

A Labour Force for the Consumer Century: Commodification in Canada's Largest Department Stores, 1890 to 1940

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Article abstract

Between 1890 and 1940 Canada's three largest department stores — Eaton's, Simpson's, and the Hudson's Bay Company — developed a multifaceted system of employee commodification. Not only did they encourage their employees to become avid consumers, so did they market their employees' activities, interests, and bodies. They undertook these commodifying gestures in an attempt to extract value from their workforces. Investigating the rise and operation of commodification at these major retailers, this paper offers new insights into corporate management systems, demonstrates that commodification had negative consequences for employees, and provides fresh perspectives on 20th-century consumer capitalism.

A Labour Force for the Consumer Century: Commodification in Canada's Largest Department Stores, 1890 to 1940

Donica Belisle

She says her friends declare she is so thoroughly an Eatonian, they can almost see the diamond E on her face.

Eaton's Toronto employee magazine, 1944,
on the occasion of Miss Carthy's 35th
anniversary with the company¹

IF CONTEMPORARY ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS are to be believed, North Americans enjoy endless opportunities for pleasure and fulfillment. All we have to do is buy a particular product or service, and happiness will result. The liberal values of freedom, individualism, and choice run rampant in advertisers' messages. We are free to choose the commodities that will make us free — free of worry, ostracization, and pain. Significantly, though, not everybody can afford the products advertisers tell us are necessary. And, those who can afford consumer goods often find that consumer satisfaction is fleeting. As soon as one purchases a commodity, marketers begin promoting an even better, more exciting item. It is no wonder that critics say that consumer culture can be alienating. Advertisers promise fulfillment, but can deliver disappointment.

Just as advertising and consumer culture can cause consumer dissatisfaction, so can they have negative consequences for people who work in the service industries. As corporations become more dependent on "optics" and public relations, they start going to greater lengths to ensure their workforces match their images. IBM promotes a workforce culture of restless innovation and corporate dedication,

¹*Flash*, 19 June 1944, 2, Archives of Ontario [AO], T. Eaton Papers [TEP], Series 144.

and Westjet cultivates a culture of friendliness, good-naturedness, and patience. Future Shop employs savvy salespeople that customers might try to impress and emulate, and Gap hires preppy salespeople that look like the company's target consumer group. Corporations also encourage employees to identify with their employers' images. Holding parties and contests in which workers win company products, and making it compulsory for employees to dress and behave according to corporate policy, companies attempt to craft workforces that fit their identities.

Labour scholars have explored the effects of management's turn toward image-making. In her study of the emotional labour that US flight attendants perform, Arlie Russell Hochschild finds that stewardesses are trained to behave artificially. Even when customers are being irritating, insulting, or aggressive, flight attendants must restrain their instinctive responses. This causes stress, emotional burnout, and feelings of estrangement. Pei-Chia Lan, in her work on cosmetics saleswomen in Taiwanese department stores, demonstrates that such saleswomen must be youthful, attractive, and slim. She writes, "To resist the depreciation of body capital, saleswomen consume a variety of beautification products ... and they continue to work harder and longer to pay for the expenses accrued while cultivating their bodies." While the saleswomen Lan interviewed liked fashion and beauty, they also knew that they would be unable to remain in their positions "after getting pregnant or turning thirty." Scholars have also noted that corporations have attempted to convince workers to become consumers. In her study of the Westclox plant in Peterborough, Ontario, between 1923 and 1960, Joan Sangster demonstrates that its in-house publication portrayed workers as consumers not only of Westclox's products, but of commodities in general.²

In light of the service sector's constant growth, it is imperative that scholars continue investigating advertising's and consumer culture's roles in the workplace. Exploring how and why Canada's largest department stores — the T. Eaton Company [Eaton's], the R. Simpson Company [Simpson's], and the Hudson's Bay Company [HBC] — incorporated advertising and consumption into workers' experiences between 1890 and 1940, this article offers a historical analysis of image-making and consumerism within the workplace. In Canada, as in most industrializing countries, department stores were the first retailers to experiment successfully with mass merchandising. They were also among the West's biggest corporations. By World War II Eaton's was the largest retailer in the British empire. It was also Canada's third largest employer. Building on research by international department-store historians, and paying particular attention to the Canadian case, this article reveals that the industrialized world's earliest mass merchandisers pio-

²Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley 2003), 187-189; Pei-Chia Lan, "Working in a Neon Cage: Bodily Labor of Cosmetics Saleswomen in Taiwan," *Feminist Studies*, 29 (Spring 2003), 21-45, esp. 39, 32; Joan Sangster, "The Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923-60," *Labour/Le Travail*, 32 (Fall 1993), 167-200, esp. 193.

neered the image-making and consumer-creating strategies now common within service-worker industries.

To arrive at a precise understanding of the operation of consumer capitalism, this article uses particular terms in specific ways. The verb “to consume” is used to refer to activities involved in looking for, purchasing, using, and destroying goods and services available in the capitalist marketplace. The noun “consumer” denotes a private individual who is actively involved in looking for, purchasing, using, and destroying capitalist-produced and -distributed goods and services. “Consumerist” is used as an adjective to describe a subject’s orientation toward consuming. “Consumer culture” is used to denote a culture characterized by high levels of consumption. Although seemingly commonplace, these terms actually have their origins in the rise of the bourgeoisie and the triumph of *laissez-faire* economics. While “consume” originally referred to fire’s destructive action, in the late 14th century writers began using it to describe “evaporation,” “disease,” “wasting,” “devour[ing],” and “decay.” In the next century writers began using “consume” to describe the acquisition, use, and destruction of material goods. After another 100 years, the link between “consume” and objects became explicit, and political economists began using the word “consumption” to discuss the “utilization of the products of industry.” By the early 20th century, “consume” took on the meaning it holds today. The binary opposite of “produce,” it connotes the demand side of free market capitalism.³

Many theorists have explored “commodity” and “commodification,” but the best analyses remain those of Karl Marx. Not only did Marx believe “the commodity” is “the economic cell-form” of “bourgeois society,” but he demonstrates that experiences under capitalism cannot be understood without first exploring the commodity. Marx was well aware that the history of the commodity is inextricable from the history of political economy. Indeed, although “commodity” referred originally to that which is “convenient” and “useful,” writers began using “commodity” during the 1400s in reference to “material advantages” and “wealth.” By the late 18th century “commodity” referred to “article[s] of commerce,” “goods, merchandise, wares, [and] produce.” Cognizant of the commodity’s transformation during the rise of the bourgeoisie, Marx uses “commodity” specifically to refer to goods and services exchanged for profit in the capitalist marketplace. Defining commodities as goods whose values are measured through the process of exchange, or “exchange-values,” Marx distinguishes commodities from “use-values,” or goods whose values are measured by considering individual goods’ use-potential.⁴

³Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2nd ed., 1989 <<http://www.oed.com>> (28 January 2002).

⁴Karl Marx, “Preface to the First German Edition,” in “Capital, Volume One,” trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling and ed. Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York 1978), 295, 302-329. Also “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts,”

Goods are not the only entities that can become commodified. In *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx suggests that within the discourses of political economy, “the worker sinks to the level of a commodity and becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities.” In the sixth chapter of *Capital*, he provides an explanation of the historical conditions that lead to the commodification of labour-power. Since labour creates commodities, those who wish to extract value, or profit, by exchanging commodities “must be so lucky as to find ... in the market, a commodity [that] possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value[.]” Such a value-producing commodity is the human being. Within their bodies, humans contain both the “physical and mental capabilities” necessary for commodity production. Value-seekers are successful in their quests to find labour-producing commodities because within capitalist society, there exists propertyless people who have nothing to bring to the market but their labour.⁵ In the act of selling labour-power to a purchaser in exchange for wages, workers transform individual productive capacity into a commodity.

Following Marx, this article defines the commodity as an object, service, person, or other entity infused with exchange-value. It understands commodification to be the process whereby an object, service, person, or other entity acquires exchange-value. For this reason, it refers to the type of labour management employed at Eaton’s, Simpson’s, and the HBC between 1890 and 1940 as commodification. Like all other employers, these companies commodified their workers because they purchased their workers’ labour-power. Yet commodification operated at these workplaces in other ways. These department stores viewed their workers as potential consumers. Workers possessed wages, and, when exchanged for goods, wages became sources of profit. Department stores hence sought to coax wages out of workers by convincing them to acquire a consumerist ethos. Besides allowing the stores to recoup capital spent on salaries, workers’ “propensity to consume,” to borrow a phrase from John Maynard Keynes, had other benefits.⁶ Employees who actively sought, purchased, and used company products became advertisements for their stores. If they were enthusiastic about company wares, they would convince others to purchase goods. More than this, if they displayed company merchandise in attractive ways during their leisure time, they would promote their company’s products while off the job.

The inducement of consumerism was only one side of commodification at Canada’s giant retailers. Department stores also commodified employees by incorporating their appearances and actions into advertising and publicity. It is commonly believed that when workers sign employment contracts, they agree to

trans. Martin Milligan, *Marx-Engels Reader*, 70-105; Oxford English Dictionary Online (28 January 2002); Marx, “Capital,” 302-319.

⁵Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts,” 70; “Capital,” 336-337.

⁶John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (London and Basingstoke 1936), 89.

provide certain services to employers. These include physical strength, a commitment to productivity, and whatever identifiable skills the worker might possess. It is clear, however, that Eaton's, Simpson's, and the HBC viewed workers' value in broader terms. Although these employers paid workers only for the services agreed to within the labour contract, they actually attempted to extract further services from them. Through hiring policies as well as welfare and training programs, Eaton's, Simpson's, and the HBC tried to engineer workforces they believed would enhance the stores' images and products. As well, through their formidable advertising and publicity departments, they made their employees' behaviours, bodies, and endeavours part of their marketing strategies. At Simpson's, the HBC, and Eaton's, workers' value was determined not only by their strength, skills, and commitments to productivity, but also by their appearances, activities, and personalities.

Department stores have left copious records detailing their benevolent treatment of employees. Historians have mined these sources to excellent effect, demonstrating that between 1890 and World War II many large department stores in Australia, western Europe, and North America blended paternalist labour management with welfare capitalism.⁷ Their studies have noted the existence of image-making within department stores' labour management, but they have not yet made image-making a central focus of inquiry. Paying attention to both consumerism and image-making, this article reveals dimensions of department-store employees' experiences that have not yet been adequately analysed. In fact, the impetus for this article partly arose from my own encounters with retail labour management, as well as my difficulties finding sources that explained those encounters. Between 1995 and 1999 I worked part-time as a "sales associate" in a mall clothing store owned by Co-Mark. Associates earned minimum wage but received assurances of raises and promotions if they demonstrated enthusiasm and met sales quo-

⁷Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920* (Princeton 1981); Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (London and New York 1995); Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana and Chicago 1988); Joy Santink, *Timothy Eaton and the Rise of His Department Store* (Toronto 1990); Susan Forbes, "The Influence of the Social Reform Movement and T. Eaton Company's Business Practices on the Leisure of Eaton's Female Employees During the Early Twentieth Century," PhD thesis, Department of Kinesiology, University of Western Ontario, 1998; Forbes, "Gendering Corporate Welfare Practices: Female Sports and Recreation at Eaton's During the Depression," *Rethinking History*, 5 (2001), 59-74; Mary Matthews, "Working for Family, Nation, and God: Paternalism and the Dupuis Frères Department Store, 1926-1952," MA thesis, Department of History, McGill University, 1997; Gail Reekie, "'Humanising Industry': Paternalism, Welfarism, and Labour Control in Sydney's Big Stores, 1890-1930," *Labour History*, 53 (November 1987), 1-19; Theresa McBride, "A Woman's World: Department Stores and the Evolution of Women's Employment, 1870-1920," *French Historical Studies*, 10 (Autumn 1978), 664-683.

tas. Rarely were these assurances fulfilled. The store manager acted as a surrogate mother and friend, inviting workers for special company-paid meals and treating associates to “ladies nights out.” In true paternalist fashion, though, if she caught employees discussing wages or unions, she fired them. Similarly, if workers asked for particular shifts, she treated these requests as individual favours that would be granted only if workers “deserved” them. Fringe benefits at this workplace included discounts on clothing and financial assistance with business-related post-secondary training. Incentives to consumerism were constant, as were management’s attempts to extract exchange-value from employees’ appearances. At this company, strategies of paternalism, welfarism, and commodification worked together to keep wages down, to keep turnover high, to create consumerist workers, and to generate appearances that bolstered sales.

