

**Fig. 1**, Mansour, Mariam. "Mary Quant Mini Dress, Toronto Metropolitan University FRC2014.07.357", 24 Sep. 2019. Accessed 29 Sep. 2019. Picture taken at the Fashion Research Center.



## **DID MARY QUANT'S DESIGNS CONFORM TO OR DEFY THE GENDER ROLES OF THE 1960s? WAS THE GINGER GROUP LINE SIZE FRIENDLY AND DID IT PAVE THE WAY FOR WESTERN WOMEN'S FASHION IN THE 21st CENTURY?**

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Advocate of the mini skirt and master of timeless fashion that transcends generations, Mary Quant was a fashion force to be reckoned with in the swinging sixties. In 1963, Quant shook up the UK's fashion industry with her mass-produced line called the "Ginger Group collection". Through this particular collection Quant's desire was to "produce modern and edgy clothing for a wider clientele" (Stainer).

Quant drew her inspiration from American sportswear. The purpose of this line was to allow consumers to have a variety of pieces in their wardrobe that they could mix and match without compromising their budget. The name of the collection was derived from a political term for a pressure group (Stainer). In this context, the verb "ginger" meant to "pep things up" and that is certainly what Quant did with her unconventional attitude towards design (Stainer).



**Fig. 2,** Mansour, Mariam. "Mary Quant Mini Dress, Toronto Metropolitan University FRC2014.07.357", 24 Sep. 2019. Accessed 29 Sep. 2019. Picture taken at the Fashion Research Center.

Our particular dress of focus is a mini, sheer cotton dress with broderie anglaise detailing and subtle polka dot patterning. This dress, being one of many of its kind, epitomizes the free, youthful feminine ideal that Quant introduced with the Ginger Group collection line. It is important to note that during this time there was a shift in the market and the focus was on the working girl as opposed to the prevalent socialite consumer. "The principal focus was no longer on the well-heeled, middle-aged fashion buyer; instead, the market catered exclusively for the young, who had a more limited budget" (English 95). Quant steered the fashion scene away from "haute couture" and made it more accessible through ready to wear designs. "She became the first 'designer' rather than 'couturier' to determine the new direction in fashion (English 95).

The above dress from the Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection is made from a natural cotton with subtle white polka dot prints incorporated throughout and bands of broderie anglaise embroidery on the sleeves, waistband and hem. In addition to having broderie anglaise detailing, both the sleeves and hem contain scalloped finishing on the edges (FRC2014.07.357) This dress is structured with a zipper back, sheer three-quarter balloon sleeves and a modest round neck. Moreover, the dress has a drop waist that is similar to that of an A-line dress. The mini dress is not cinched at the waist, allowing for more mobility, making the legs the focal point of attention. The dress contains lining to ensure that it is not sheer, therefore while it is playful and short, it is still considered somewhat conservative and classic. The dress shows evidence of wear through oil stains on the front side right above the drop waist. Also, there is what appears to be a yellow food stain on the back of the dress on the embroidered waist belt. Additionally, the yellowing of the dress indicates that the dress is somewhat old and worn. Alongside the dress's inner neckline is a label that reads "MARY QUANT'S Ginger Group" with washing instructions and a size 8 label.



**Fig. 3, Maje Dress 2019.**  
[https://www.theoutnet.com/en-ca/shop/product/maje/dresses/mini-dress/revery-broderie-anglaise-voile-mini-dress/2507222119069852?tp=149336&cm\\_mmc=ProductSearchP\\_LACA--MAJE--Dresses-Google&gclid=CjwKCAiAqqTuBRBAEiwA7B66hWrl9MLAQW3DOSD4Tqt5K7eDEYuHeep5c8M90l8qyWERpTXZ\\_](https://www.theoutnet.com/en-ca/shop/product/maje/dresses/mini-dress/revery-broderie-anglaise-voile-mini-dress/2507222119069852?tp=149336&cm_mmc=ProductSearchP_LACA--MAJE--Dresses-Google&gclid=CjwKCAiAqqTuBRBAEiwA7B66hWrl9MLAQW3DOSD4Tqt5K7eDEYuHeep5c8M90l8qyWERpTXZ_)

While this mini dress from Quant's Ginger Group collection conforms to some stylistic elements of the 1960's (such as the drop waist) its short length and playful nature blurs the line of its time period, making it look timeless. Because of the absence of hand-stitched techniques, it can be deduced that this dress was sold at a mid-level price point and this is confirmed by the background we have of this particular brand.

Below is a visual comparison between a dress by Maje and Quant's Ginger Line Group dress. We thought it was necessary to include both as the dresses are almost identical yet designed almost 60 years apart.



