

A Moment of “Subjection” in the Reception of Crinoline by Servants: Focusing on “Longing,” “Imitation,” and “Resistance” in Fashion

Saki SUNAGA

INTRODUCTION

Human-created materials correspond to a variety of environments, including through labor. Especially, clothing as an infrastructure links humans to their environment. Clothing took the form called “fashion” via industrialization; accordingly, clothing was incorporated into the economy. I tend to see fashion as a problem of capitalism because modern fashion has become the symbol of the consumption culture.

When thinking about these questions, it is important to study fashion formation and development because the consumer-oriented society emerged in the mid-Victorian era. At the same time, mobility of social class had progressed. It is necessary to think about the fashion problem according to the source (mid-Victorian dynasty); it corresponds to the sudden transformation of cities and public consumption characterizing the late 19th century.¹

In this paper, we consider fashion as a “practice of totality of everyday clothes,” and we use the analytical perspective to see clothes as things that shape fashion. For example, Nishikawa (2008) says “it is necessary to note about the discourse on how glass culture has penetrated to the modern Japanese society and in that process, show windows have been positioned in everyday life and how they have been used practically, furthermore about the description of the relationship where people’s bodies overlap in layers through glass windows” (Nishikawa 2008: 63). If I reclaim this observation in the context of fashion research, it is not only to summarize the practicality

of everyday clothes into “human relationship” neither it is about focusing only on clothes, but it is about explain the formation of the consumer culture which is linked to class/gender within the conflict among the factors of materials, bodies and space. The formation of the consumer culture is presumably linked to class/gender of the female servant, representing the conflict between materials, bodies, and space. In general, although “servant” refers to a domestic servant, female domestic servants are the focus of this paper. In addition, I focus on “crinoline” as things that formed a fashion of the Victorian era. Under capitalism and the formation of the consumption culture of fashion, how are materials, bodies, and space related to each other?

Until now, discussions centered around the agency of the working class as the proletariat in the East End. In contrast, in this paper it is clarified the reality and the process of enriched agency formation of workers, by focusing on the servant as urban workers, which is a different classification. In mid-19th century London, in its establishment as a “consumption city,” crinoline and servants met on the stage of the West End. It is important to note that through this contact the location for subjection of the working class was formed through fashion.

In 1st chapter, I describe the servant, crinoline, and *Punch* magazine as subjects and methods of research. In 2nd chapter, the city achieves a rapid transformation, which I confirm from the viewpoint of the clothing industry. Further, I clarify the specificity of servants living in the consumption space of the

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West End, not the East End. In 3rd chapter, I attempt to analyze the relationship between the acceptance of fashion and the servant's agency through materials from the viewpoint of "longing," "imitation," and "resistance." With the mass production of clothes as the backdrop, longing results in imitation. However, the acceptance of fashion does not end with imitation. Servants were being incorporated into the larger activity of the modern fashion system by following the fashion code until they abandoned wearing crinoline. At the same time, I observed that crinoline became a tool of the "resistance," leading the way to agency formation as the fashion of servants. This is the hypothesis of the paper.

SUBJECTS OF STUDY: SERVANTS, CRINOLINE, AND PUNCH

The employment of domestic servants increased with the substantial and rapid growth of the middle class during the 19th century. In 1891, 140 million people were estimated to be employed as domestic servants. By 1901, they were not only the major work for women in the country, but, with a total labor force of nearly 150 million people, they formed the largest occupational group. In the background, there developed the view that the employment of domestic staff was in itself a sign of respectability and an indicator of social status (Horn 1986: 13).

What kind of clothes did servants wear? In the mid-19th century, servants were able to choose their clothes freely when going out. However, there was a limit. According to Horn (1986), it was common to put on plain clothes for indoor work, but there was more freedom in the choice of street clothes. Attire was gradually unified as "white caps and aprons for mornings, and black dresses for afternoons"—that is, a uniform (Horn 1986: 12).² Richmond points out that tense relations between the bourgeois mistresses

became a factor that limited the options in uniforms and holiday clothes of servants:

Mistresses' desire to mark a greater separation between themselves and their staff led to the imposition of uniforms on female domestic servants, intensifying clothing as a key site of tension between mistress[es'] and servants' off-duty dress, the invasion of personal liberty denying them freedom of expression and reflecting a belief that servants were the property, rather than the employees, of their mistresses (Richmond 2013: 242).