This blend of paternalism, welfarism, and commodification is notably different from another management style that labour historians often associate with consumer culture. Researchers sometimes use the term fordism to describe a situation in which unionized workers relinquish control over the labour process in return for adequate leisure time and high wages. The word derives from the “Five Dollar Day” that Henry Ford introduced to assembly-line workers in Detroit in 1913. Concerned about worker dissatisfaction and low productivity, Ford reduced the workday from nine to eight hours and gave employees a daily raise from \$2.50 to \$5.00. Productivity rose, and the Five Dollar Day did provide “solutions to the Ford labor problems.” In recognition of Ford’s dubious contributions to labour management, scholars today use the term fordism to describe the post-World War II agreement that unionized workers made with the state and capital. They committed to high productivity and workplace quiescence in return for high wages, secure jobs, and adequate leisure time.⁸

As workers in de-industrializing countries move into non-unionized service jobs, employers are feeling less pressure to meet fordism’s demands of high wages and job security. Especially within retailing and fast food, companies are practising the pre-fordist traditions of low wages, job insecurity, and individualized treatment of workers. Significantly, however, post-fordist employers are retaining a commitment to encouraging consumerism among employees. They are also taking employee commodification to new heights. Recent television commercials by Bell Canada, McDonald’s, and Wal-Mart all portray employees as healthy, happy, and loyal. As corporations’ advertising and personnel departments become increasingly intertwined, it becomes imperative that researchers document the operation and consequences of workplace commodification. Not only must we look at how commodification influences employees’ well-beings, so must we examine how commodification affects workers’ efforts to improve working conditions and how

⁸Stephen Meyer III, *The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908-1921* (Albany 1981), 106-108, 119, 200.

commodification shapes workers' experiences of class exploitation and identity formation.

Rise of Mass Merchandising

During the 18th and 19th centuries, subtle but substantial changes transformed Western retailing. Older traditions of bartering, credit, and exchanging home-produced items for retail goods began coexisting alongside newer practices of fixed prices and cash-only sales. Urban retail stores became destinations for pleasure-seeking adventurers, and "shopping" became a new social activity. Mass industrial production lowered prices and made available unprecedented goods assortments and volumes. Currency stabilization and the growth of international market networks oiled the channels of commodity distribution. The developing bourgeoisie's associations among status, identity, domesticity, and consumption provided a growing market for household goods, as did the receipt of money-wages and the rising real incomes of industrial labourers. Newly built railroads carried goods from factories to downtown retailers. They also carried goods away from retailers and towards rural mail order customers. Urban mass transit connected suburbs to downtowns and funneled crowds of shoppers to large retailers, and developments in communication, including standardized postal services and the rise of advertising, allowed downtown retailers to keep customers informed of stock and prices.⁹

France boasted the world's first department stores, but the US was not far behind. By the 1890s most Western nations, including Canada, had major department stores. Historians pinpoint three essential characteristics that differentiated turn-of-the-century department stores from other retailers. First, their merchandise was highly diversified. It included not only dry goods like fabrics, notions, and carpets but also furniture, kitchenware, hardware, cooking appliances, and musical instruments. Second, they were organized along departmental lines. Each category of merchandise received its own "department," and attached to each merchandising

⁹Miller, *The Bon Marché*; Claire Walsh, "The Newness of the Department Store: A View from the Eighteenth Century," in Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, eds., *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot 1999), 68; Crossick and Jaumain, "The World of the Department Store: Distribution, Culture and Social Change," *Cathedrals of Consumption*, 34; H. Padermadjian, *The Department Store: Its Origins, Evolution and Economics* (New York 1976 [1954]), 3-4; Lancaster, *The Department Store*; Benson, *Counter Cultures*; Elaine Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (Oxford 1989); Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton 2000), 74-107, 142-177; William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York 1993); David Monod, *Store Wars: Shopkeepers and the Culture of Mass Marketing, 1890-1930* (Toronto 1996); Gail Reekie, *Temptations: Sex, Selling, and the Department Store* (Sydney 1993); Santink, *Timothy Eaton*.

department was a separate administrative unit responsible for that department's finances, staffing, buying, and other needs. Third, they "towered over their competitors," as David Monod puts it. Cash-only sales allowed big stores to accumulate large amounts of capital, which they used to buy huge discounted orders from suppliers. Offering low prices and large assortments, they turned over stock faster than other retailers and realized unprecedented profits.¹⁰

Urbanization was crucial to department stores' successes. The world's first and most successful department stores appeared in cities with populations of 100,000 and over. Metropolitan dwellers had the inclination and ability to patronize department stores. They also had the purchasing power necessary for department stores' survival. Canada's first department stores appeared in the 1890s in the country's two largest and most industrialized cities: Montréal and Toronto. In 1891 Montréal had 219,616 people, almost twice as many as it had in 1871; and in 1891 Toronto had 181,215 people, more than three times as many as it had two decades earlier. Together Montréal and Toronto contained one-twelfth of Canada's total 1891 population and were the acknowledged manufacturing, shipping, and financial centres of the growing Dominion.¹¹

Established in 1844 by Scottish brothers Henry and James Morgan, Morgan's in Montréal was the first of Canada's shops to attain department-store status.¹² Until 1890 the retailer was located near the waterfront, but in 1891 the company moved to St. Catherine's Street, a bourgeois residential area. Toronto's major department stores were founded later than Morgan's, but they soon outstripped their Montréal counterpart. In 1869 Irish immigrant Timothy Eaton opened a dry goods shop in the booming city, and in 1871 Scottish immigrant Robert Simpson followed suit. In the mid-1880s Simpson's and Eaton's settled into the locations they would keep until their closures in the 1970s and 1990s, respectively: the corner of Yonge and Queen streets. By 1896 Simpson's had 500 staff and a brisk mail order operation, but Eaton's was bigger. With 2,475 employees, 326,538 square feet of selling space, buying offices in London and Paris, a whitewear manufacturing department,

¹⁰Monod, *Store Wars*, 117-118; also Miller, *The Bon Marché*; Crossick and Jaumain, "The World of the Department Store"; Pasdermajian, *The Department Store*; Lancaster, *The Department Store*.

¹¹Pasdermajian, *The Department Store*, 36-37; Alvin Finkel and Margaret Conrad, *History of the Canadian Peoples, 1867 to the Present* (Toronto 1998), 118. Canada's population in 1891 was 4,833,236 (K.A.H. Buckley et al., *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd ed. [Ottawa 1999], A2-14).

¹²Wallace Ward, "Morgan's on the March," *The Montrealer* (October 1951), 19. It should be noted that Bowring Brothers, which became a department store in St. John's in the first decade of the 20th century, had been established in Newfoundland in 1811: Carla J. Wheaton, "'... as modern as some of the fine new departmental stores ... can make it': A Social History of the Large Water Street Stores, St. John's, Newfoundland, 1892-1949," PhD thesis, Department of History, Memorial University, 2002, 66.

a monthly sales turnover of approximately \$243,689, and the most profitable mail order business in the country, it was Canada's largest retailer.¹³

Over the next two decades Eaton's and Simpson's remained Canada's biggest merchandisers. Simpson's purchased Murphy's Montréal department store in 1904 and Eaton's opened a department store in Winnipeg in 1905. By the end of World War I both companies were operating extensive mail order and factory departments, and Eaton's, which began calling itself the "largest retailing organization in the British Empire," had mail order buildings in Moncton, Montréal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina, and Saskatoon as well as factories in Hamilton, Toronto, Montréal, and Winnipeg. Other department stores did appear in Canada during these years, including the Dupuis Frères, Ogilvy's, and Murphy's, all in Montréal; Smallman and Ingram's in London; and Woodward's and Spencer's in Vancouver. Most of these stores captured markets not readily served by Eaton's and Simpson's. The Dupuis Frères was North America's only francophone department store, and Woodward's and Spencer's thrived in British Columbia because Eaton's and Simpson's had not yet made substantial inroads into the province.

In the early 1920s a major competitor, the Hudson's Bay Company, arrived on the retailing scene. The oldest corporation in the world, in 1670 the King of England had given the HBC title to the lands surrounding the waters draining into the Hudson's Bay. In 1870 the HBC sold most of its land to the Canadian state but retained title to certain properties. By the early 1900s the HBC had expanded from its fur-trading base into real estate. During World War I the company moved into urban retailing. It established major department stores in Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver, and Victoria. In just ten years, the HBC's retail staff jumped from 300 to 3,000 people, of whom approximately half worked in the HBC's Winnipeg and Vancouver locations. Though none of the HBC's buildings were as big as Eaton's or Simpson's, they captured a significant proportion of the western department-store trade.¹⁴

¹³Elizabeth Sifton, "Montréal's Fashion Mile: St Catherine Street, 1890-1930," in Alexandra Palmer, ed., *Fashion: A Canadian Perspective, 1890-1930* (Toronto 2004), 205-206; Santink, *Timothy Eaton*, 90-159.

¹⁴"Sight-Seeing Calgary Store," *The Beaver* (March 1932), 420-421; "Report on the Hudson's Bay Stores in Canada," Mr. Burbridge, 1912, Hudson's Bay Company Archives [HBCA], A. 102-2504; "Hudson's Bay Co.'s Store Welcomes Public Today," clipping from *Victoria Daily Times*, 19 September 1921, HBCA, A.92/17/31; "Vancouver Store," *The Beaver* (December 1926), 10-11; "First Impressions of Winnipeg's New Store," *The Beaver* (December 1926), 8-9; "Successful Opening," *The Beaver* (June 1922), 33; "New H.B.C. Store at Victoria," *The Calgary Daily Herald*, 13 September 1921, in HBCA, A.92/17/31; Untitled, *The Beaver* (December 1920), 20-21; J. Prest, "From Pioneer Trading Post to Great Department Store," *The Beaver* (March 1921), 4; H.T. Lockyer, "The Rise of H.B.C. Vancouver Retail Establishment," *The Beaver* (December 1920), 20; David Monod, "Bay Days: The Managerial Revolution and the Hudson's Bay Company Stores Department," 4, unpub-

Simpson's and Eaton's also expanded in the 1920s. In 1924 Simpson's opened retail sections in its Halifax and Regina mail order houses and by 1929 the total number of Simpson's employees was 6,700. Eaton's growth was more substantial. In 1925 the company purchased Goodwin's in Montréal and in 1926 it added a foodateria and retail outlet to its mail order house in Regina. In 1927 Eaton's opened stores in Moncton and Red Deer and a foodateria in Medicine Hat. Haligonians and Saskatooners saw Eaton's arrive in 1928. That year Eaton's also purchased the Canadian Department Stores, an Ontario chain of 21 stores. In 1929 Eaton's opened shops in Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, and Moose Jaw and by 1930 it had 47 retail outlets and 100 mail order offices. Capping off the decade was the opening of Eaton's-College Street in Toronto, a lavish house furnishings store outfitted in Art Deco that featured galleries, expensive showrooms, a prestigious restaurant, and an auditorium. In 1924 Eaton's had 17,827 employees. By 1930 it had 26,700. It was well on its way to becoming Canada's third largest employer, a status it achieved after World War II.¹⁵

International historians agree that department stores' heydays ended in the 1910s and 1920s. The Canadian situation was no different. Propelling the big stores' rapid expansion was a fear of declining sales. Size had been crucial to the stores' successes. By expanding throughout the 1920s they had remained profitable. By 1930, however, chain stores — which had started growing rapidly after 1925 — became serious threats to department stores' business. Their low overheads allowed them to undermine department stores' prices, and their deep merchandise lines attracted customers looking for variety. The onslaught of the Great Depression hurt Canada's big stores further. Increasingly hostile to mass merchandisers, shoppers turned to locally owned businesses and cooperatives for their consumer needs. Although retail sales rose by 49.5 per cent between 1933 and 1939, department stores' sales increased only 24.5 per cent during the same period. While they survived the Depression and even retained their statuses as Canada's biggest

lished paper, HBCA, PP-1986-10; "Hudson's Bay Co.'s Store Welcomes Public Today," clipping from *Victoria Daily Times*, 19 September 1921, HBCA, A.92/17/31.

