“Whoever knew Hamburg before the French Revolution and sees it now,” the journal Hamburg und Altona observed in 1801, “will hardly recognize it. The people and their manners, their lifestyle, their social tone, their tastes, their architecture, their homes, including their inner and outer decorations, have all undergone great changes.”¹ At the turn of the nineteenth century, Hamburgers recognized that their republican city-state was in the midst of a serious transformation, one aspect related to new forms of consumption. The acquisition of material goods defined Hamburg’s municipal culture in new ways. During the 1790s, increasing consumption encouraged new public behaviors among Hamburg’s women and men that many observers believed posed a threat to the welfare of their republic. At the core of this transformation lay a distinct shift in civic morality in which a traditional concept of duty to the public good was replaced by a modern emphasis on individual gratification. For many contemporaries, clear evidence of the betrayal of communal republican virtues lay in the escalation of conspicuous consumption evidenced by society’s embrace of fashion and luxuries.

Changes in Hamburg’s political culture were influenced by an array of political, economic, and social events that also transformed much of the rest of Europe during the revolutionary decades of the late eighteenth century and first decades of the nineteenth century. This chapter examines the intersection of two historic trends: the emergence of bourgeois modes of consumption and new constructions of gender for women and men.² Until recently, scholars have read fashion in terms

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² Aaslestad, Sitten und Mode, 2.
of gender polarities. Studies on consumption and fashion associate women with frivolous conduct and vice but couple men with productive work and virtue. The emphasis on women as consumers of luxuries overshadows most inquiries in the study of gender and consumption. Traditional feminist interpretations have identified commercial culture as an exploitative and repressive force that extends patriarchal economic power over the socially and politically subordinate female. As passive objects of the market system, according to this interpretation, women were slaves of fashion. Historians recently have begun to reinterpret commercial culture and consumption as emancipatory, liberating women from the constraints of domesticity and empowering them in the market economy. Such new interpretations often emphasize style politics, through which women engage in the rituals of consumption either to flout or to reform traditional systems of authority. Historians also have explored the relationship between men and fashion, emphasizing that particular attire and styles conferred political legitimacy on affluent men and excluded women and the poor. As a presentation of the self, fashion highlights how individuals orient themselves toward the social world and therefore often provides insights into gendered constructions of femininity and masculinity. This is especially true in times of tumultuous change such as the turn of the nineteenth century.

The eighteenth century has emerged as the transitional period when commercial fashion steadily replaced sumptuary legislation in the determination of dress. Fashion, however, did not constitute uniquely an aesthetic quality; rather, it was understood as a social category. It was the adornment of the body with clothing as well as modes of conduct, hospitality, ceremony, and sociability. Thus, fashion, embodying new social values, emerged as a key site of confrontation between tradition and change. Recent textual analyses that focus on the social practices and the changing meanings of consumption in the 1700s emphasize that contemporaries recognized both the dangers and potential of fashion and consumerism. If dress operates as a cultural code marked by gender, did it define and reinforce a normative femininity and masculinity that bolstered the emerging gender polarity of the Sattlezeit? Or did fashion generate subcultures that provided women and men with opportunities to express new identities?

This study of Hamburg emphasizes that public attention to the rise of fashionable women and men reveals the emergence of multiple gendered identities and highlights the longevity and relevance of tradi-
tional culture, ideas, and practices that coexisted alongside new gender models. The exchange between Hamburg’s consumers of luxury and their critics underscores the interwoven relationships among consumer culture, civic ethics, and public identities and emphasizes the uneven development of separate gendered spheres that seemed to characterize late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century society. In Hamburg, femininity and masculinity were unstable notions subject to redefinition as both women and men altered their private behavior and experimented with new public identities. Popular attention to fashion compelled publicists openly to define appropriate republican conduct for women and men. According to many contemporary observers, the prevailing interest in dress, consumption, and leisure was not based on gender or sexuality; rather, it demonstrated the choice of new lifestyles and values that asserted personal autonomy and satisfaction at the expense of traditional civic morality.