Furthermore, in addition to this change in clothing, Horn points out that it is important to note that the relationship between an employer and servant changed:

As small shopkeepers, tradesmen and clerks moved in growing numbers into the servant-keeping classes, so the distinctions between employer and maid were more firmly drawn... And nowhere was this clearer than among employers whose own station in life was uncomfortably close to that of the maid[s] they kept, and for whom the preservation of petty distinctions of rank was all-important (Horn 1986: 13).

Servants acquired relatively more freedom than the era of feudalism. On the other hand, clothes selection in the bourgeois home had many more restrictions. Servants were placed in unstable relationships and could be immediately fired if their mistresses were not satisfied.

The feudal heritage that could be called a modern contradiction involved the severe constraints imposed on the selection of clothes. The involvement of servants with the fashion in this situation resulted in a

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clue for solving the problem: the crinoline.

Crinoline was the fabric made from weaving hemp and horsehair, and the brace to inflate the skirt also came to be called by this name. The fashion mode of the big inflated skirt was called "crinoline" (Koga 2004: 43). It was fashionable in the 1850s and 1860s.³

It has been known that crinoline was worn not only by bourgeois women, but also by servant women. Walkley points out that crinoline was "the first fashion to be universally adopted by all ages and classes, for it could be cheaply provided to the wearer with such a distinctive appearance that not to wear it was to look strange" (Walkley 1985: 35). Crinoline was the "first fashion," adopted by all ages and classes based on its inexpensiveness. In previous research, there are considerable discussions regarding the subject of the receptor from bourgeois women's position, though it has been pointed out that servants or working-class women also wore crinoline, so the relationship between crinoline and servants has been discussed insufficiently.⁴

In this paper, to target the ironic and humorous cartoon about the servant and crinoline from *Punch*⁵, the satire featuring women wearing crinoline has been used since July 1856. At first, *Punch* had used satire to address the situation in which bourgeois women wore crinoline; then, in the 1860s, it began to increase the number of satires about servant women. From cartoons about crinoline and servants, crinoline has been worn as everyday clothing of servants.

In the next chapter, as a prerequisite of fashion reception, I want to confirm that the West End became a contact place for crinoline and servants.

THE CONTRAST OF LONDON

In this section, I confirm the situation in London in the mid-19th century that is foundational to the information presented in the next section about

crinoline and servants. I would clarify the contrast of the aspects of "light" and "darkness" of London, from the perspective of fashion industry which was an important industry in London. The aspect of "light" could be found in the development of consumer culture in the west side of London, and the aspect of "darkness" could be seen in the exploitation which supported the consumer culture in the east side.

The West End:

The Space where Servants Lived

The east and west segregation of labor has been recognized as class differentiation; however, the working class and the bourgeoisie had an overlap beyond the framework of the economy in the space of the West End.

Servants were the live-in workers in the homes of the bourgeoisie of the West End. Therefore, the place where they lived was a space of temptation in the West End. In the following, I adhere to the point of view mainly from Kawakita (1986) regarding the clothing industry and consumption/urbanization of the West End.

In 1851, the first international exhibition was held in London. The U.K. entered into the period of the greatest prosperity in its history; there was a pride in the technology of the Industrial Revolution that had been used for more than 100 years.

In addition, wealth was concentrated because of the tax machinery in London, the world's largest consumption center. The employment structure was affected, in that odd work or so-called "casual work" did not need mastery of skills; it was concentrated in an area where transportation expenses were low. "Longing for London" for local young people was directed to the consumer culture. The thought, "I can get a job," led 5,000 to 8,000 newcomers to London year by year (Kawakita 1986).

In 19th century England, mass marketing of clothing prevailed. Consumption of clothing also

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increased several times in half a century beginning in 1861. With increased consumption, consumption of fabric increased.

Mass-produced fabrics were sold in retail stores in London—in the West End, especially, where tailors worked tirelessly. At that time, the process for manufacturing clothes began with the consumer purchasing fabric and small embellishments at retail stores, taking them to a tailor, and paying for custom craftsmanship. Therefore, it is also important to note the growth of clothing merchants, tailors, and knickknack retailers in the West End.