¹⁵Simpson's, Ltd., *Thumbnail Sketches* (Toronto 1921), 12; Simpson's, Ltd., *The Story of Simpson's: 68 Years of Progress* (Toronto 1940), 2-5; John Ferry, *A History of the Department Store* (New York 1960), 315; William Stephenson, *The Store that Timothy Built* (Toronto 1969), 86-89; Sifton, "Montréal's Fashion Mile," 219-220; Cynthia Wright, "'The Most Prominent Rendezvous of the Feminine Toronto': Eaton's College Street and the Organization of Shopping in Toronto, 1920-1950," PhD thesis, Graduate Department of Education, University of Toronto, 1992; John Willis, "The Mail Order Catalogue: An Achievement in Mass Distribution and Labour," *Les Territoires de l'entreprise/The Territories of Business*, dir. Claude Bellavance et Pierre Lanthier (Sainte-Foy, QC 2004), 184-185.

retailers, Eaton's, Simpson's, and the HBC's department stores started losing their grip on Canadians' spending decisions.¹⁶

Managing the Big Stores

As they arose across the industrializing West, department stores came to symbolize the emergence of modernity. Promising to democratize luxury, they promoted a new consumerist ethos that would create individual happiness and enrich all humankind. Simpson's stated in 1906, "The department store is one of the great developments of the age ... [I]t will be counted among the great successes achieved in the progress of the world."¹⁷ Not only department stores' publicists, but also department stores' critics, believed department stores were harbingers of a new era. Small shopkeepers claimed department stores' merchandising methods destroyed local businesses and ruined rural communities. Unionists contended department stores brought down labour standards. Moralists suggested department stores encouraged female shoppers to become greedy and vain. And conservatives worried about department stores' employment of white women. Specifically, moralists believed that women who left home to earn wages in department stores threatened the European patriarchal family. Middle-class feminists, meanwhile, believed department stores' labour practices threatened white women's respectability and reproductive health. As Madame Arthur Gibeault told readers of the Catholic feminist publication in Québec, *La Bonne Parole*, in 1927, "la plupart de nos employées de magasins actuelles seront les mères de demain; il importe donc d'améliorer autant que possible leurs conditions de travail, de les protéger physiquement autant que moralement et d'assurer leur confort dans la mesure juste et nécessaire."¹⁸

Dependent upon good customer relations, department stores worked to prove their critics wrong. Labour management became crucial to these efforts. In their earliest days, department stores' workforces were predominantly men. As each department store developed into a full-fledged mass merchandiser, they employed more and more women. By the 1930s women constituted more than half of the international department-store labour force. Not only were they considered more suitable for selling particular goods than were men, so were they cheaper to employ. At Eaton's, Simpson's, and the HBC between 1890 and 1940, women worked as

¹⁶Monod, "Bay Days," 24; Statistics Canada, *Department Stores in Canada/Les Grands Magasins au Canada* (Ottawa 1979), 17; Monod, *Store Wars*, 219.

¹⁷Norman Patterson, "Evolution of a Departmental Store," *Canadian Magazine* (September 1906), 438.

¹⁸Miller, *The Bon Marché*, 145-146; Lisa Tiersten, "Marianne in the Department Store: Gender and the Politics of Consumption in Turn-of-the-Century Paris," in *Cathedrals of Consumption*, 116-134; Crossick and Jaumain, "The World of the Department Store," 1-45; Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 128; Mme Arthur Gibeault, "Les employées de magasins," *La Bonne Parole* (May 1927), 13-14. I am grateful to Andrée Lévesque for sharing this reference.

salespeople, elevator operators, waitresses, cleaners, cooks, secretaries, hair stylists, beauticians, buyers, garment-makers, fashion models, personal shoppers, packers, telephone operators, publicists, advertising illustrators, and product demonstrators. About half of them worked full-time, and only a few of them attained management positions. The majority were single, but some married and widowed women laboured in the big stores.¹⁹

Most department stores had their origins in small shopkeeping and, importantly, paternalism was the main social model by which merchants had governed their small shops. As Michael Miller writes of 19th-century French firms, “the enterprise was literally an extension of the household to which it belonged ... the *patron* and wife [formed] a surrogate family for those assistants whom they took in their charge.” When merchants began expanding their operations into department stores, they retained paternalist traditions. In Canada, Eaton’s is the most famous paternalist department store. Timothy Eaton is a well-known Canadian figure, and his care and concern for his employees is legendary. In his foreword to Patricia Phenix’s book *Eatonians* (2002), former employee Jim Matthews claims, “Canada does indeed have heroes, and Timothy Eaton is one of them.” Simpson’s and the HBC were also paternalist. While Simpson’s paternalism was grounded in Robert Simpson’s small shopkeeping background, the HBC’s originated in its pre-industrial fur-trading past. From 1670 to 1870, notes Edith Burley, its posts “resembled the preindustrial households of seventeenth century England, which were characterized by vertical ties.”²⁰

As department stores throughout the West grew into bureaucratic and capitalist organizations, they incorporated welfare programs into their paternalist strategies. According to Miller, the Bon Marché in Paris used paternalism and welfarism to smooth the enterprise’s transition from a family firm to a bureaucratic and capitalist organization. Not wanting to cope with a large impersonal workforce, potential class conflict, critics’ assertions of the Bon Marché’s materialism, decadence, and unfair labour practices, the Parisian department store opted for an employees’ relations regime that harkened back to the pre-industrial household. It also introduced welfare programs to prove its benevolence, to induce worker loyalty, and to demonstrate workers’ respectability. In her study of American department stores between 1890 and 1940, Susan Porter Benson emphasizes welfare work’s potential to erase employees’ working-class personas. Demonstrating that customers were irritated by boisterous, snobbish, and independent behaviour, Benson argues that management introduced welfarism in American department stores to smooth employees’

¹⁹Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume X: Merchandising and Service Establishments — Part I: Retail Merchandise Trade* (Ottawa 1934), 6-7.

²⁰Miller, *The Bon Marché*, 76; Jim Matthews, Foreword to *Eatonians: The Story of the Family Behind the Family* by Patricia Phenix (Toronto 2002), xv; Edith Burley, *Servants of the Honourable Company: Work, Discipline, and Conflict in the Hudson Bay Company, 1770-1879* (Toronto 1997), 2.

rough edges and make them more accepting of the need to treat customers with respect and servility. Gail Reekie, in an article on department stores in Australia, picks up this theme. Whereas Benson emphasizes the importance of welfare work for the construction of a skilled salesforce, Reekie stresses paternalism's and welfare work's abilities to dampen class conflict and maintain employee loyalty. Finally, in her book about corporate paternalism in progressive-era America, Andrea Tone argues that large employers, including department stores, adopted welfare work to counteract critics' claims of workforce exploitation and poor product quality. By introducing welfare programs and then advertising these programs, employers demonstrated not only that their workforces were contented and healthy, but also that they made high-quality products.²¹

At Eaton's, Simpson's, and the HBC, all of these motivations for welfarism were apparent. From the 1890s into the Great Depression and beyond, Canada's biggest stores offered perhaps the most extensive corporate welfare programs in the country. Though Eaton's, Simpson's, and the HBC introduced different programs at different times, their overall strategies were similar. Health benefits were among the first innovations. During the 1890s Eaton's Welfare Office in Toronto "was empowered to extend ... extra financial assistance to employees especially in cases of sickness." By 1900 Eaton's had two hospitals in Toronto, and in 1910 it opened a hospital in Winnipeg. In 1908 Simpson's hired its own doctor and opened its own hospital. In the 1920s Simpson's introduced sick pay. By the 1930s employees of HBC department stores had access to doctors and nurses, the ability to "purchase drugs at cost," and financial assistance for "medical and pharmaceutical bills."²²

Savings, loans, life insurance, pensions, paid vacations, profit-sharing, and the paying of wartime salaries for employees in active military service were other innovations.²³ Canada's largest stores' welfare commitments were most visible, however, in their social, educational, and sports activities. Before World War I, "Eatonia Clubs" sprang up at Eaton's Toronto and Winnipeg locations. For the Winnipeg club, Eaton's purchased a special building named "Strivel House." Once employees joined the Eatonia Club, they could participate in "intellectu-

²¹Miller, *The Bon Marché*, 100-120; Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 124-130; Reekie, "'Humanising Industry'"; Andrea Tone, *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America* (Ithaca and London 1997).

²²Ian Murray, "Employees — Welfare," 23 December 1965, AO, TEP, Series 162, Box 31, File 990; "Quarter-Century of Meritorious Service!," *Contacts* (June 1935), 10, AO, TEP, Series 141; Simpson's, *The History of Employee Benefits at Simpson's* (June 1952), unpaginated, Hudson's Bay Company Heritage Services [HBCHS], RG17/1Q/3; "Welfare," *Bay Window* (March 1938), HBCA.

²³Murray, "Employees — Welfare"; Simpson's, *The History of Employee Benefits*; Edith MacDonald, *Golden Jubilee* (Toronto 1919), 232; Assistant Secretary, Board of Directors, to Mr. R.W. Eaton, 14 May 1920, AO, TEP, Series 162, Box 31, File 990; Murray, "Employees — Welfare," 5; "Beaver Club Notes," *The Beaver* (September 1931), 306; *Eaton's and You* (Toronto 1940), 17-25, AO, TEP, Series 171, Box 1.

ally-oriented” and “artistic” groups, including the Literary Society and the Debating Club, the Camera Club, and the Sketching Club. After Timothy Eaton’s son, John Eaton, became president in 1907, he established sports programs. After qualifying, Eaton’s male employees could join tumbling, soccer, baseball, and cricket teams. Female employees could join the “White Hopes” softball team in Winnipeg. John Eaton also created the Eaton Athletic Association, which was “best known for its track and field meet,” a prestigious annual event that “drew athletes from across Canada and the United States.”²⁴

Education and leisure expanded during World War I. In 1917 Eaton’s purchased the former Young Men’s Christian Association [YMCA] building at 417 Yonge Street in Toronto. With a swimming “tank,” cafeteria, gymnasium, library, sewing room, and three “sitting-rooms,” it was an ideal location for the social and recreational activities the company engineered over the next few years. By 1919, Women Club’s activities at the building included “basket-ball, drill, calisthenics ... apparatus work ... dancing ... needle-work[, and] choral singing.” The company “designated” the first-floor lounge as a “special room, where under suitable chaperonage, such members as live in boarding houses, may receive their young men friends.” In 1923 Eaton’s extended its offerings to female employees when it purchased a summer camp for women at Shadow Lake near Ballantrae. Boasting “five sleeping cabins ... a dining hall ... visitor cabins ... a recreation bungalow ... row-boats, sailboats, ... baseball diamonds, basketball courts, and a nine-hole golf course,” the Camp invited Eaton’s female employees to spend their summer holidays and their weekends at the location.²⁵

Other programs were for boys and men. In 1917 Eaton’s purchased land at Victoria Park, where it established a camp for young male workers. Shortly after it bought real estate at Scarborough Bluffs, where the company created a “Young Men’s Country Club.” The boys and men who attended these places slept in tents, played sports, held “concerts and shows,” and entertained female guests during “Friday evening socials and dances.” Eaton’s created two male-specific clubs: the Eaton Boys’ Club and the Business Men’s Club. The Director of the Boys’ Club presided over its 14- to 18-year-old members. He supervised “their baseball and hockey teams” as well as monitored members’ company progress and encouraged them to continue their educations. Members of the Men’s Club spent their time attending formal banquets, brushing up selling and managerial skills, and listening to speeches made by male leaders in Ontario’s commercial, Protestant, and political communities.²⁶

In the 1920s the HBC also started offering sports and leisure programs. Individual stores created Amusement and Athletic Associations [HBAAA]. These oversaw

²⁴ *Contacts* (17 July 1939), AO, TEP, Series 141; Forbes, “The Influence,” 117; Stephenson, *The Store that Timothy Built*, 78-80; Forbes, “The Influence,” 117.

²⁵ MacDonald, *Golden Jubilee*, 226-228; Forbes, “The Influence,” 167.