**Fig. 4,** Toronto Metropolitan University FRC2014.07.357. Photograph by Victoria Hopgood.

In this research blog post, we will discuss the following questions: Did Mary Quant's designs conform to or defy the gender roles of the 1960's? Was the line size friendly and lastly, did it pave the way for western women's fashion in the 21st century?



### **MARY QUANT'S DESIGNS AND GENDER ROLES OF THE 1960s**

As mentioned earlier, Quant took the fashion world by storm in the 60's, liberating women by inspiring them to embrace fun fashion and stray away from Paris' haute couture. Furthermore, as stated by Davies in the *YOU Magazine* article, "Mary",

*"The graphic cuts, trademark bob, coquettish eyelashes and quintessentially British style inspired a generation of women to go short, go bold and be more modern; to have fun with their fashion. I loved the way her designs reflected what was going on in the wider world of politics, music and society - how rebellious they were."*

Working women were at the forefront and through Quant's designs, in the *Marie Claire* magazine article (Davies) explains that women were "freed from rules and regulations and from dressing like their mothers." Quant's designs not only served to liberate women on a superficial level but also, they reflected a deeper, more drastic change in the way in which women behaved at a time when contraceptive pills were introduced in 1967 as mentioned in the *YOU Magazine* article, "Mary". The miniskirt was a symbol of independence and sexual liberation and represented the newly embraced attitudes of women who demanded more autonomy and visibility. It came about at a time where more jobs were available for women and being a housewife was not the only option on offer (Goldin 2). While the miniskirt movement generated a buzz, it was the cause of controversy as well. With their array of vibrant colors and unusually short hemlines, they were "considered obscene and designers such as Coco Chanel disapproved" (Amsbaugh et al.). Women were expected to conform to the prevalent style of the time that saw more modest clothing that was in muted colors (Amsbaugh et al.).

It was argued by Kat George in an article by *REFINERY29* that rather than serving as a tool of liberation and female empowerment, the miniskirt attracted "the male gaze and hyper-sexualized women" (George). Thus, shifting the focus on fashion as opposed to more pressing issues such as politics of gender parity. Additionally, feminists considered the miniskirt to be a tool of objectifying women and in the 1970's they began to dispute the rise of the miniskirt (George). Today, there remains to be an ongoing debate with regards to whether or not the miniskirt was a tool for liberating women or objectifying them (George). While we have come a long way from the 1960's and women are more sexually liberated; the issue of victim-blaming and inequality still prevail (George). In our opinion, while we acknowledge that the dress would be deemed too skimpy for the climate of the sixties, we believe that regardless, it allowed women to feel empowered and less constrained in the literal sense due to the mobility its short length allowed. We believe that rather than serving as a tool of sex appeal, Quant's intention was to create designs that would give women a voice.

### **MARY QUANT'S DESIGNS' SIZE RANGE**

Little to no information was given with regards to the size range of Quant's designs. However, the ideal body type to wear the mini-dress was very restricting. It catered to women who were very young and thin- post war. Moreover, (Hall) stated that it encouraged a "dieting culture". In *The Guardian* article "Mary Quant: Still Fresh as a Daisy" Lister explains that "for women who had grown up during the war on a war diet, these clothes worked." She adds that Quant wanted to "flatter personality and loved functionality" (Kellaway). Perhaps by doing so, Quant overlooked the sizing aspects of her designs which ruled out many women. Moreover, Quant expressed that she "didn't see a fat person until her first trip to America in the Sixties" (Armstrong). Her inspiration behind the miniskirt came from watching ballet dancers as a child. She further expressed that while the mini skirt wasn't physically constraining, a certain body type was required to pull it off. "But everyone was thin then, I didn't get fat even when I was pregnant. You have to work very hard at staying slim and it's a bore. But it's worth it," (Armstrong). Therefore, while older women and more curvaceous women did not have the chance to embrace her designs, now on the Victoria and Albert Museum website, women are given the opportunity to download sewing patterns that are inspired by Quant's designs. More importantly, the patterns offered are available in a wide size range, varying from size 6 to 22 (Singh).

Over the years Quant's mini skirt served many purposes: from a 60's trend, to a controversial, feminist political statement to a wardrobe staple. Today, however the mini skirt is an essential piece that can and is worn by women of all body types. Although there was no sufficient information to be found specifically discussing the sizing of Quant's designs, it can be deduced that her designs were certainly not size friendly. Moreover, judging by her views on weight, one can assume that Quant had no intention of designing clothing for more curvaceous body types. Based on our first glance of her dress, we even considered that it may perhaps be childrenswear not only due to its size but also due to the innocence evoked by the color and design.



Figs, 5-7. Celebrities wearing PVC on the red carpet <https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/gallery/celebrities-wearing-vinyl-trend-and-latex>.