According to Tomomatsu, the population associated with the clothing industry nearly doubled for the period 1841 to 1851. In addition, the number of clothing merchants increased 4.17 times compared to the increase in the overall population—2.17 times—from 1841 to 1891, indirectly indicating that the population in the West End increased significantly as the area became more consumer-oriented and urbanized (Tomomatsu 2001-03: 106-108).

I should emphasize here that people who had been living in the West End were not only the bourgeoisie. Servants were also residents, and they enjoyed window shopping in the city.

The East End:***Tailoring was Performed in Slums***

How was this longing for fashion manifested in the West End? Not only was there the formation of a fashion culture for bourgeois women, but servants were also caught up in this affinity for fashion. Regarding clothing production, I describe the background that supported associations among bourgeois women, servants, and the fashion industry.

According to British modern historian Kawakita (1986), the most important fact in the history of the establishment of slums in London was that the people coming from various provinces to the city for jobs settled in the suburbs initially. People who were not

able to succeed there and the next generation flowed into the slums (Kawakita 1986: 7-39).

The clothing industry was an important employer. London occupied a vital position in the textile industry, mainly the silk industry, until the mid-1820s. Clothes as consumer goods had to pass through "clothes processing" that included sewing and tailoring, a booming industry for London (Kawakita 1986: 44).

One of the characteristics of the clothes processing business in London was the cottage industry labor system (not a factory system). The poor obtained their materials from wholesalers and engaged in simple processing at home; finished goods were returned to merchants. Since apprenticeship regulations were abolished in 1814, craftspeople worked in what could be called a severe "sweating system." The organized tailor's union in London was destroyed completely. The West End was composed of certain high-quality shops and numerous public shops in various places throughout the city. The working structure had shifted in the East End as well, where women, children and Jewish immigrants from Germany started working at home in slums.

The invention of the sewing machine for use in homes and small studios is pointed out by Kawakita.⁶ The sewing machine invented by the American Singer Company was released in 1851. Its popularity spread rapidly, taking advantage of the first patent issued in 1861 in the U.K.; 500 sewing machines were introduced in 1869, and six million were produced from 1853 through 1896. The U.K. purchased a sewing machine hastily in an international exhibition, but it was still used only partially in the mid-19th century. As mentioned before, subcontracting of labor in the East End still promoted hand-sewn clothing. Backed by a sudden social change, the structure that supported a working class for the fashion industry went through a transition, and the production of clothes gradually switched from a domestic industry

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to a manufacturing industry.

Bourgeois clothes in the West End had been made by workers in the East End. Accordingly, there was a problem is the duality of social attributes involving servants. Servants were members of the working class in general, particularly workers in the East End. On the other hand, from the point of view of fashion, servants were also involved in consumption, which positioned them close to the bourgeoisie. Therefore, I want to call attention to this particularity of servants.

More, I confirm two points from the point of view of the clothing industry about the spatial contrast of London and the duality of the social attributes of servants. In the next section, I bring up specifically how space, materials, and bodies are associated.

**THE RECEPTION OF FASHION:
ADOPTING AND ABANDONING
CRINOLINE**

*The Longing for Fashion and Imitation of
Crinoline Style*

How was crinoline worn by servants? I analyze it from an illustration in Punch (Plate 1).

I think that "SERVANTGALISM" (Plate 1) refers to the young girl's behavior, characteristic among servants. Noteworthy is that the servant on the left is reading a fashion magazine, suggesting that servants recognize the contrast between the elegant ladies depicted in fashion magazines and their own dowdy appearances resulting from hard work. According to previous research, a new magazine for bourgeois women was widespread during this period.⁷ Therefore, it is probable that servants would have ordinarily seen magazines for bourgeois women in bourgeois homes. I considered that the influence of these fashion magazines created among servants a longing for crinoline style.

How did servants wear crinoline? From illustrations in Punch, the servant sweeping with

a broom wore crinoline under the skirt, thereby imitating the crinoline style of her mistress (Plate 2). In another illustration, it appears that the servant wearing crinoline has some difficulty performing



SERVANTGALISM ;
OR, WHAT'S TO BECOME OF THE MISSUSES?—No. 7.