²⁶ Forbes, “The Influence,” 118-119; MacDonald, *Golden Jubilee*, 228.

social and sports events. The HBC also built tennis courts for Winnipeg employees and an athletic field for Calgary workers. In 1931 the HBC purchased a house for the daytime use of its Winnipeg store staff. Furnished with “lounge rooms,” “two dining-rooms where lunches and suppers are served at a nominal cost to employees; a special rest room for girls ... dressing rooms in the basement for baseball and football teams; also card-rooms and smoking rooms for the men,” the clubhouse was “popular” among employees. Also during the 1930s the HBCAAs were renamed Beaver Clubs. Funded partially by the HBC and partially by membership fees, these clubs offered recreation programs and social entertainments. Junior and Business Clubs were other features of the HBC’s paternalist welfare. Designed to allow greater interaction between younger employees and their older, executive counterparts, they represented opportunities for training, networking, and the recognition of skilled junior staff. Club meetings featured banquets, which were followed by lectures on such topics as “Sales Promotion,” “Merchandising,” and “Stories of HBC Explorers.”²⁷

Sensitive to claims they were destroying feminine virtue, Canada’s largest stores paid special attention to female workers’ respectability. After he opened his Winnipeg store in 1905, Timothy Eaton became aware his female employees were “not pleased with the accommodation of the ordinary boarding places.” He thus “purchased a large house to be used” as their residence. The appointment of 370 Eaton’s Welfare Secretaries in Toronto in 1917 also demonstrated the firm’s regulation of women’s well-beings. An employee in each of Eaton’s departments received a special “E.W.S” pin and became responsible for “report[ing] any case of sickness, indisposition, or trouble generally” to the Welfare Head. Simpson’s programs for women resembled Eaton’s. During World War I, President Harry Fudger bought a house in downtown Toronto and transformed it into an upscale residence for 160 female staff. Lavishly decorated, it had a library, tennis courts, sitting rooms, “a beauty-parlour type hair-dryer in the laundry” room, sewing machines, non-denominational Christian “religious meetings,” Sunday musicales, landscaped grounds, prepared meals, single and double rooms, and reasonable rates. It was, as Strange notes, the “largest single boarding facility for single working women” in Toronto.²⁸

²⁷“Community Singing is Getting Results,” *The Beaver* (January 1921); “New Life for Calgary HBAAA,” *The Beaver* (May 1921), 38; “Employees’ Association Formed,” *The Beaver* (February 1922), 34; “New Tennis and Quoits Courts,” *The Beaver* (October 1920), 21; “Junior Executive Club,” *The Beaver* (March 1930), 382; “HBC Business Club,” *The Beaver* (September 1931), 307; “Beaver Club Notes,” *The Beaver* (September 1931), 306; “Welfare,” *Bay Window* (March 1938), HBCA.

²⁸MacDonald, *Golden Jubilee*, 176, 224; *Sherbourne House Club*, c1920s, HBCHS; “Fudger House Rules,” no date, HBCA, Simpson’s Search File; Carolyn Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (New York 1995), 178.

Clubs for women were exhaustive attempts to improve female workers' morality. The Toronto Eaton's Girls Club [EGC], active during the interwar years, was a particularly sustained effort. The EGC's "overall emphasis during most of the 1920s was on 'social skills'" and "the attributes necessary for being a good wife, mother and housekeeper." During the Depression the EGC began to put more emphasis on "physical activity" and began offering "fencing, field hockey, tennis and badminton" alongside its older "swimming, basketball and gymnasium programs." According to Susan Forbes, this switch in emphasis reflected Eaton's employees' preferences for sports over classes in decorum, sewing, and homemaking. To keep employees in the EGC, Eaton's had to offer programs in which women would participate. Despite this cautious embracing of women's sports, however, it is clear that the EGC continued emphasizing respectable femininity. A 1932 poem about the EGC, distributed in employees' pay packets, illustrates this mission: "The Eaton Girls' Club is a melting pot/Where each girl puts in the best she's got./Much or little, great or small/ ... Put in friendship, the helping hand,/Courage and love — or only sand./The Eaton Girls' Club is a common pool/Which you have to stir with the golden rule."²⁹

Staff newsletters and magazines were final components of Canada's largest stores' paternalist welfarism. During the 1930s, Canada's department stores joined their national and international welfarist counterparts in offering regular in-house organs that attempted to cultivate, as Sangster says, "support for company objectives." Since 1920 the HBC had been publishing *The Beaver: A Journal of Progress*. Fusing public relations with staff relations, *The Beaver's* purpose was to keep customers, shareholders, and employees informed about company policy and events. In 1934, however, the HBC excised articles intended for staff from *The Beaver*. That same year it started publishing staff magazines for Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Victoria store employees. These were called *The Bayonet*, *The Bay Builder*, and *The Bay Window*, respectively. In 1938 it started publishing *The Bay Breeze* for Edmonton store workers and *Beaver Tales* for Calgary store workers. Ranging between six and 20 pages long, such journals featured news about the staff, the HBC, store promotions, and welfare and recreation programs. Employee-authored poems, jokes, and short letters also appeared.³⁰

Eaton's, too, printed staff magazines. Appearing in 1932, the Winnipeg organ was the first and largest. Called *Contacts*, each issue contained approximately sixteen pages. *Bi-Weekly* started in Hamilton in 1934, *Flash* in Toronto and *Chinook Winds* in Calgary in 1935, *Entre-Nous* in Montréal in 1936, and *Staff Bulletin* in Moncton in 1938. Their purposes, like HBC publications, were to stimulate corpo-

²⁹Forbes, "Gendering Corporate Welfare Practices," 62-63, 68; EGC brochure, 1932, "Notices to Employees," AO, TEP, Series 171, 1.

³⁰Sangster, "The Softball Solution," 193. In 1940 the HBC started publishing a magazine called *The Beaver Log* for Saskatoon staff; and in 1944 published *The Party Line* for Interior Stores Division Staff. These magazines are at the HBCA.

rate loyalty, enthusiasm, knowledge, and productivity. Containing photographs of staff and store promotions, reports on employee activities, descriptions of welfare programs and company policies, notices of upcoming events, and instructions on selling, they aimed at fostering a more profitable workforce. Simpson's also printed staff publications, but these were never as elaborate as the HBC's or Eaton's. Titled *The Every-Tuesday-Morning Bulletin*, these two-page newsletters contained information on promotions and displays. They also mentioned upcoming employee meetings, new welfare programs, and store policies.³¹

Promoting Consumerism

Although Eaton's, Simpson's, and the HBC portrayed themselves as benevolent, it is true that their *raison d'être* was to accumulate capital by selling goods at marked-up prices. Their need to sell commodities led to myriad forms of employee commodification, the first of which can be called the promotion of consumerism. This consisted of convincing employees to be loyal, telling employees that consumer goods would make their lives happier, and prompting employees to promote employers' products. The paternalist practice of gifting was central to these efforts. When high-ranking employees married, Timothy Eaton would furnish an entire room in their dwellings. Both Eaton's and the HBC gave employees such gifts as gold watches, gold rings, gold cuff links, luggage sets, wool blankets, ivory hand mirrors, food baskets, tea sets, and dishes to mark weddings, retirements, and long-service milestones. During World War I Eaton's sent Christmas "boxes of goodies to each Eaton man in England and France" as well as monthly packages to employees who had been taken as war prisoners. Though evidence regarding Simpson's gift-giving practices prior to 1940 has not been located, it is likely that this company was also generous with presents, if for no other reason than to compete with its neighbour.³²

Through gifting, Canada's department stores demonstrated appreciation, concern, and affection. Since gifts can represent a way of compensating someone for services rendered, department-store gift-giving also aimed at fostering obligation. Especially when given to mark events like male employees' marriages and long-service achievements, gifts became methods of extracting further productive

³¹Eaton's staff magazines are at the AO in TEP, Series 141. Simpson's newsletters are at HBCHS.

³²August Bridle, "The Founder and His Successor," 82; *Flash*, 2 December 1935, 2; *Flash*, 5 July 1937, 3; H.M. Tucker to Miss C. Rowe, 27 August 1926, AO, TEP, Series 162, Box 31, File 990; "Shower of China," *The Beaver* (August-September 1921), 32; "Mrs. L. McDermid to Edmonton," *The Beaver* (March 1923), 251; "Saskatoon Store News," *The Beaver* (September 1923), 459; "General News," *The Beaver* (September 1925), 43; "Staff Supplement," *The Beaver* (September 1929), 272-273; "Hoover Company," *The Beaver* (September 1928), 84; MacDonald, *Golden Jubilee*, 232-234; "The Top Ten Privileges," *The Bayonet* (May 1940), HBCA; *The Bay Builder* (April 1937), HBCA.

service from workers. Gift-giving also encouraged enthusiasm for company commodities. Home furnishings were meant not only to show appreciation but to demonstrate and develop the pleasures of acquisitive consumption. Gold rings, gold watches, china, and silver dishes marked special occasions. Their very exclusiveness communicated importance. When gifts were presented to employees, they were usually done so with fanfare, illustrating that the receipt of company gifts was a joyous event. Within company literature, stores reported positively upon gifts employees received. At a “jolly party” in honour of Miss Morris, noted *The Beaver* in 1922, “Mr. Pout, on behalf of [his] department, presented Miss Morris with a handsome silver casserole, silver spoons and Madeira doilies. The evening was spent with dancing and music.”³³ Describing the party and the gifts in an enthusiastic manner, the article attempts to create excitement for Morris and her receipt of the company’s gifts, which almost certainly came from the firm’s own stock.

Privileges regarding goods also aimed at convincing workers to consume. By 1910 Simpson’s and Spencer’s had employee discounts, and in 1920 the HBC started standardizing its discount policies. By 1935 each full-time HBC employee was entitled to two discount cards: one for himself or herself, and one for an immediate dependent. HBC employees also had access to charge accounts and extra discounts on Christmas purchases. Such special occasions as the “employees’ shopping evening” held at the HBC’s Saskatoon store in December 1923 further promoted consumption. After a special-priced dinner and “group singing,” employees went about the closed store, shopping, visiting, and buying. By 1933 Eaton’s employees were entitled to 5 per cent discounts on goods and could use a weekly payment plan. So that employees would not leave their posts to go shopping during the day, Eaton’s allowed its workers to shop between half past eight and half past nine in the morning. They were also permitted to take the morning bus between Eaton’s-College Street and the Main Store during their working hours so they could purchase goods.³⁴

To further spark consumerism, Canada’s biggest stores advertised directly to employees. Since at least World War I Eaton’s included advertisements in workers’ pay envelopes. “The Men’s Hat Department of the Store is showing a most extensive selection this season of the new and smart hats for Spring. Select your Easter Hat now!” declared a 1926 insert. *The Beaver* carried advertisements since its 1920 inception. These were meant to appeal to the magazine’s employee and non-employee readership. Canada’s biggest stores also offered special employee discounts on goods and services. Simpson’s staff magazine informed workers:

³³“Miss Morris Honored,” *The Beaver* (February 1922), 34.

³⁴Herbert H. Bishop, Superintendent of David Spencer, Ltd., to BC Commission on Labour, 1912 to 1914, British Columbia Archives [BCA], GR-0684, Box 2, File 2; “Employees’ Shopping,” *The Beaver* (January 1923), 177; *The History of Employee Benefits*; “Discounts,” HBCA, RG2/10/Base-Notes, File 59; *Employees’ Book of Information* (Toronto 1933), 23-25, AO, TEP, Series 162, Box 23, File 792.

“The Hairdressing department offers a manicure to employees until eleven o’clock for 25c.”³⁵ As Figures 1 and 2 reveal, Eaton’s and the HBC’s house organs also advertised to employees.

Articles in staff magazines similarly encouraged consumerism. *The Beaver* praised the consumer ethic in an article entitled, “What Are Your Wants?” Declaring “You may measure a man by his wants,” it stated that the “poor plodder has few wants, expects but little, and generally gets no more than he expects.” The “successful man,” in contrast, “has many wants — good home, good clothes, good company, wealth, power and fame.” Do not be suspicious of materialism, the magazine urged, for “Human wants are back of all human progress.” More usually, magazines informed employees about their stores’ offerings and encouraged readers to become excited. Purred Eaton’s Toronto organ, “You should see the exquisite little hand painted compacts from Vienna in the Toiletries section ... Each one shows a miniature copy of a famous painting. The originals were by such great artists as Corot, Watteau, Fragonard.”³⁶

Training sessions were another promotional tool. Usually, merchandise trainers approached their subjects in appreciative and breathless manners. In this way they not only taught employees about the composition and purposes of various goods but imbued the goods with excitement and happiness. At “The Gingham Girl,” a training fashion show staged by Eaton’s Winnipeg’s Dress Cottons Department in 1934, employees and customers learned “hundreds of fascinating new designs.”³⁷ Female salesclerks and office workers were the show’s “mannequins,” or models. By both wearing the clothing and watching the show, Eaton’s female employees learned about the pleasures of fashion consumption.

