
denim into her life on her own terms, rather than working around the predetermined aesthetic qualities of the Levi’s.

Following the success of this contest a second book was published, *American Denim: A New Folk Art*, which further publicized the denim phenomena. Editor, Peter Beagle, attributed the popularity of decorated denim to women back in the 1940s and 50s saying: “my daughters were painstakingly adorning their own thighs and crotches and buttocks with unicorns and daisies long before Levi Strauss & Co. recognized it with its Denim Art Contest.”¹²⁴ The author acknowledges both the heritage of personalized denim as well as where it was contemporarily with interviews of mainly female contestants reflecting on their designs, showing how the at trend was democratized through the brand’s recognition.

Sponsored events, like Levi’s Denim Art Contest ushered counterculture fashion to the masses, but it was when brands began appropriating their art for themselves that it truly became mainstream. In order to further appeal to the counterculture demographic, brands created new advertising campaigns which featured psychedelic imagery. Psychedelia has roots in folk art and became popular amongst counterculturist due to its vibrant colors, organic shapes and natural motifs. Psychedelic art is unique because it resulted from experimentation with drugs like marijuana and the newly popular LSD.¹²⁵ In a *LIFE* magazine article titled “Psychedelic Art” from September 1966, describes the goal of psychedelic art as, “aimed at including the hallucinatory effects and intensified perceptions that LSD, marijuana and other psychedelic


¹²⁵ LSD was discovered in 1943 and by the late 1950s and 60s the Beatniks began experimenting with the drug, then from their influence the Hippies began using it in large quantities. (W.J. Rorabaugh, *Cambridge Essential Histories* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 38.)
drugs produce -- but without requiring the spectator to take drugs.” The new art genre was
used on album covers and popularized by artists, like Peter Max. Attributes of psychedelia can be
seen on customized jeans. For example, in The Stitchery Idea Book, the author advocates for
experimenting with abstraction when embroidering clothing, rather than attempting to complete a
full scene. On the strengths of abstractions the author advocates, “True abstraction is achieved
when the artist can use his knowledge of elements and principles of design, and arrange things
just for the sheer joy of making pleasing or interesting shapes, textures, and lines that ‘belong’
together. When a design is successful it is because it has become something pleasing of itself, not
because it looks like something else that is pleasing.” The same ideology, promoting
abstraction over scenery on clothing, can also be seen in psychedelic art.

Examples of psychedelic imagery used as decoration can be seen on a denim jacket
designed and submitted to the Levi’s Denim Art Contest by Wende Stitt (Figure XV). Stitt came
in fourth place for her Levi’s jacket which she used embroidery and applique. The image of
Stitt’s jacket featured in Levi’s Denim Art Contest Catalogue of Winners, shows different themes
the designer used which are reminiscent of psychedelia. Like Peter Max, Stitt’s jacket contains
elements of cosmic imagery; a moon with a smiling face and a hat, an orange rocketship
decorated with rhinestones, and stars represented by silver buttons. The cosmic elements emerge
out of a orange and yellow rainbow surrounded by silky baby blue applique clouds. The rainbow
streams from an abstract face which is the main element of the Stitt’s composition. The face has
stars for eyes, the nose is an orange semicircle and the bright red mouth curls up to meet the

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eyes. Inside the mouth are pearly white teeth in the foreground, but the background is a lush forest scene, complete with its own orange sun with red and yellow sun beams. Stairs extend from the bottom of the mouth. On the right side of the main image is a pink elephant, which is falling into space. The elephant is wearing sunglasses, a striped shirt, a bowtie and its own pair of blue jeans. The abstract and nonsensically whimsical themes within Stitt’s design has elements of psychedelia.

National companies and advertisers took notice of the eye-catching techniques, shared by both psychedelic artists and DIY-ers, and utilized them in their branding to appeal to a specific type of consumer. This recontextualization of psychedelic art, is described in *Psychedelic: Optical and Visionary Art Since the 1960s* as “Something about the LSD trip -- marked by super-saturated colors, psychic disjunctions, and surrealist juxtapositions -- influenced the entire epoch, spilling over from avant-garde culture to mainstream advertising, as psychedelia became pop cliche and common vernacular.” This textual evidence shows how styles once rejected by mainstream culture were being appropriated.  