### QUANT'S GINGER GROUP LINE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON 21st CENTURY FASHION

Quant's Ginger Group Line influenced western women's fashion in the 21st century. Along with the noteworthy miniskirt, Quant has a number of designs she is synonymous with, including sleeveless shift dresses, tunic dresses, Peter Pan collars, skinny rib sweaters as well as everyday colored tights and the iconic PVC raincoats (Hall). One cannot deny that today's fast fashion industry giants, such as H&M, Zara and ASOS to name but a few are following in Quant's foot steps after her introduction of the mass-market industry to the world. Upon opening her first boutique, Bazaar, sixty years ago, her influence remains strong to date amongst both high fashion brands and fast-fashion stores and this can be seen through their designs. Although her style was simple and practical, it was progressive for the era and remains to be remembered today. Having made a colossal contribution to the fashion world over decades of time, there are a number of exhibitions, museum shows as well as books and articles honoring Quant as a true fashion revolutionary (Hall).

Quant's ideology of "fun and playfulness" has paved the way for many fashion innovations such as eccentric colored tights that are an essential part of women's dress today. Moreover, the use of PVC as a material had never before been used in clothing prior to Quant's designs and today "the wet look" is coveted by a number of celebrities on the red carpet. Quant's influence was so widespread that she even contributed to the beauty industry by introducing the first ever waterproof mascara that is being worn everyday by every woman ever since (Walsh). She was highly influential and her impact can be seen in everyday clothing from back to three generations of women.



Broderie Anglaise trend of the summer featured in collections by various designers.

**LEFT: Fig. 8.** Stella McCartney dress. <https://www.mytheresa.com/en-it/stella-mccartney-broderie-anglaise-silk-dress-1152433.html>

**RIGHT: Fig. 9.** Self-Portrait dress. <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/103723597651687406/>



**LEFT: Fig. 10.** Zara dress. <https://www.thefashionspot.com/style-trends/835397-white-dresses-for-summer-2019/#/slide/1>

**RIGHT: Fig. 11.** H&M dress. [https://www.hm.com.cn/en\\_cn/0798087003.html](https://www.hm.com.cn/en_cn/0798087003.html)

Upon closely looking at the dress from the FRC, we have noticed that a number of details it features are on trend now. Broderie anglaise, for example, was considered the "official fabric of summer" with ASOS selling over 90,000 units of designs in this fabric (Teather). Moreover, the sheer fabric was the trend for 2018 with different materials from light net to organza (Thakur) along with puffy/balloon sleeves trend that we have been seeing from 2018 still remaining strong in 2019 (Lanquist). The whole concept of this dress has also been reimaged in 2019 as summer dresses were visible in a number of major fashion designer's collections from high end brands such as Prada, Zimmerman and Stella McCartney to more accessible brands such as H&M, Zara and Macy's (Klerk).





REIMAGINING  
THE  
MINIDRESS



**OUR MOOD BOARD**

The mood board below serves to highlight our findings that dresses similar to Quant's can be seen in various designer's collections today, ranging from fast fashion brands to high fashion brands.

2019



ZIMMERMANN



ALEXIS



PRETTY  
LITTLE  
THING



CHLOE



Toronto Metropolitan  
University



GANNI



Through creating this moodboard we wanted to highlight the parallels between Quant's mini dress from the 1960's and the designs that exist today. Moreover, we selected our favorite "reimagined" version of the dress by designer *Ganni*.

We selected this particular dress due to its unique color and its twist on the traditional shirt dress. It incorporates the puff sleeves as seen on the Quant design but makes it more modern with the addition of the pockets. We like the functionality aspect of it- it can be dressed up or down and could serve as a cover up with a bathing suit. It is, in our opinion the ideal, broderie anglaise dress.

Clothing, accessories even beauty have seen a vast shift between the 60's and now because of Quant however going beyond material culture, it was her attitude that women wanted to adopt. Women yearned to be like Quant, admiring her ideology of "freedom of expression" and "the confidence to be oneself" (Walsh) and today's woman is the epitome of that. As Quant famously said "the fashionable woman wears clothes. The clothes don't wear her" (Sagal).

One cannot deny that Quant was a major driving force of change in the 1960's. By challenging conventional norms through her playful designs she made women feel confident and empowered which was much needed at a time where women had little autonomy. However, very little is known about the flip side- the women who felt excluded because of the restricting sizing of her designs. While it is known that being thin was the ideal beauty standard of the time, as evident by iconic models such as Twiggy, very little is mentioned and researched about how women who did not live up to this ideal felt. Although Quant managed to give women a voice through their way of dress and the mobility her designs allowed, the irony lies in the fact that a great percentage of other women may have felt marginalized and pressured to look a certain way in order to fit the aesthetic of the time. While plus sized models and clothing are more on offer now compared to the 1960's parallels still exist through the selection of models at the forefront with the likes of Bella Hadid and Kendall Jenner monopolizing fashion shows and fashion campaigns.

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