Selling Employees’ Activities

Although the promotion of the consumer ethic was a central means by which Eaton’s, Simpson’s, and the HBC commodified their employees, it was only one component of workplace commodification. In response to their critics’ accusations, Canada’s giant retailers seized every opportunity to demonstrate their benevolent treatment of staff. They thus behaved similarly to the Bon Marché in Paris. As Miller writes, “the means by which the Bon Marché focused public attention on its [closely knit] internal community were nearly unlimited.” Eaton’s and the HBC often expressed their community involvement and employee contentment by staging singing and theatre events featuring department-store employees. Eaton’s weekly Toronto flyer frequently informed customers of Eaton’s employees’ chorale and drama performances. One 1920s advertisement notified readers that the Eaton

³⁵“Who’s Your Hatter?,” AO, TEP, Series 171, Box 1; *The Every-Tuesday-Morning Bulletin*, no. 163 (c1937), 1, HBCHS, RG17/1S/1.

³⁶“What are Your Wants?,” *The Beaver* (October 1921), 14; “Noticed Around the Store,” *Flash* (9 December 1935), 2.

³⁷“The Gingham Girl,” *Contacts* (April 1934), 3.

Employees' Shopping Specials

All Outstanding Values! On Sale Until 6 p.m., November 23rd

There's big news in The Bay Builder for every employee this month . . . news of extra savings available to employees and their dependents only! Prices have been slashed to give you real bargains . . . and on top of that, **YOU GET YOUR REGULAR EMPLOYEES' DISCOUNT!** Merchandise is on sale in the regular departments. Store regulations governing employees' shopping hours apply to these items, of course. Use your shopping card.

<p>Men's Smart English Trench Coats Smart fitting—good looking. Quality Egyptian cotton, check lined and oilskin interlined. Epulettes, gun shield, all-round belt, leather buttons. Sizes 34 to 44. Price, \$12.95 each —Basement Store</p>	<p>Only 38 to go! Ronson Lighters Assorted leather-covered Princeton models. Neat for the ladies—yet every inch a man's lighter! The very things to fill Christmas Gift needs. Special \$2.89 —Main Floor</p>	<p>Here You Are, Men! Linen Handkerchiefs Fine quality linen hankies with smart hemstitched borders. Full size. Made by John S. Brown of Belfast—a sure sign of quality. Special, dozen \$1.00 —Main Floor</p>	<p>Penman's Silk Wool Half Hose Fine quality silk and wool knits in smart patterns and popular shades. Sizes 10 to 11½. Regular \$1. Special, per pair 50c —Main Floor</p>
<p>Here's a Christmas Special! Chrome Smokers Bright chrome smokers with white, black or brown enamel trim. Patented no-smoking ash receptacle. Reg. \$1.85, each \$1.65</p>	<p>A Famous Samson Product! Card Tables This is the table that has been successfully promoted for some time! One that will stand up under all kinds of hard knocks. Reg. \$2.50, each \$2.50</p>	<p>Another Big Samson Special! Card Tables The Samson card table—complete with combination Ash Trays and Glass Holders. Regular \$4.95. Special for staff only, priced \$4.25 at, each —Fifth Floor</p>	<p>Big Savings For You On Damask Drapes Lined and unlined—good selection of colors! Full widths—7 feet long. Regular \$12.95 a pair. Staff only, pair \$7.95 —Fourth Floor</p>
<p>Extra Heavy New Metal Bridge Lamps Beautiful lamps for your own home or for gifts! Smart base with choice of parchment shades—fluted or plain. Regular \$5.95, each \$3.95 —Fourth Floor</p>	<p>Another Hosiery Special! Crepe Hose First quality high twist in ten Fall shades. 45-gauge hose at a real bargain price for Bayettes! Ten Fall 79c shades. Pair \$1.59 —Main Floor</p>	<p>A Sporting Offer For You Any \$1.98 Glove Just pick out your favorite in kid, suede, capeskin or wool. \$1.98 lines and you have your choice for \$1.79 only —Main Floor</p>	<p>Imported Sample Raffle Knitting Gloves Traveller's samples! Handmade—in many cases only one of a kind. The ideal gift for the friend who knits! Three prices, less your discount! \$1.29 \$1.59 \$1.98 —Second Floor</p>
<p>Employees' Special In Handkerchiefs Dainty prints, embroidered white and lace edged pure Irish linen! Stock up now for your Christmas list. Special to YOU—89c for 4 —Main Floor</p>	<p>Silk Crepe and Satin Blouses Just what you need to go with your new suit! White, eggshell, wine, navy, rust and pastel. Regularly priced at 1.98. Special price, each \$1.79 —Main Floor</p>	<p>Smart Hand-Embroidered Pillow Cases Finely woven pure white cotton cases with daintily embroidered designs. Practical and acceptable gifts! 42 inch long. Pair 98c —Basement Store</p>	<p>Special Library Subscription Rates For new employee subscribers. Per month 55c Or, first three months for \$1.60 —Mezzanine Floor</p>
<p>420 Men's All Wool Pullovers Clearance of higher-priced line! Knit from quality yarns in plain shades—contrasting trims. Sizes 38 to 40. Special, ea. \$1.59 —Main Floor</p>	<p>English Bone China Cups - Saucers Smart new shapes in delightful decorations. Just right for shower and Christmas gifts! Reg. \$1, each 65c —Fourth Floor</p>	<p>Beautiful Chrome Plated Waffle Iron Full size iron with heat indicator. Fitted with cord. Regularly priced at \$4.95. Special—to YOU—each \$3.95</p>	<p>Employees' Special! Just \$ to go at this price! All-wave console radio, 7 tubes, 3 wave bands, 1936 model. Reg. \$14.50—specially priced for employees less their discount! Special, each \$84.50 Convenient Terms May Be Arranged! —Fifth Floor</p>
<p>Men's or Women's Tube Skating Outfits Sizes 6 to 12, men's. 2 to 8, women's, reg. \$3.99. Special, \$3.45 Children's, 11 to 5, \$3.19 reg. \$3.45 —Fourth Floor</p>	<p>The New Streamline Toy Train Hiawatha Streamlined Train Sets—just the same as are used on the Chicago, Milwaukee run. Engine, 3 cars and 8 pieces of track. \$1.25 Only —Fourth Floor</p>	<p>Girls! Our Regular 95c Crepe Hose Full-fashioned, first quality hose in good range shades! Hard-wearing pure silk crepe with lace or crepe welt. Special Price, per pair 79c 2 pairs for \$1.45 —Basement Store</p>	

Figure 1. Advertisement in HBC Staff Magazine. From: *The Bay Builder* (November 1936), Hudson's Bay Company Archives. Reproduced with permission from Hudson's Bay Company Archives.

EMPLOYEES' SPECIAL

Eatonia **Women's Real Silk Hosiery**
At 20% Off Regular Price

(No further Employees' Discount allowed on this item).

Wednesday, July 3, 8.30 to 10.30 a.m. only

Learn by experience the outstanding value of EATONIA. 3 weights:—
Tissue Chiffon (3-thread); Service Chiffon; Heavy Service. Season's
smartest shades. Sizes 8½ to 10½. Regularly \$1.00 pair.
EMPLOYEES' SPECIAL, pair..... 2.28 **80c**
Or 3 Pairs for..... 2.28

SPECIAL COUNTER—Sixth Floor, Main Store

Figure 2. Advertisement in Eaton's Staff Magazine. From: *Flash* (12 August 1935), Archives of Ontario, T. Eaton Papers, Series 141. Reproduced with permission from Sears Canada.

Eaton Choral Society
THEATRE NIGHT

Monday, November 24th

Princess Theatre
Canadian Operatic Co.
(Savoyards)

present Leslie Stuart's
FLORODORA

All-Star Cast of Principals
Company of 70,
Orchestra of 25 Pieces

Entire House Taken by
Eaton Choral Society

Tickets, 50c, \$1.00, \$1.50
and \$2.00 (no tax)

Can be secured at Informa-
tion Bureau, Main Floor in
the Store.

Figure 3. Advertisement in Eaton's Weekly Customer Magazine. From: *Eaton News Weekly*, c1920s, Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission from Sears Canada.

Choral Society would be presenting “Florodora” at the Princess Theatre (Figure 3). In 1935 the Hudson’s Bay Choral Society in Vancouver staged a well-attended recital at the Empress Theatre, in conjunction with the Burrard Male Choir and First Baptist Church Choir. Though the HBC’s singing and dramatic performances often had an informal and relaxed air, Eaton’s events were formal, lavish presentations. Through such atmospheres the companies communicated their intended images to the events’ attendants. While the HBC was a comfortable place to shop, Eaton’s in Toronto was an elegant merchandiser.³⁸

The Eaton Girls’ Club in Toronto was even more central to Eaton’s attempts to profit from employees’ activities. During the 1935 Christmas season the EGC staged a “Theatre Night” at the Margaret Eaton Hall. Eaton’s transported guests from the Neighborhood Workers, the Aged Men’s and Women’s Homes, and the Christie Street Hospital to witness the event. Members of the EGC served guests ice cream and biscuits, and Eaton’s drama troupe, the Masquers, performed a play. Also that year, the EGC — with help from Eaton’s — put together 200 Christmas hampers for “those in need.”³⁹ Creating friendly and entertaining moments in which workers interacted with members of the public, Eaton’s and the HBC attempted to extract profit from employees’ activities outside the workplace. They also demonstrated that employees supported the goals of bourgeois philanthropy and were hence respectable.

Eaton’s and the HBC did not refrain from using workers’ own initiated activities as advertising opportunities. In June 1919 a group of Toronto employees rented the Armories so they could stage a presentation from the firm’s staff to Sir John Eaton. Grateful for his New Year’s Eve announcement of shorter hours — the firm would close every Saturday at noon and, during the summer, would be closed all day on Saturdays — these employees collected \$20,000 from their co-workers. They then donated the money to the Toronto Hospital for Sick Children. They also provided a small bed, which they called the Sir John Craig Eaton Cot. Although some rumours about this event suggest employees grumbled about having to donate money, it is nonetheless true that formal presentations and employee gifts were part of paternalist employment relationships. According to Patrick Joyce, employees in 19th-century British factories would sometimes fête their employer. Celebrations and accompanying gifts marked employees’ formal recognition of particular workplace concessions. They also bound employers to uphold their promises. Eaton’s publicists, however, ignored employees’ determination to ensure Sir John maintained shorter hours. Instead, they emphasized employees’ “esteem” for Sir John and stressed the harmonious nature of the event. “In the speech-making that followed,” noted one Winnipeg newspaper advertisement in the late 1920s,

³⁸Miller, *The Bon Marché*, 221; “Choir Concert Pleases Many,” *The Bay Builder* (May 1935), 4.

³⁹“Here and There with Eatonians,” *Flash* (9 December 1935), 3.

Hon. Dr. Cody, then Minister of Education for Ontario, pointed out that the gift was ... the sign of good-will between the employer and employees ... It marked a new era in commerce and industry.... [Eaton's employees] had used a unique occasion to show loyalty, and at the same time to help one of the most Christ-like and helpful of institutions in the whole country[.]⁴⁰

Broadcasting this occasion, Eaton's publicists appropriated and commodified Eaton's employees' activities and made them part of the company's general history.

If Eaton's felt comfortable turning an employee gesture of goodwill into a public relations opportunity, so did Eaton's and the HBC believe it acceptable to report on employees' accomplishments in publicity literature. Eaton's 1919 company history proclaimed that Eaton's male employees received "ninety-four decorations" for their contributions to the Allies' cause in World War I. It included a chart showing the names of the decorations and the numbers of employees who received them. *The Beaver* often reported on employees' accomplishments. One *Beaver* included an article about Robert Watson, Esq., informing readers that he was not only an accountant with the HBC but a published novelist. A similar article appeared in 1928. Called "Jimmy Ball **HBC** Olympic Sensation," it recounted a Winnipeg drug department's employee's winning of a Silver Medal in the 400-metre race at the Olympics. "Both on the track and off the track he has earned himself the reputation for being a true sportsman and a perfect gentlemen ... The Hudson's Bay Company, Dauphin [Ball's hometown], Winnipeg, and in fact the whole of Manitoba, are all proud of his clean record," *The Beaver* declared.⁴¹

Advertising Employees' Bodies

In the process of commodifying employees' activities, Canada's biggest retailers often commodified employees' bodies. Both types of commodification aimed to demonstrate goodwill and contentment. Both also sought to enhance the stores' potential for profit. Bodily commodification differed, however, in one crucial respect. It was a much more explicit attempt by Eaton's, Simpson's, and the HBC to transfer the exchange-value generated by and represented in particular workers' beings to the value of the stores and their commodities.