Housemaid. "Well, Soosan, I've made up my mind not to stop 'ere no longer to work like Negroes as we do!"
Cook. "Nor I, nuther! But just turn the meat, will you, please, the whilst I finish my Crochet!"

Plate 1. SERVANTGALISM; or, what's to become of the missuses?—No. 7.

Note: The words in the plate 1 is that:

Housemaid. "Well, Soosan, I've made up my mind not to stop 'ere no longer to work like Negroes as we do!"

Cook. "Nor I, nuther! But just turn the meat, will you, please, whilst I finish my crochet?"

Source: Punch, 1853. It is owned by Hitotsubashi University Library.



CRINOLINE FOR DOMESTIC USE.

Domestic. "Bother missus! She wears it herself, and I don't see why I shouldn't."

Plate 2. CRINOLINE FOR DOMESTIC USE.

Note: The words in the plate 2 is that:

Domestic. "Bother missus! She wears it herself, and I don't see why I shouldn't."

Source: Punch, June 28, 1862. It is owned by Hitotsubashi University Library.

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tasks, so crinoline was not suitable for servants whose daily lives were occupied almost entirely by work (Plate 3). Servants' crinoline did not fit perfectly, perhaps because they might have purchased a coarse and less expensive form of crinoline by the manufacturer.⁸ In other words, it was possible for servants to imitate the style of mistresses, but their crinoline was not of the same high quality as that worn by bourgeois women.

**"Resistance" in the Abundance of Crinoline:
The "Struggle for Servants' Lives"**

Crinoline style made servants engage in imitation; however, it was not a simple change from desire to imitation.

From Plate 4, it is apparent that servants began to be aware of looks from others; thus, they accepted the tension associated with wearing certain clothing items in daily life. Servants learned the dominant cultural norms in Victorian society, as seen in their acceptance of the crinoline style worn by mistresses.

Here, I want to emphasize the following point.



CAUSE AND EFFECT.
Housemaid, "DRA'T THE BOTHERING CHINA CUPS AND THINGS, THEY BE ALWAYS A-KNOCKING UP AGAINST ONE'S CRINOLINE."

Plate 3. CAUSE AND EFFECT.

Note: The words in the plate3 is that:
Housemaid. "Dra't the bothering china cups and things. They be always a-knocking up against one's crinoline."
Source: *Punch*, March 26, 1864. It is owned by Hitotsubashi University Library.

The acceptance of crinoline indicated that servants were adopting the form of modern clothes. Servants recognized that not wearing crinoline was embarrassing. They conformed to the code of fashion, such as dressing according to the appropriate attitude for contact with outsiders.

In the late 1860s, crinoline was considered by bourgeois woman as "out of fashion." Gradually, it was abandoned. From illustrations in *Punch* in 1866



SERVANTGALISM.
Mary, "DID YOU CALL, MUM?"
Lady, "YES, MARY! I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU NOT TO WEAR YOUR HOOP BEFORE YOU HAD DONE YOUR ROOMS, BECAUSE YOU BROKE THE JUGS AND BASINS WITH IT!"
Mary, "OH, MUM! YOU SEE THE SWEEPS WERE COMING THIS MORNING, AND, REALLY, I COULD NOT THINK OF OPENING THE DOOR TO THEM SUCH A FIGGER AS I SHOULD HA' BEEN WITHOUT MY CRINOLINE!"

Plate 4. SERVANTGALISM.

Note: The words in the plate4 is that:
Mary. "Did you call, Mum?"
Lady. "Yes, Mary! I thought I told you not to wear your hoop before you had done your rooms, because you broke the jugs and basins with it!"
Mary. "Oh, Mum! You see the sweeps were coming this morning, and, really, I could not think of opening the door to them; such a figger as I should ha' been without my crinoline!"

Source: *Punch*, November 21, 1863. It is owned by Hitotsubashi University Library



"LIKE HER IMPUDENCE."
Missis and the Young Ladies (together), "GOODNESS GRACIOUS, J' mima! WHAT HAVE YOU----WHERE'S YOUR CR'N'LIN?" (This word snappishly.)
Jemima, "Oh 'M, please 'M, which I understood as they was a goin' out, 'M----" [Receives warning on the spot.]