Between the outbreak of the French Revolution and Hamburg’s annexation into the French Empire in 1811, the republic’s popular press and pamphlet literature identified new public identities—associated with luxury and ostentation—as threatening to the existence of the city-state. In fact, popular press opinions on fashion, consumed in their day as food for public discussion, overrode former sumptuary legislation regulating dress. Like sumptuary legislation, however, public opinion on fashion in Hamburg recognized the political and moral significance of personal judgment in attire. As a cultural mirror that reflected and affirmed civic morality, Hamburg’s popular press provides key insights into the contemporary meanings of fashionable lifestyles and codes of conduct. For example, public debates on consumption in Hamburg went beyond discussions of debt and circulation of money as people recognized that acts of purchasing material goods could both defy traditional values and generate new social meanings. In the case of Hamburg, these new meanings associated with fashionable women and men did not break down consistently along gender lines, and they illustrate the complexity implicit within the changing gender system. The symbolic and social dimensions of consumption and fashion in Hamburg were closely related to the forging of new public identities for women and men, and critics of fashion document the challenges raised by modish lifestyles to conventional understandings of femininity and masculinity during this period of great experimentation in gender construction.

In Hamburg, public discussions about indulgence in ostentatious
consumption were framed in ethical and political terms. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Hamburgers confidently celebrated the fruition of enlightened utilitarian reforms designed to strengthen both the civic morality and economy of their republican city-state. As evidenced in the local press and civic associations, Hamburg’s urban residents, especially the commercial and professional classes, proudly expressed their collective identity through horizontal networks that affirmed common values of hard work, modesty, and frugality—virtues deemed necessary for a self-governing republican polity. Many Hamburgers believed that these virtues and their republican constitution distinguished them from their monarchical neighbors. In a city-state with neither legally defined social estates (Stände) nor a table of ranks, these values shaped political culture and social order. Of all civic virtues, patriotism—defined as the civic duty to voluntarily subordinate individual advantage to the common good—embodied the ideal nature of Hamburg’s communitarian republicanism.

Women and men were expected to express these virtues in a society interconnected through mutual obligations. Industriousness and moderation practiced in the world of the countinghouse, workshop, or Civic Council also underpinned the household, the basic social unit of the republican community. In fact, some contemporary women referred to the household as the häusliche Republik, illustrating that contemporaries understood it more as a part of a functional community than an autonomous, intimate domestic sphere. If men served their community as patriots through commercial diligence, civic voluntarism, and associational activities, women exhibited their patriotism through loyalty and commitment to the integrity of the household and family. Implicitly recognizing the productive work of women and men, both sexes expected to embody and practice such republican virtues as thrift and moderation as a means of promoting the community’s well-being. Hamburg’s commentators explained frivolous consumption in other German cities as a consequence of the bad influence of the court or the nobility, but in a republican Hansestadt one expected a lifestyle that valued restraint and communal welfare. “Sober, temperate, and level-headed northerners,” as one contemporary described his compatriots, should not fall prey to vain frivolity.

Women and men expressed these virtues in the material world through clothing and decor. For example, the city’s mercantile families traditionally dressed simply and practically, affirming the values of republican moderation. Adhering to the adage that “He who wears
gold on his clothes has none in his pocket,” they dressed in plain dark frocks and coats, donning lace and fine jewels only for special occasions. In contrast to the multicolored splendor of fabrics and finery associated with aristocratic sumptuousness, Hamburgers, like their Dutch republican counterparts, generally clothed themselves in practical woolens and somber silks of black, white, blue, and gray that affirmed values of modesty, propriety, and thrift. Functioning as a collective reminder, such modest attire represented a visual image of the republican community. As natives and visitors alike noted, at home the wives of successful merchants dressed no better than their maids, and at the Exchange, “merchants, however rich, . . . dressed in the plainest manner.” Though Hamburg’s elites were well known for extravagant entertaining, they were equally known for frugality at their own tables. Travelers reported that unlike merchants in London, Berlin, Dresden, and Vienna, who resided in elegant homes, the majority of Hamburg’s merchants lived in functional and sparsely furnished apartments adjoining their warehouses. By 1800, values that supported this traditional lifestyle were revered as althamburgisch and as the repository of republican virtues.