The consumer standards movement that swept across the United States at the turn of the 20th century influenced North American employers' portrayals of their workforces. Worried about impurities and safety, lobbyists pressed for higher stan-

⁴⁰Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (London 1980); "Eaton's Proclaims Saturday Holiday," Winnipeg newspaper advertisement, late 1920s, AO, TEP, Series 162, File 682.

⁴¹MacDonald, *Golden Jubilee*, 235; "H.B.C. Vernon Accountant Winning Fame as An Author," *The Beaver* (December 1920); "Jimmy Ball **HBC** Olympic Sensation," *The Beaver* (September 1928), 83.

dards and greater production transparency. In response, companies began advertising not only their clean working conditions but their workers' respectability. "In food companies that sold goods to a mass market," Tone writes, "employers championed the superiority of their products by emphasizing the 'pleasing' attributes of the workers who made them." Workers' respectability could be proven by advertising their participation in sports and educational programs. It could also be illustrated by advertising their appearances. Tone hints that "racist stereotypes" crept into American welfarist employers' marketing strategies.⁴²

In Canada, ideas about race and class played a major role in this type of commodification. At the turn of the 20th century, many English-speaking Protestants associated industrialization and urbanization with immorality and decay. Mariana Valverde shows that among social purity activists, the concept of "the city" became "intertwined with ... fears about racial, moral, and social degeneration." As Valverde points out, many purity activists associated dark skin colour and working-class origins with urban deprivation. Similarly, in his study of Vulcan, Alberta, Paul Voisey reveals that many settlers constructed a new, "western" culture in opposition to what they perceived were the main problems of the "east." These included the notions that it was "small, cramped, and crowded"; that it discouraged "enterprise ... independence ... straightforwardness and honesty"; and that it was rotting with "saloons and brothels [and] grimy factories and slums."⁴³

In response to these beliefs, until World War II it was company policy at Eaton's, Simpson's, and the HBC to hire Canadian- and British-born white anglophones to staff customer-service positions. As a government investigation into unemployment observed in 1916, "There are few saleswomen of foreign extraction in Ontario." Although the Dupuis Frères made a point of hiring francophones, the language of choice at Canada's three largest department stores was English. As the author of the HBC's 1925 "Report on Stores" stated, "I [recommend engaging] a few French salesclerks [in Winnipeg] in order to cater to the French population in the city of St. Boniface, as none of our competitors specially cater to this trade." Canada's largest department stores also rarely hired people who were not visibly Anglo-Celtic. In her history of Eaton's, Phenix recounts a story told her by "CBC newswriter Larry Zolf." To "pay Eaton's back for not hiring Jews or Slavs, he and a friend named Harold decided to steal wallets from the Winnipeg store." Toronto's largest stores also avoided hiring non-whites and non-Protestants. As Cynthia Wright notes, "Jews and Roman Catholics were underrepresented" at Eaton's in the 1930s, especially when compared "with their numbers in the Toronto population." While Eaton's preferred to keep its white- and blue-collar labour forces Anglo-Celtic and Protestant, it did hire small numbers of Jews and Italians to

⁴²Tone, *The Business of Benevolence*, 126, 58.

⁴³Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto 1991), 104, 119; Paul Voisey, *Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community* (Toronto 1988), 28, 30, 32.

staff factory positions.⁴⁴ The higher number of Jews and Italians in factory work, compared to store work, makes clear Eaton's preference to keep non-Anglo-Celtics out of customers' sight.

To further cultivate employees' purity, department stores offered a range of activities and programs designed to improve workers' bodies and minds. Sports were believed to create exuberant and attractive bodies, to uplift workers' hearts, and to generate store loyalty. Welfare workers also provided constant advice on how to maintain one's health. Throughout this period welfare managers exhorted workers to eat nutritious food, get lots of rest, participate in wholesome recreational activities, dress appropriately, and even stand properly. In 1924 Eaton's inserted slips titled "Health Hints" into employees' pay envelopes (Figure 4). And at the 1926 Annual Meeting of the HBC's Vancouver Employee Association, "Dr. Ford, the Company's medical advisor," lectured attendants on "how to keep well, and how to get well after becoming sick."⁴⁵



Figure 4. Insert in Eaton's Employees' Pay Envelopes. From: AO, F 299, Series 171, Box 1. Reproduced with permission from Sears Canada.

⁴⁴Wright, "The Most Prominent Rendezvous of the Feminine Toronto," 208-10. *Report of the Ontario Commission on Unemployment* (Toronto 1916), 176; "Unsurpassed in the British Empire," *The Sunday World*, 10 September 1907, AO, TEP, Series 162, File 660; F.H. Richmond, "Report on Stores etc.," 1925, 39, HBCHS; Phenix, *Eatonians*, 41; Tamara Adilman, "A Preliminary Sketch of Chinese Women and Work in British Columbia, 1858-1950," in Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro, eds., *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia* (Victoria, BC 1984), 53-78. Also Katrina Srigley, "'In case you hadn't noticed!': Race, Ethnicity, and Women's Wage-Earning in a Depression-Era City," *Labour/Le Travail*, 55 (Spring 2005), 69-105.

⁴⁵"Keep Employees Well," *The Beaver* (March 1926), 76.

Department stores also followed a more direct route in their efforts to profit from employees' bodies. They advertised their workers' appearances. As early as 1905 Eaton's distributed a booklet on *Eaton's Mail Order System*, which explained the efficient and honest workings of its catalogue operations. The sixteen-page pamphlet contained seven photographs of groups of white male and female Eaton's employees, all neatly attired and working diligently in spacious, well-lit, and clean conditions. In department stores' illustrations, which represented ideals and not realities, Eaton's emphasis on workers' whiteness is especially apparent. Eaton's 1919 history book is filled with sketches of employees, and in each drawing, employees appear competent, attractive, efficient, and white (Figure 5).

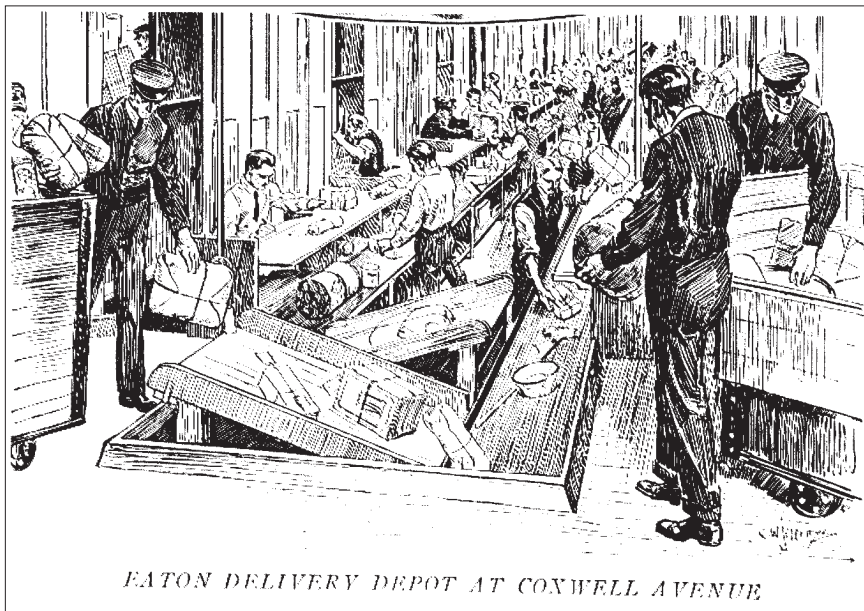


Figure 5. Illustration of Eaton's Employees in Eaton's 1919 Company History Book. From: Edith MacDonald, *Golden Jubilee* (Toronto 1919), 199. Reproduced with permission from Sears Canada.

By advertising employees' "good breeding," as one Simpson's pamphlet for American tourists described its workers in 1931, department stores indicated their workers were wholesome and happy. As an Eaton's brochure stated in 1908, "Some people do not like the word 'factory' because they associate it with sweat-shop methods ... or with a constant whir of dust and noise. Our factories are simply gigantic work rooms where the best designers, cutters and operators ... gather every

day in the pleasing occupation of making the very best of wearables[.]”⁴⁶ In 1911 Eaton’s made its rejection of racial and class degeneration explicit. In a booklet called *Evolution of a Store*, the company testified to its commitment to a particular kind of human progress.

The whipped-out, the tired, the despondent, have no place at Eaton’s. Store melancholia is a thing that have never yet spread its microbes through this institution. Neither has it ever had a labor strike.

Eaton’s stands for health, good-cheer, hope and faith plus. Note the air of health, frankness and kindly self-reliance, coupled with a due deference, on the faces of all workers.

This statement is not entirely accurate, for Eaton’s Toronto printers did go on strike in 1902.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, this pamphlet suggested that Eaton’s workers were vigorous and intelligent because they did not challenge their subordination. Not only did they not go on strike, they did not complain about their work or laze around the store. *Evolution of a Store* also announced that Eaton’s buildings were equipped with “light and good ventilation,” which allowed Eaton’s “air” to be “sweet and pure and wholesome.” Although Eaton’s employees had to work for a living, they did not have to endure the cramped and dirty conditions associated with metropolitan labour. To further indicate Eaton’s benevolent treatment of workers, and employees’ own respectability, *Evolution of a Store* was peppered with photographs of well-dressed white employees in spacious and clean work rooms.⁴⁸

Along with purity and docility, department stores emphasized employees’ imperialism and nationalism. Before Eaton’s male employees departed for active service during World War I, Eaton’s Toronto and Winnipeg photography departments snapped their photographs and displayed them in their stores. According to Eaton’s 1919 company history, the company did this so that serving Eatonians would know they were “not forgotten.” Yet Eaton’s was also conveying to shoppers that their employees were adhering to their proper patriotic duties. It thus attempted to extract exchange-value from its employees’ participation in World War I. The HBC undertook similar actions. The Christmas edition of the 1925 *Beaver* printed a two-page list of names of HBC employees who aided the Allies’ cause. Asterisks were placed beside those who had “Died in the service of [their] Country.” Accord-

⁴⁶ *Canada and Toronto* (Toronto 1931), unpaginated, HBCHS, box of Simpson’s brochures; *About a Great Store* (Toronto and Winnipeg 1908), unpaginated, AO, TEP, Series 162, File 1331.

⁴⁷ Wayne Roberts, “The Last Artisans: Toronto Printers, 1896-1914,” in Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto 1976), 138. It should be noted that Eaton’s employees also went on strike in 1906, 1912, 1919, and 1934.

⁴⁸ *Our Mail Order System* (Toronto 1905), AO, TEP, Series 162, Box 48, File 1535; *Evolution of a Store* (Toronto 1911), AO, TEP, Series 162, Box 41, File 1333.

ing to Jonathan Vance, this practice was common among Canadian businesses.⁴⁹ Not only department stores, but other employers as well, attempted to profit from the bodily contributions that male workers made to the state.