Plate 5. "LIKE HER IMPUDENCE."

Note: The words in the plate5 is that:
Missis and the Young Ladies (together). "Goodness Gracious, J' mima! What have you----Where's your Cr'n'lin?" (this word snappishly.)
Jemima. "Oh 'M, please 'M, which I understood as they was a goin' out, 'M----" (receives warning on the spot.)
Source: *Punch*, July 14, 1866. It is owned by Hitotsubashi University Library.

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(Plate 5), it can be seen that the servant abandoned the crinoline style, not because it was "unsuitable for labor," but because it was out of fashion. However, the servant was surprised by criticism from the mistress. This means that lower classes were expected to adopt new fashions later than the bourgeois.

Servants voluntarily wore crinoline through imitation and later abandoned the custom voluntarily. Servants ignored social codes required for themselves. It is possible to read the resistance of servants through their acceptance and abandonment of crinoline style.

Such resistance has certain social implications. For example, as a social situation of the 1850s and 1860s, a prior study offers the following description. In the wake of assault/abuse cases regarding actions perpetrated against servants by their employers in the 1850s, Congress passed the Apprentices and Servants Act of 1851, which "laid down that the master of any servant or apprentice under the age of eighteen was to supply 'necessary Food, Clothing, or Lodging,' and failure to comply could be punished with three years' imprisonment. In addition, where any 'young Person under the Age of Sixteen' was hired out as a servant from a workhouse, 'so long as such young Person shall be under the Age of Sixteen,' he or she was to receive at least two visits a year from the local relieving officer or other official appointed by the Poor Law Guardians" (Horn 1986: 120). Instability of servants' lives was indicated by the fact that some were not even compensated for their work. If the relationship with the employer worsened, a servant was forced to quit immediately; in such cases, he/she might not have been given even a meal. It is said that such assault/abuse cases lasted until the end of the 19th century.

Servants were forced to be subordinate to their mistresses, and they wore crinoline in their domestic roles. Resistance through the use of crinoline could have been unconscious, though it could be considered

inherent in the struggle for their lives. Thus, it is possible that servants were asking for freedom and rights through imitations of fashion.

Resistance after Crinoline

This paper is not intended to cover the 1870s; however, I wondered how the subject of servants changed. To clarify the importance of their resistance as a turning point in crinoline fashions, I include a simple prospect from the 1870s and after.

Plate 6 suggests that the servant received the mistress's "hand-me-downs." In the illustration, the servant has proposed to "loop it up," suggesting that she will own the dress someday. From the statement that she "ought to have some say in the matter." I consider that she was verbalizing her sense of fashion. In other words, the servant expressed herself through fashion. She probably wore a dress after hemming it herself. Thus, she would not directly inherit the



Plate 6. "CHACUN POUR SOI."
Note: The words in the plate6 is that:
Lady's Maid. "I beg pardon, Ma'am, your dress is trailing---hadn't I better loop it up before you go out?"
Lady. "No, thanks, Parker, I prefer letting it trail, as it's the fashion just now----"
Lady's Maid. "Yes, Ma'am---but as the dress is to be mine someday, I think I ought to have some say in the matter!"
Source: *Punch*, November 4, 1876. It is owned by Hitotsubashi University Library.

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fashion of the bourgeois lady; she would have an "improved" dress. Such improvements indicated that servants developed their own fashion culture.

Blamed and mocked by ladies and society, servants also adopted and abandoned crinoline. Such shrewdness exhibited by servants always caused tensions between classes. The fashion process was present in tensions and it served to integrate servants into the structure of the fashion system. Their collective role in this system was not passive. Servants participated actively with their own selections. In this regard, crinoline is positioned as a historically significant material that prompted the first step in the formation of a relationship with fashion and working-class women.

CONCLUSION

From satirical paintings about crinoline and servants in the magazine *Punch* of the 1850s and 1860s (regarding daily lives of servants), I revealed that crinoline was worn according to the meanings of longing, imitation, and resistance. Servants with a longing for fashion in their life spaces within the bourgeois home imitated the crinoline style. For servants as workers, crinoline style was not suitable for work because it was non-functional. Eventually, servants abandoned their crinoline, not because it was not functional but because it became outmoded. It was the result of their selections intended to adapt to fashion trends.