Unprecedented commercial prosperity in the last decades of the eighteenth century fueled Hamburg’s public preoccupation with fashion. The revolutionary wars of the 1790s brought great profits to the city as the volume of trade in the harbor doubled and hundreds of new businesses flourished. A successful mercantile republic, Hamburg was familiar with wealth and luxury, and material success naturally played an important symbolic role indicating social status in a community without a legally defined social structure. But the republic’s sudden affluence in the 1790s appeared distinct and ominous. It generated new and dangerous economic practices; large amounts of money in circulation encouraged speculation, promoted an unstable commercial environment, and caused rapid inflation. Contemporaries complained that instead of being reinvested into trade, deposited into savings, or directed to civic programs, profits were wasted on slipshod schemes and frivolous luxury, often leading to financial ruin. As a result of imprudent and reckless speculation, 152 trading houses fell bankrupt in 1799, evidence of what contemporaries referred to as foolhardy “profiteering craze [Wuchergeist],” distinguished from the traditional and steady “commercial spirit [Kaufmansgeist].” Hamburgers’ propensity to consume—and especially to consume luxury items—stemmed from much more than favorable economic conditions and an
age-old practice of social emulation. Rather, the emergence of luxury consumption and fashionable lifestyles in turn-of-the-century Hamburg originated in a change in values and attitudes.

The Enlightenment’s legacy of individualism may have contributed to attitudes that helped shape the consumer revolution and the celebration of material culture and leisure. On one hand, the Enlightenment in Hamburg was utilitarian and was manifested in the communal social activism of the Patriotic Society, the General Poor Relief, and the Society for the Friends of Local Schools and Education, to name only a few civic endeavors. On the other hand, it also encouraged self-improvement, new forms of leisure, and personal autonomy. Emphasis on the uniqueness and autonomy of the self fostered an atmosphere that justified personal cultivation and acquisitions. Paradoxically, therefore, the Enlightenment in Hamburg both supported communitarian values and provided the intellectual justification for individual expression and personal gratification found in the growing world of goods.

Many Hamburgers believed that their contemporaries had become too susceptible to unhealthy foreign attitudes and materialistic conduct. Between 1791 and 1800, the city experienced several waves of immigration that brought thousands of foreigners, the majority of them French, to the city. The growing presence of the French émigrés and other newcomers strengthened local desires for all things foreign in this cosmopolitan city. French customs considerably influenced the republic’s businesses and culture. Several French shops opened, specializing in luxurious fashions, perfume, and jewelry. The city also gained a French theater, numerous French restaurants and cafés, and French newspapers and fashion magazines. Most of these endeavors thrived, and by 1798 Hamburg observers could justly describe the city as “Little Paris.” Such restaurants, cafés, and dance halls altered Hamburg’s urban space and public sociability by offering society new opportunities to indulge in corporal pleasures. Growing more prominent after 1799, British furniture, fashion, coaches, taverns, and bookstores also influenced the city’s local culture. By 1801, one publicist described Hamburg’s citizens as britannisirt. Hamburgers appeared intoxicated with the possibility of purchasing the “opulence of Versailles and the splendor of London” from immigrants eager to capitalize on the growing Hanseatic market. The fault lay not with the foreigners, Hamburg’s publicists argued, but with their compatriots’ incessant imitation. In the eyes of local critics, mimicking foreign
mannerisms and groveling over extravagant novelties perverted traditional values and embodied civic disloyalty.

By the turn of the century, publicists claimed that the rage for ostentatious mode had transformed the city into a “living boutique of all possible fashions [where] fur coats, muslin dresses, flower garlands, perfume, makeup, hair design, and beauty soap abound.”38 Visiting the city in 1797, one Englishwoman described crowded promenades with women adorned in colorful frocks and fanciful wigs, remarking that Hamburg’s women were

the most remarkable for their dress, and they are so preposterously fine: they scarcely can wear hats, but have their hair dressed in all the elegance of the first state of fashion and profusely with ornaments with beads, feathers, and artificial flowers. . . . [I]t is not easy to conceive the ludicrous figure of a woman in this ostentation.39

If publicists longed for a return to moderation in dress, natives and visitors alike commented on Hamburgers’ imitation of extravagant and indecent fashions from France and Britain.40 Plates that appeared in the city’s fashion journal, Hamburgisches Journal der Moden und Eleganz, in 1802 illustrate the latest styles with breeches pulled over the stomach and necklines descending under the bosom (figures 1 and 2).