Female employees' bodies also appeared in publicity campaigns. After the war, Eaton's hosted a public display of its Girls' Club members' bodies. It occurred in an arena in Toronto, likely during an intermission of a male sports event. The sports display would have featured male workers' virile and youthful bodies engaged in character-building activities. The female exposition also underscored workers' virility and youth, but in contrast to the sports exhibition, it also emphasized their docility and ornamentality. In a dancing and gymnastics routine, Eaton's "girls" formed the words "For King & Country" with their bodies. Hundreds of spectators, including Eaton's dignitaries seated near the stage, clapped appreciatively (Figure 6). Almost a decade later, Lady Eaton sponsored a similar event on her estate. She held a "May Festival," which was performed by youthful members of the EGC. Several spectators attended the "picturesque event," noted an Eaton advertisement (Figure 7). They witnessed "Historic episodes of Spring from the time of the Druids ... in pageant, song and dance," and afterwards "joined in "a song for England, and England's king and queen, as the players passed in procession" in

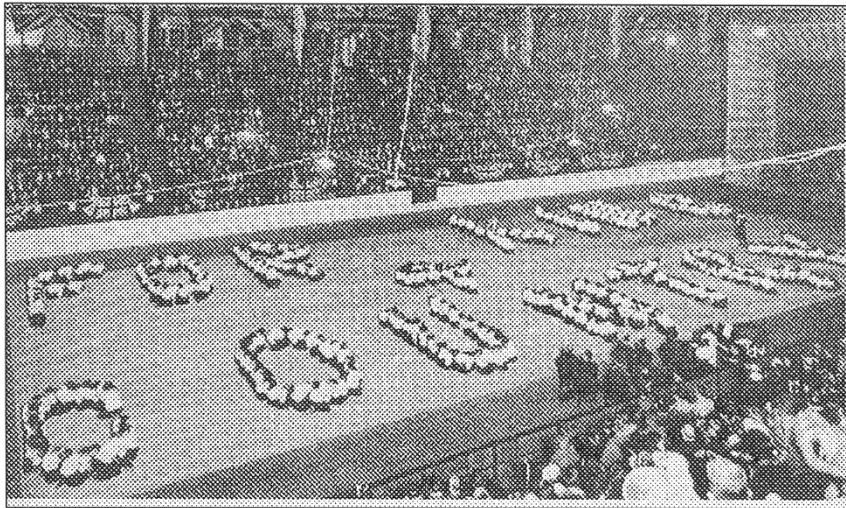
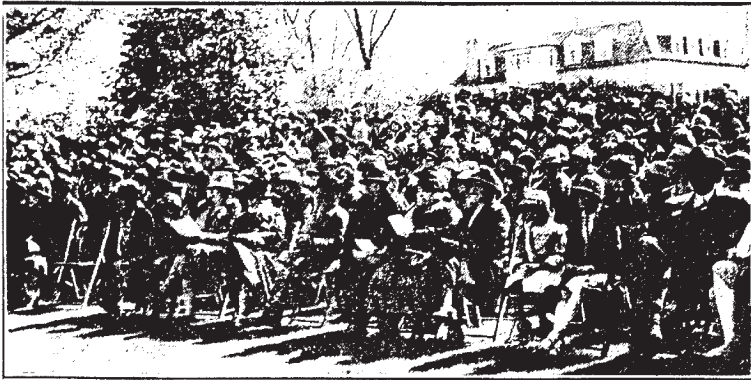


Figure 6. Eaton's Female Employees' Gymnastics Event. From: William Stephenson, *The Store that Timothy Built* (Toronto 1969), 81. Reproduced with permission from Sears Canada.

⁴⁹ MacDonal, *Golden Jubilee*, 232; "1914-1919," *The Beaver* (December 1925), 32-33; Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver 1997), 135.



A group of the audience who witnessed the May Festival.

Figure 7. Spectators at Eaton's Female Employees' May Festival Performance. From: *Eaton News Weekly*, 11 June 1927, Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with permission from Sears Canada.

front of them.⁵⁰ Both the “King and Country” event and the May Festival suggested Eaton's workers were wholesome, dainty, and patriotic. They were visual embodiments of feminine purity and imperialist loyalty.

While offering insights into how department stores sought to extract exchange-value from Eaton's female employees' bodies, the gymnastics display and the May Festival also provide broader perspectives on race, imperialism, and nationalism in interwar Canada. The performers' choreographed routines ritualized imperialism and English tradition, affirming British superiority in Canada. In this regard, these events resembled the 1938 *Tweede Trek* in South Africa. According to Anne McClintock, at the turn of the 20th century Afrikaners “were a disunited, scattered people.” Over the next 30 years they developed a common nationalist identity. A performance of a trek across the land that told the story of the Afrikaners' development was crucial to this creation. Donning “ancestral” clothing and traveling in buggies, they romanticized their forebearers' conquering of the region.⁵¹ Although Eaton's performances differed, they resembled the *Trek* in that they were ritualized spectacles that created a nationalist identity by justifying racialized imperialist legitimacy in a colonized land.

The gymnastics and May Festival exhibitions also help us understand class subordination in Canada. In both cases, performers were wage earners. Their displays had been choreographed by the recreation managers at Eaton's Girls' Club.

⁵⁰“May Festival of Eaton Girls' Club,” *Eaton News Weekly* (11 June 1927), 19.

⁵¹Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York 1995), 368-374.

According to Strange, promoters of recreation for working-class women believed calisthenics, swimming, and other healthful activities would improve female wage-earners' constitutions. Assuming low-paying jobs and commercial amusements could damage white women's morality and reproductive capacities, recreationists argued that wholesome leisure activities enabled working-class women to remain healthy and feminine.⁵² Significantly, the recreation movement did not challenge class inequality. Instead of recommending that employers pay higher wages, recreationists believed working women could improve themselves through training in physical and moral fitness. Both the 1919 gymnastics routine and the May Festival illustrate the ironies of this position. In both cases, youthful female wage earners displayed their bodies for audiences of employers and wealthy philanthropists. The audiences appreciated the spectacle, not only because it was entertaining, but because it legitimized the bourgeoisie's sense of the natural social order.

Finally, the 1919 gymnastics event and the May Festival point to the aestheticization and sexualization of women's bodies under consumer capitalism. Although the May Festival was performed for a female audience, it did feature women acting out a pre-Christian tradition of heterosexual courtship. What made the May Festival peculiarly modern was its connections among big business, display of female bodies, and sexual allure. In her exploration of capitalism and sexual identities, Rosemary Hennessy explains why modern heterosexual femininity became defined by submission and ornamentality. Her analysis builds on Foucault's insight that sexuality "became more important in family relations" after production moved out of the family and into the marketplace. At the turn of the 20th century, this growing importance coincided with the rise of the consumer marketplace. In both arenas, desire and pleasure became crucial. Capitalist "overproduction," she writes, was "managed ideologically" by "the formation of newly desiring subjects, forms of agency, intensities of sensation, and economies of pleasure." These processes drew upon and changed existing gender relations. In the "Victorian gender hierarchy," only men were viewed as "desiring subject[s]." Under capitalist modernity, however, both men and women became desiring subjects. Moreover, the new desiring subject "was a subject that was not defined so much in terms of species needs for reproduction as in terms of individual consumer preferences or objects he or she desires." Significantly, though, women remained objects of desire. Thus if they desired a heterosexual relationship, they had to portray themselves as objects of the masculine gaze.⁵³

Hennessy's insights explain why the modern relationship between consumer culture and displays of attractive women evolved. To fully understand this relationship, though, it is useful to also refer to Wolfgang Haug's 1971 *Critique of Com-*

⁵²Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, 192. Also Forbes, "The Influence."

⁵³Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York 2000), 99-104.

modity Aesthetics. Haug argues that exchange-value has created a sexualized aesthetic in which commodities are sexually attractive and human existence is commodified. Since capitalism depends on the realization of surplus-value, profit-seekers seek to extract as much capital from the commodity-form as they can. The realization of this extraction may only be achieved at the point of sale. Thus it is precisely at this moment “when and where the merchandise casts its loving glances.” Since the commodity’s sexual appeal engages shoppers in acts of voyeurism, Haug argues that merchants present commodities as the objects of the voyeur’s gaze.⁵⁴ This sexual attribute of goods produced for exchange is the “commodity aesthetic.” According to Haug, this aesthetic has seeped out of the realm of merchandising and has come to define capitalist human relations. If we apply Hennessy’s and Haug’s insights to both Lady Eaton’s May Festival and Eaton’s 1919 gymnastics display, we can determine that Eaton’s was trying to enhance its commodities’ value by sexualizing its workers’ bodies. Showing youthful working women as attractive and feminine, Eaton’s attempted to transfer the value created by their sexualized bodies toward its own image and products. In this way Eaton’s attempted to profit from its female employees’ heterosexual allure.

Department stores also used beauty contests and fashion shows to broadcast their female employees’ attractiveness. *The Beaver* often reported that certain female individuals had been nominated by their department managers to enter local pageants. Underneath a photograph of four women, the February 1922 issue informed readers, “The above group of salesladies were selected to represent H.B.C.” in the Edmonton *Journal* beauty contest. In this particular contest, “prizes will be awarded to the group which the judges consider the best, not only for ‘visibility’ but also for [a] smart, business-like appearance.” The HBC’s entrants had a good chance of winning, claimed *The Beaver*, for they were “Easy to look at and pretty hard to beat.” By the interwar years fashion shows had become staple components of the stores’ public relations repertoires. The retailers occasionally employed professional models for these shows, but they more often drew upon their selling and clerical staffs. As *The Beaver* related about a 1921 show, “The models who took part in the recent Fall opening ... have ... justified the reputation which the Edmonton branch holds for staging events successfully ... without going outside for talent ... In conversation with an Eastern manufacturer ... we had ... difficulty ... convincing him that the models were amateurs, selected from the sales-ladies of the store.”⁵⁵

The women who participated in beauty contests and fashion shows likely did so to have fun, to engage in creative forms of self-display, and to showcase their bodies and perhaps their sexuality. In this sense the contests and shows were inven-

⁵⁴Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality, and Advertising in Capitalist Society*, trans. Robert Bock (London 1986 [1971]), 16-38, 23, 48-52.

⁵⁵“Beauty Contest,” *The Beaver* (February 1922), 25; also “Social Notes,” *The Beaver* (February 1923), 201; “Queen of the May,” *The Beaver* (May 1923), 313; “Models of Fashion,” *The Beaver* (October 1921), 25.

tive venues in which women workers performed alternative, and perhaps more exciting and glamorous, personas than those experienced in day-to-day life. Yet it must be remembered that department stores orchestrated these events and profited from the proceeds. They also promulgated the notion that women's success depended on attire and appearance. The titles and the scripts of the shows usually connected fashion and beauty with adventure and fulfillment, as did Eaton's 1934 Winnipeg show titled "Windswept, Streamlined, and Going Places!" Hence the shows did not challenge the presumption that women should display their bodies so that men could judge their appearances. Indeed, in a report on a HBC Edmonton fashion show, *The Beaver's* editor offered the following: "New suits, hats, wraps, ... dresses and sumptuous Hudson's Bay furs were charmingly displayed by a bevy of pretty models chosen from among the girls of the store ... The girls ... captured the hearts of spectators."⁵⁶

Commodification Epitomized: Salespeople

Of all department-store employees, salespeople were the most commodified. Working at the heart of the commodity exchange, they were under intense customer scrutiny. As early as 1908 Eaton's in Toronto was receiving regular complaints about its sales staff's demeanour, activities, and statements.⁵⁷ Recognizing that sellers had the potential to influence browsers' opinions and purchasing decisions, Eaton's, Simpson's, and the HBC invested much time, money, and effort in ensuring their salesforces appeared as profitable as possible. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, this responsibility fell to owners, department managers, and welfare workers. Often, owners posted lists of wrongdoings for which employees would be punished. A 1900 Eaton's poster, titled "MISDEAMOURS," was typical.

Assembling in groups of two or more for conversation.
 Speaking with a salesman or saleswoman except on unavoidable business
 Striking a Cash Boy
 Reading Newspapers, letters or books, or writing letters.
 Eating while at the counters or departments.
 Loafing or spending unnecessary time ... away from your department.
 Standing, sitting, or lounging on counters or shelves is particularly prohibited ...
 Cleaning or scraping the finger-nails while at the counters ...
 Chewing gum or tobacco or spitting on the floor
 Driving nails or tacks about the counters ... scribbling on walls ...

⁵⁶"Windswept, Streamlined, and Going Places!" *Contacts* (April 1934), 2; "The Store Sets High Mark in Style Exhibit," *The Beaver* (October 1921), 24; also Donica Belisle, "Exploring Postwar Consumption: The Campaign to Unionize Eaton's in Toronto, 1948-1952," *Canadian Historical Review*, 86 (December 2005), 662-664.

⁵⁷"Complaint Column," *The Little Helper* (11 April 1908), 8, AO, TEP, Series 162, Box 48, File 1548.

Lighting matches in any part of the store ...
 Ringing bells, or using speaking tubes without necessity ...
 Mutilating or otherwise injuring ... property of the store.
 Loud, noisy talk: fooling or quarreling ...
 The suppression of any fact that should be known to the Management.