Servants were incorporated into the system of modern fashion by following the fashion code, which ultimately involved the abandonment of fashions made of crinoline. At the same time, I also revealed that crinoline had a role as an intermediary as a resistive agent for servants.

However, it is also impossible to miss the fact that such resistance was paradoxical for servants. Deteriorated relationships with mistresses developed

as servants followed trends in fashion; sometimes, servants' lives became more unstable. In other words, viewing the overall mid-Victorian history, it cannot always be said that the "resistances" through fashion lead to results that enhance the freedom and autonomy of servants. For servants forced into submission based on class and gender, resistance through fashion seemed to be their only choice.

What is more, crinoline functioned as an apparatus for disciplining or training servants to adopt the modern trend of wearing clothes to be fashionable. Servants acculturated the style to form a physical stance. However, I also considered that there was an inner governance accomplished through imitation of the physical stance of the mistress through wearing fashionable clothing. In other words, imitation in terms of clothing choice was the means of self-expression. It was the opportunity to rebel against a mistress by seeking freedom through clothing. Crinoline enabled it. Unexpectedly, crinoline invited servants to participate in the large fashion infrastructure. Servants were also challenged to "to live in freedom and dignity" by expressing themselves through fashion.

The urban environment created resistance in fashion in mid-19th century London; crinoline and domestic servants aligned in the West End. Conditions enabled servants to engage in a life space different from their working-class space. Furthermore, it is important to know that a factor influencing crinoline's fashion popularity was mass production. In other words, the subject of servants' use of crinoline emerged by the interaction of those conditions with the historical trend in wearing crinoline and the spatial factor of consumption/urbanization of the West End.

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Notes

1 These questions respond also to the following contemporary issues: In modern society, where utopia excluded from the consumer society cannot exist, we are surrounded by the dominant culture, but instead of getting rid of or denying it, how can we grasp the opportunity to subjectify through remaking or recreating?

2 This became the typical clothing of the female servant until the 20th century.

3 For example, the description of crinoline in the Victoria and Albert Museum holdings follows: "The 'artificial' or 'cage' crinoline appeared in 1857 as a welcome and more practical alternative. It was made of spring steel hoops that increased in diameter towards the bottom and connected with tapes. The number of hoops ranged from 9 to 18 according to the formality of the dress. The variety of different crinoline styles on the market was huge. Spring steel was the most popular material for the frame because it was flexible. In Sheffield, manufacturers produced enough crinoline wire each week to make over half a million crinolines" (Victoria and Albert Museum 2016).

4 Walkley demonstrates from the many articles in *Punch* that the servant had imitated the crinoline fashion of the mistress. However, the meaning of this imitation has not been fully analyzed.

5 *Punch* is a satirical magazine supported by middle class intellectuals for more than 150 years from its first issue on July 17, 1841, until it is ceased publication on April 8, 1992. *Punch* emphasized four points in the progress of civilization: (1) the independence of impartiality, (2) social reform, (3) universal humanism, and (4) progressivism. The conservative and sympathetic view toward workers was "one that assumes the maintenance of the current system and order of capitalism" (Muraoka 1996: 15). Most of the reporters and the painter affiliated with *Punch* were male. There is a need to keep in mind that it was a medium for men by men.

6 The sewing machine invented by the American Singer Corporation appeared in the World Expo in 1851. It was introduced to Britain and rapidly spread when the first patent expired in 1861 (Kawakita 1986: 59-65).

7 According to Toya, "Women's magazines appeared as popular magazines and began to increase dramatically the number of copies in the mid-19th century by the improvement of printing technology, the development of transport means, and the reduction of taxes related to the publication" (Toya 2000: 229).

8 "The largest firm to manufacture crinoline was Thomson's in London, which had branches in New York, Paris, and Brussels, as well as others in Saxony and Bohemia. The London factory alone employed over 1,000 women and turned out between 3,000-4,000 crinolines daily" (Waugh 1954: 166). It can be seen that crinoline was mass produced by women.

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