

Pathfinder

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WOMEN

Fashion show in the living room

TV may decide what the well-dressed woman wears



Styles on TV. Maggie Johnson shows lingerie;

What makes fashions? By tradition, a complex of forces work together to decide what the well-dressed woman will wear: clothing designers and manufacturers, fashion editors, Hollywood movies and even, to a small extent, the well-dressed woman herself.

But by last week almost everybody in the business was ready to admit that a rank outsider, shiny-faced and brassy-voiced, had shouldered its way into the front lines of fashion-making. By catching the customers in their own living rooms, it was outbidding the old powers both for audience and influence. It was, of course, television.

There is considerable disagreement over just how strong a fashion force television is, and even more about how strong it is likely to become. One of the big guns in New York women's wear circles, for instance, is a publicity woman named Eleanor Lambert. She finds fault with TV as a straight fashion-show medium. "It's too much like the candid camera," she says. "Fashion has to be edited and idealized."



Maggi McNellis selects a costume from her fabulous dressing room.

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TV Fashion



Faye Emerson. *Even the husbands can't help noticing what smart TV stars wear.*

On the other hand, the same Miss Lambert now employs a full-time TV expert, Diana Stokes, in her fashion publicity office, and Miss Stokes spends a great deal of time and effort getting designers' products—dresses, hats, jewelry and lingerie—on an average of one television show a day. It is Miss Lambert, too, who pulls the strings for the New York Dress Institute's Press Week, one of the biggest fashion shows of the year. Parts of the current show, being held this week, are finding their way onto at least two TV shows—the *Kate Smith Hour* and *Tex and Jinx* (NBC).

Lumps & Shadows. Yet, as Miss Lambert points out, video does have faults as a fashion medium. One of the pioneers, former Powers model Maggie Johnson, who runs a show called *Your Television Shopper* (WABD, New York) can list more of them. She has learned, for instance, not to wear side-draped skirts: a pouf may come out on the screen looking like an oddly misplaced lump of Maggie. Hats tend to cast black shadows on faces; shoes, except in straight foot shots, are almost indiscernible. Even so, Miss Johnson and her staff are swamped after each show with calls and letters asking, "Where can I buy it?"

Television, the experts agree, is already having an impact on fashion. Moving as it does into the home, it catches the family off guard. It reaches the housewife who would never think of attending a fashion show. And it also reaches her husband.

Its most powerful influence probably comes not in fashion programs—though these are growing in number—but in dramatic shows, variety shows, quiz shows, interviews and a host of others on which smartly dressed women appear.

Taking the Plunge. Most women (not to mention most men) are already familiar, for example, with what actress Faye Emerson has done for the plunging neckline and the chignon. Neck and neckline with Miss Emerson is Maggi McNellis, one of the stars of a comedy-quiz show called *Leave It to the Girls* (NBC).

Maggi's television dressing room is perhaps the most fabulous anywhere outside of Hollywood. Decorated entirely in pink, its closet doors open on multiple rows of dresses, dozens of hats, pink boxes of scarves, drawersful of jewels and cabinets containing some 75 pink shoeboxes, all full and individually labeled. Maggi was called on recently by a men's club for a repeat performance—not of an act, but a pale blue and white net dress.

Dresses by . . . Leading designers

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Kate Smith. *It isn't only slim models who look smart. (SEE: Fashion show)*

now frequently lend their dresses, suits and hats to the stars. All they ask in return is a brief credit—usually tucked in at the end of the show.

Nor are the displays limited to the young and streamlined models. A sizable handful of TV shopping programs now show the latest styles for 6-month-, 6-year- and 60-year-olds. And Kate Smith, the hardest perennial among singing stars, does more on her own daily program than any designer or fashion editor



(image added)