The notice warned, “A deliberate careless, or wilful violation of any of the above rules will render ... employees liable to an immediate discharge.”⁵⁸

Owners and managers also regulated salespeople’s attire. It was mandatory for clerks at Eaton’s, Simpson’s, and the HBC to wear simple, chaste, and dark-coloured — preferably black — garments. This kind of garb helped customers to identify employees, but it also indicated that employees were respectful and respectable. *The Beaver* noted, “Customers Don’t Like ... To see untidy people about the stores.” Eaton’s Winnipeg organ similarly declared, “Untidy clothes mean you don’t care what [customers] think of your appearance ... But don’t dress too well — that gives you an air of showing off.” And an Eaton’s training manual asserted, “A well-dressed business-like appearance is not obtained by wearing bright colors or extreme styles.”⁵⁹

Welfare workers became responsible for developing salespeople’s pleasing appearances and behaviours. Through skills development classes, physical recreation programs, and regular medical evaluations, welfare workers tried to make customer-service employees polite, enthusiastic, intelligent, and physically attractive. In 1934 *Contacts* urged employees to “study the art” of cosmetics before applying make-up “— since its proper use is of vital importance to those who would keep ‘young and beautiful’ — as well as those who would succeed in the business world.” Such instructions confirm Haug’s observation that “the correlation of public taste with the aesthetic stylization of the sales staff’s appearance is a factor of immediate consequence for commerce.” In 1937 Simpson’s offered its employees a “Self-Teaching Course in Practical English and Effective Speech” intended to help workers “[learn] correct usage of English, and enlarg[e] their vocabularies.” To further ensure salespeople’s profitability, in the 1910s Eaton’s Toronto store created an Efficiency Department. Its experts provided “new employees with ... training in methods and merchandise.” The Department also paid for university extension courses in fields related to department-store work. By the Great Depression, each of Canada’s largest department stores was operating formal training departments.

⁵⁸“Misdemeanours,” 15 March 1900, AO, TEP, Series 162, File 651.

⁵⁹“Store Warns Employees About Male Customers,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 7 January 1972, AO, TEP, Series 162, Box 18, File 656; “Uniformity and Neatness in Dress,” *The Beaver* (March 1921), 41; *Employees’ Book of Information* (Toronto 1933), 8, AO, TEP, Series 162, Box 23, File 792; “Customers Don’t Like,” *The Beaver* (September 1928), 75; “What is the Essence of Good Salesmanship?,” *Contacts* (October 1935), 3; *Employees’ Book of Information*, 8; Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 128-136; Forbes, “The Influence,” 144.

Like stores in France, these appeared approximately 20 years behind those in major US stores. Staff trainers held merchandising sessions as well as distributed booklets and magazines to sales employees, in attempts to perfect sellers' profitability.⁶⁰

If employees' personas were regulated at the turn of the 20th century, by the interwar years they were even more so. Within international sales training literature, it had become a truism that shoppers judged a store's value, and hence its products, by evaluating salespeople's looks, attitudes, and capabilities. "In our manner, our speech and in our general bearing we are constantly making impressions on our customers," noted Eaton's *Employees Book of Information* in 1933. Trainers bombarded sellers on how to groom themselves and how to behave. Hands received especial attention. "Your hands — the two silent salesmen who are forever with you," Eaton's proclaimed in 1933, "often by their graceful and dainty manner convince the customer of the merits of the displayed merchandise." Since employees' hands had the power to enhance and diminish commodities' values, managers urged workers to "give oneself a home manicure." Eaton's recommended regimen included using "a strong nail brush every night," "shap[ing] the nail tips," "shap[ing] the cuticles," "apply[ing] the polish," and "massag[ing] the cuticle."⁶¹

Sales experts also taught sellers what to say. Winnipeg's Eaton magazine urged readers to use 57 sentences that were sure to sell "a piece of merchandise *more times* than any other sentence." These included, "These ties will not wrinkle," "This tablecloth saves laundry bills," and "This dress is unusually slenderizing." Eaton's Winnipeg organ also tried to guide employees' selling strategies. "Don't sell things ... *sell happiness*," one article stated, and then continued: "Don't sell clothes — sell personal appearance and attractiveness ... Don't sell furniture — sell a home that has comfort and refinement and the joy of living. Don't sell toys — sell gifts that will make children happy... Don't sell books — sell the profits of knowledge ... Don't sell radio sets ... — sell the beauty of music."⁶²

Driven by fears of declining profits, during the 1930s Eaton's trainers began to apply principles of scientific management to the sales transaction. They studied the selling process objectively and picked apart its various stages. Taking their cue from developments in US sales literature, they began telling salespeople that each sale had three steps: 1. "Approaching and greeting"; 2. "Presenting the merchan-

⁶⁰"Let's Make-Up," *Contacts* (April 1934), 13; Haug, *Critique*, 65; "C.E.A. Savage, "Physical Exercise and Store Life," *The Beaver* (June 1931), 241; *Every-Tuesday-Morning Bulletin* (24 August 1937), HBCHS; MacDonald, *Golden Jubilee*, 123; Marie-Emmanuelle Chessel, "Training Sales Personnel in France between the Wars," in *Cathedrals of Consumption*, 286-292; J. Brooks, "Report on Staff Organization and Training," February 1925, HBCA, RG2/54/9.

⁶¹*Employees Book of Information* (Toronto 1933), 17, AO, TEP, Series 162, Box 23, File 792; "All Fingers," *Contacts* (March 1933), 8.

⁶²"Tested Selling Sentences," *Contacts* (September 1933), 4-5; "What Are You Selling?," *Contacts* (June 1933), 15. Also Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 156.

dise”; and 3. “Concluding the sale.” Staff training literature discussed each of these stages and broke them down into further categories. In one discussion of Stage Two, trainers gave advice on what to do when the customer asks for an article not in stock, when the customer does not state how much she is willing to pay, when the customer provides a price limit, when the customer asks for an item out of her price range, when the customer asks the price of an article, when the customer says “she” is just looking, when the salesperson is dealing with more than one customer, when the customer wants to see an entire line of merchandise, and, finally, when a customer wants to see more than one type of product. By dissecting the sales transaction, trainers hoped to make customers and salespeople act according to a script, which they could then further study and modify.⁶³

This breaking down of selling into smaller parts constituted a reification of salespeople’s work experiences. According to Georg Lukács, reification is caused by “the mathematical analysis of work-processes.” When work is divided into the smallest units possible, “the inorganic, irrational and qualitatively determined unity” of goods and services is sundered. This sundering creates a reification — or a quantification and rigidization — of capitalist-dwellers’ experiences. By choreographing salesfloor life, Eaton’s removed sellers’ opportunities for creative skill development. They also made salespeople act artificially, which opened up the possibility that they would start feeling alienated from their own intuitions and specific abilities. In her study of emotional labour, Hochschild finds that airline stewardesses experience emotional burnout and feelings of estrangement from their own selves because they have to suppress their personal thoughts and emotions.⁶⁴

Commodification’s Consequences

Within historical research on consumer culture, there exists a long-standing tension between interpreting consumption as liberating and interpreting consumption as oppressive. In the 1970s the left’s rejection of materialism, combined with its recognition that conspicuous consumption enforced class privilege, encouraged historians to portray advertising and consumption as tools of capitalist oppression that caused alienation and despondency among working people.⁶⁵ Relatedly, second-wave feminists’ rejections of patriarchy and conservative femininity encour-

⁶³ *A Little Chat About Selling* (Toronto 1931), 5, AO, TEP, Series 162, Box 24, File 816. In the 1950s such reification reached a new level when Eaton’s — again following US developments — added two more stages to their three-step model: determining customers’ needs and suggesting additional items (*5 Star Salesmanship at EATON’S* [Toronto 1958], AO, TEP, Series 162, Box 24, File 816).

⁶⁴ Georg Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” in Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London 1968), 83; Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 187-189.

⁶⁵ Especially Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York 1976).

aged feminists to critique, first, the objectification of women within advertising; and, second, popular culture's equation of feminine success with physical attractiveness.⁶⁶ In the late 1980s, though, historians began to question earlier interpretations. They recognized that advertising and consumption could have negative consequences, but they also wanted to understand why people consumed. Looking less at capitalists and advertisers, and more at consumers, historians working in this vein have shown that people enter the consumer marketplace for a variety of reasons.⁶⁷

When considering the question "How and why have consumer subjectivities formed?," insights from recent research into consumer motivation are important to keep in mind. Yet this article shows that historians must not abandon older concerns with capitalism's role in shaping consumption. During the rise of mass retail in the industrializing West, mass merchandisers developed an extensive system of employee commodification that had negative consequences. Between 1890 and 1940 Canada's three largest retailers — Eaton's, Simpson's, and the HBC — used employees' activities, bodies, and appearances in advertising and publicity. They also saturated employees' experiences with encouragement to consume and reified the point of sale. Although these department stores paid employees only for their time and skills, they attempted to capitalize not only on employees' time and skills, but on their activities, appearances, and propensities to consume. Using workers' beings to increase the worth of their products and images, and selling goods to workers, department stores tried to gain more value from the employment contract than that which was formally agreed upon. Commodification was thus an unacknowledged form of exploitation.

As fordism declines and as service work increases, it is imperative that scholars continue inquiring into how employers' needs to sell goods influence their treatment of workers. Between 1890 and 1940 Canadian department stores sought to create workplace cultures of consumerist loyalty. These cultures would have pressured employees to consume in order to belong. They would also have bullied employees to identify with their company and its products, and hence to accept paternalism and avoid unionization. Department stores' advertising of employees' activities and bodies would also have had negative effects. It is likely that Eaton's, Simpson's, and the HBC's exhortations for its workforce to conform to particular body types and behaviours made some employees feel inferior; others undoubtedly became angry. This would have particularly been the case for workers who were neither conventionally attractive nor white. As well, the stores' careful engineering of salesfloor interactions prevented some workers from controlling their work process, which may have led to bitterness and despondency. Further, although the re-

⁶⁶Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Norton 1963); for further discussion see Lancaster, *The Department Store*, 172-175.

⁶⁷For example, Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York 1999), 167-202.

tailers' utilization of employees' behaviours and appearances within publicity may have made some personnel proud, it could have made others feel their personal lives had been used for corporate gain. Finally, the retailers' bombardment of employees' lives with advertisements may have developed in some workers a sense of inadequacy. Since the purpose of advertising is to create needs, those who absorbed their employers' messages but who could not afford to constantly consume may have felt unfulfilled.

Hiring predominantly white workers who conformed to bourgeois expectations of working-class servitude and who were conventionally sexually attractive, department stores confirmed the existence of class, racial, and sexual hierarchies in modernizing Canada. Not only this, they demonstrated that those whose appearances matched prevailing race, class, and gender ideals had better chances of employment success. Today this situation appears to have eased. Pluralism has made some headway in recent decades, and some retailers have made a point of hiring non-white workers. As well, greater acceptance of homosexuality has encouraged some stores to staff customer-service positions with fashionably attired gay workers. Nonetheless it is true that whiteness remains an asset for people searching for customer-service jobs. It is also true that heterosexual attractiveness helps retail and restaurant workers obtain employment. Class subordination further remains central to service work. Job-seekers who present themselves as amenable to the goals of the bourgeoisie will have greater success in finding jobs than those who make potentially threatening views and behaviours known. Of course, if a retailer desired to portray itself as oppositional, it would hire people who dressed and behaved unconventionally. Nonetheless, if customer-service workers today speak out against their employers, they usually find themselves pressured to quit. Thus whiteness, heterosexual attractiveness, and acceptance of class subordination remain factors in customer-service employment.

While the study of commodification helps us understand contemporary service-worker experiences, it also provides broader insights into the consumer capitalist era. The need to earn money is a basic feature of many North Americans' lives. As business becomes increasingly reliant on consumerism and image-making, its need to find consumerist workers whose bodies and behaviours are sources of value becomes more pressing. In order to find and keep employment, workers must show themselves to be in tune with capitalism's requirements. Not only must they be consumerist, so must they imbue their bodies and activities with exchange-value. They must also accept employers' attempts to extract, without payment, as much value from their appearances and activities as possible. More than this, commodification tends to reinforce social and economic hierarchies. So that we can fully appreciate commodification's significances, we must continue exploring its manifestations. Documenting labour management practices and employees' responses, commodification researchers will articulate not only consumer culture's liberations and fulfillments, but also its alienations and exploitations.

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