In the 1970s, Levi’s incorporated psychedelic motifs, which had been seen on customized Levi’s clothing and closely associated with their desired counterculture demographic, into advertising campaigns. New advertisements strayed away from western heritage and instead tried to attract younger clients. Taking cues from art in other sectors of popular culture, like album covers, Levi’s hired artists who helped musician’s to cultivate a visual aesthetic to attract the same consumer’s to their products. Artists, like Alan Aldridge and John Van Hamersveld, who both made visual art for musicians like The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, turned their talent to

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advertising. In 1971, one of Alan Aldridge’s works appeared in the final issue of *Rag’s Magazine*. *Rag’s*, which only ran for one year, provided a publication specifically directed at counter-culturists. In the magazine’s year long run, only two Levi’s ads appeared, the first showed an African-American couple with the caption, “Have you ever had a bad time in Levi’s?” (Figure XVI). The second was Alan Aldridge’s, which was an illustrated image of jeans flying through space with the optical illusion of the pants having three legs, (Figure XVII). The image is captioned, “Levi’s and Levi’s for Gals. Pants Made to a Different Vision.” The placement of this advertisement within *Rags* as well as the caption directed to consumers looking for a “Different Vision” makes it clear that Levi Strauss & Co. was trying to attract an alternative audience, the same which was altering their denim.

In addition to the “Different Vision” advertisement, Levi’s produced a multitude of psychedelic ads which were far different from their traditionally wholesome ones. In the early 1970s more playful advertisements, like “Brush your knees twice a day with Levi's,” created by Charles White III, showed a tube of toothpaste wearing jeans, (Figure XVIII). The alternative advertisements even ventured into more provocative themes. The “Rest In Levi’s” advertisement attributed to Victor Moscoso, showed a pair of Levi’s committing suicide while to other pairs watch in shock (Figure XIX). The sensitive theme combined with the Mickey Mouse-like gloves attached to the legs only bodies created a very strange image, one that someone attracted to psychedelic imagery might have drawn to.

Psychedelic advertising also entered Levi’s smaller sectors, like Levi’s for Gals. In 1970 an illustrated advertisement was created by artist Dave Willardson which showed a woman hatching out of an egg and transforming into the Levi’s for Gal’s logo, (Figure XX). In his own
words, Willardson describes the idea for the ad as: “They [Levi’s] had created a logo for the new women’s jeans called “Levi’s for Chicks” and the “L” was to have a feminine look to it. The idea that the art director submitted to Levi’s was to play off of the word “Chicks” and thought that the “L” hatching out of an egg would make a wonderful animated spot ad.” Though the animated ad was never created, the different scenes animate the image. The combination of psychedelic motifs, a woman hatching like a bird and transforming into a colorful letter, combined with the newly created female-based market, shows the specific female consumer that Levi’s was tapping into. The “Levi’s for Gals” logo itself shows themes of psychedelia. In one image, a script text saying Levi’s swirls into a larger “L” with a female face and a boot. The script woman-letter hybrid is articulated in stripes of white, orange, yellow and green. The whimsically nonsensical nature of the design could appeal to hippie, or post-hippie women because it has elements of countercultural design combined with a gender-specific product.

Though Levi’s did eventually pick up on the popularity of psychedelic art and the influence of counterculture fashion styles, they did so at the end of the hippie era. The brand’s usage of the countercultural trends and imagery in the 1970s, as a result of visibility from sources like do-it-yourself books which promoted psychedelic motifs, shows the strong influence that the customization of denim, spearheaded by women in the 1960s, had on the future of the denim industry.

Figure I: "Levi's for Gals." Levi Strauss & Co., 1968.


Figure XII: "Peter Max: Portrait of the Artist as a Very Rich Man." *LIFE Magazine*, September 5, 1969, Cover.

Figure XIII: Wrangler, and Peter Max. Hot Pants. 1971.

Figure XVI: "Have you ever had a bad time in Levi's?" Advertisement. *Rags Magazine*, June 1970, 1.

Figure XVIII: White III, Charles for Levi Strauss & Co., "Brush your knees twice a day with Levi's." Advertisement.

Figure XIX: Moscoso, Victor for Levi Strauss & Co., "Rest in Levi's." Advertisement.

Figure XX: Willard, Dave for Levi’s for Gals “Levi’s For Chicks.” Advertisement, 1970.
Conclusion

Jeans were first featured on the cover of *Vogue* magazine in November 1988 (Figure I). The cover image featured a model, Michaela Bercu in a jewel-studded Christian Lacroix jacket juxtaposed with blue jeans from Guess? by Georges Marciano.\(^\text{130}\) The Guess? jeans were only slightly visible towards the bottom of the frame. The placement of jeans on the cover of *Vogue*, an influential magazine at the forefront of women’s high fashion, reveals that by 1988 jeans were an accepted part of a woman’s wardrobe.

The November 1988 issue of *Vogue* commemorated both the first instance of jeans appearing on a major women’s magazine cover as well as Anna Wintour being appointed as editor-and-chief. When Wintour took over *Vogue* from the former editor Grace Mirabella she made the magazine more accessible by trying to appeal to a younger audience.\(^\text{131}\) By featuring jeans on her first cover, Wintour attracted a younger audience and exposed the preexisting audience to blue jeans as a staple in each respective wardrobe.

In the 1970s, before the *Vogue* cover, women’s jeans became more socially acceptable in all classes as they made their way into the designer market. One of the earliest examples of denim as luxury clothing was featured in the November 1970 issue of *Rags Magazine*. In an article about the influence of jeans on designer clothing, titled “Levi Strauss with a French Accent is Yves Saint Laurent,” author Mary Ann Crenshaw recounts French designer Yves Saint Laurent drawing inspiration from American denim: “After a heavily inspired visit to this country’s Army Navy stores Yves dashed back to Paris and dashed off a collection just full of


high-fashion peacoats, blue jeans and the like, at made to order prices that would swivel the head under any gob cap.” Crenshaw included that Saint Laurent was selling his blue jeans for $70, much steeper than Levi’s which were priced at $7.50. By emulating the style of common blue jeans, YSL was appropriating the American look and changing the class dynamics of denim.

In the 1980s the continued effect that luxury denim had on the overall denim industry was evident. In a 1991 New York Times article “90's Denim: Relaxed And Blue and More,” the author reflected back on the sale of jeans in 1981, which was at its peak with 502 million pairs sold. This growth was due to established designers venturing into jean-making and the emergence of specifically denim designers. Designer jeans in the 1980s were termed “status jeans,” because they were considered status objects, a way for the wearer to gain clout due to the higher price. If a woman could buy $25 dollar jeans, rather than $12 jeans, why wouldn't she? In a 1979 New York Times article, “Status Jeans: Lucrative Craze,” designer denim brand Jordache, which began in March 1978, is listed as having a product increase from $15 million to $36 million in just one year. This growth of Jordache is a prime example of how the designer denim market expanded exponentially beginning in the 1980s.

1980s status jean brands focused on marketing and did so much differently than denim retailers in the past, many of which who used niche imagery. By the early 80s, brands such as

136 Ibid.
Gloria Vanderbilt and Calvin Klein presented stylistically un-opinionated and sexier advertisements. In “The Marketing of: Vanderbilt,” a New York Times analysis of Gloria Vanderbilt, the article attributes Vanderbilt’s success to her generic advertising. Speaking on the democracy of Vanderbilt's jeans, author Francesca Stanfill writes: “Not only, it seems, do Vanderbilt jeans ‘check out’ with trend-hungry Bloomingdale’s people, but also out there where women still eat peach cobbler and haven't even heard of cuisine minceur.” The opposite female caricatures presented in this argument shows how Vanderbilt’s jeans attracted female consumers from all backgrounds.

Well throughout the 1980s and 90s, brands continued to produce similar advertisements in an attempt to sustain their widespread success. In September 1981 a Calvin Klein Jeans advertisement featuring Brooke Shields, had her clad in an outfit consisting of a rust-colored button up with her stomach exposed, brown boots and her Calvin’s (Figure II). Twelve years later, in August 1993, Calvin Klein ran a similar ad in Vogue for their jeans, this time with Kate Moss (Figure III). In this advertisement Moss was clad similarly to Shields, in a simple top, with her stomach exposed, and in her Calvin Klein jeans. Despite the decade in between the advertisements, there is similar imagery in order to appeal to a large spectrum of female consumers.

In the early to mid-1990s denim sales were high, but toward the end of the decade there was a shift in popular brands and styles. In March 1999 the New York Times reported the shift in consumership in “Levi’s Blues,” presenting Levi’s plummeting sales as a case study. The article, by Hal Espen, reported a drop in Levi’s sales: “For 1996, Levi Strauss reported record one-year

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sales of $7.1 billion and a profit of more than $1 billion. By the end of 1998, the annual sales figure had shrunk to $6 billion, a 15 percent decline that can be attributed in large measure to the flight of young customers.”

The core demographic of denim consumers were young people and as their pop cultural influences fluctuated so did their clothing styles. In “Levi’s Blues” Epsen attributed the stylistic renaissance of young people to the shift in popular music. The aesthetics of grunge rockers such as Nirvana and rappers like Wu-Tang Clan, influenced both young men and women to conform to the styles of their favorite musicians. New fashion styles ushered in by popular musicians were baggier than the figure flattering styles of past decades.

Once leading denim brands lost consumers by not conforming to their preferred styles, whereas new specialized brands such as, JNCO stood out because they made clothing to appeal specifically to young buyers.

**JNCO Jeans produced very different products than the more traditional Levi’s (Figure IV).** On their website JNCO jeans defines their 1990s rise to success as: “What emerged was more than a brand – JNCO defined a way of life that pushed the limits, encouraged creativity and championed individuality creating the original lifestyle brand that became the foundation of the 90’s youth generation.”

The brand then lists it’s main principles: “Challenge conventionalism. Explore the unfamiliar. Honor individuality.” This brand took baggy jeans to another level, featuring leg openings as large as 32 inches, compared to Levi’s 501 which only have a 16 inch

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139 Epsen, "Levi's Blues."


leg opening. Though JNCO was a niche brand, their extreme products appealed to young people looking for something outside of the norm.

Today, women’s jeans come in a variety of styles and at different price points. For example, on Levi’s official website, their famed 501 style can be purchased for as low as $39.98. Other Levi’s retailers, like Re/Done, describes their products and process: “a celebration of the Levi’s jean’s past and a continuation of the jean’s individual story. We take the vintage denim apart at the seams, repurposing it as the fabric of our new jeans.” At Re/Done, a comparable pair of women’s Levi 501’s sell for up to $349.00 (Figure V). At the most extreme end of the price spectrum is Levi’s collaboration with luxury brands and designers such as, Gosha Rubchinsky, Off-White, Supreme and Vetements. Vetements revealed their Levi’s collaboration during their 2017 Haute Couture show in Paris, France. This collaboration produced denim garments such as jeans which had been reconstructed to include zippers down the legs and a zipper extending from the waist at the front all the way to the back (Figure VI). The head designer of Levi’s, Jonathan Cheung described the mutual success of the Vetements X Levi’s collaboration to The Cut, saying “There’s something about the authenticity of Levi’s that grounds the eccentricity of Demna’s work with cut and proportion. A yin to a yang. I think that’s what makes Vetements accessible. Demna plays with familiarity, authenticity, and twists it. If he used a weird (and we love weird!) fabric and cut it in a weird way, that would be too much. So our ‘realness’ is what makes his take on denim work.” The price for the Vetements X Levi’s collaboration ranges from $1,590 for jeans at

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Saks Fifth Avenue to $2,260 for a reconstructed jacket available at e-commerce website Matches Fashion.

With Levi’s as a case study, the large range in their products and the price ranges that accompany them show how women of all economic statuses are interested in and consume their products. Denim and its byproduct, jeans have come a long way from their humble beginnings as masculine workwear.

Between the 1880s and the 1980s women had varied interactions with denim. These interactions include first using the material for home furnishing to establishing jeans as staples of countercultural fashion, cultivated through customization, to produce individualized self expression. Women’s consumer dynamics from the late nineteenth century to today have resulted in the universal acceptance of jeans across genders.
Figure II: "Advertisement: Jeans (Calvin Klein)." *Vogue* 171, no. 9 (Sep 01, 1981): 70-71.

Figure III: "Advertisement: Calvin Klein (Calvin Klein)." *Vogue* 183, no. 8 (Aug 01, 1993): 206.
Figure IV: "JNCO Jeans." Advertisement

Figure V: Re/Done. Levi's High Rise Ankle Crop. 2018. Jeans.
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