Discarding their plain Dutch overcoats, fashionable men adopted the fitted single-breasted frock or tailcoat, cut away at the front to emphasize artificially heightened shoulders and to reveal tight breeches (indecently so, according to some critics) and silk stockings.41 At the extreme were the dandies of the late eighteenth century, Hanseatic Incroyables or Elegants, who wore enormous cravats wrapped elaborately to engulf the chin and sometimes the mouth and who invested much time tying the ultimate wrap to create the appropriate look with the stiff shirt collar turned inside the cravat, exposing its points against the jawline (figures 2 and 3).42 Fashionable men displayed elaborate gold watches, silver cigar cases, and snuffboxes. Abandoning wigs and powder by the turn of the century, men grew sideburns and adopted the “Brutus style” natural hair, cut short and curled with hot tongs.43

Women’s styles had changed considerably by the 1800s. Fashionable women in Hamburg welcomed the simple “Greek costume,” forsaking enormous wigs and ostentatious hats of the 1790s for natural hair à l’antique (figures 4 and 5). This mode replaced frippery and petticoats with sheer short-sleeved Hellenic frocks that highlighted the long line
of the body. The absence of a corset accentuated and revealed the female torso. The Greek costume or chemise dress appeared to many observers more as undress than dress. Critics considered the thin fabric, exposed bosoms, and bare arms not only too provocative but also impractical for Hamburg’s cold, wet weather. The gown’s material was so sheer that flesh-colored tights often were worn underneath for the sake of decency. In a northern city such as Hamburg, these gowns required such outer garments as the stylish Spencer, a short fitted single-breasted jacket from England that covered the bodice (figure 3). Like their fashionable male counterparts, women accessorized with an array of personal goods: hats, turbans, gloves, jewelry, reticules (small handbags), cashmere shawls, visiting cards, personal calendars, and handkerchiefs. As objects of individual choice, such personal adornments replaced symbolic decorations identified with particular social groups and offered further opportunities for social display. They also
distinguished the wearers as members of the fashionable set. Along
with the color and cut of gowns and coats, personal accessories con-
stantly fluctuated in style, leading contemporaries to disparage the
ephemeral nature of fashion—“the vortex of changing modes,” as one
observer put it.49

Women and men kept abreast of the latest modes from one of the
most controversial new genres of popular culture in German-speaking
Europe, the fashion journal, the best known of which was Das Journal
des Luxus und der Moden. Although its critics regarded the fashion
press as a pernicious and essentially French influence that fostered a
new frivolity and aristocratic mannerisms, Hamburg’s indigenous pub-
lication, Hamburgisches Journal der Moden und Eleganz, featured
locally written articles as well as cosmopolitan fashion reports from all
over Europe.50 The journal, typical of promoters of fashion, sought to
associate it with the productive expansion of industrial and art

Fig. 2. Woman reading in negligé. Hamburgisches Journal der Moden und Eleganz, July 1802. (Courtesy of the Kommerzbibliothek, Hamburg.)
trades. Moreover, the journal answered its critics by pointing out that it did not champion luxury, which at any rate was hardly a new phenomenon; rather, the publication contended, it sought to educate respectable society about how to act and dress in public.

The journal instructed and amused its readers with an array of articles and impressive fashion illustrations depicting the latest trends. The periodical highlighted recreational activities and, like novels, was produced for leisure time. The women and men depicted in the fashion plates appear carefree, occupied in adorning themselves before a mirror or enjoying a concert, a soiree, a ball, or a promenade (figures 1, 3, 4, and 5). Indeed, the journal included reviews of plays and even sheet music for the latest songs. Obviously absent were representations of women and men at work in the home, market, or countinghouse as well as depictions of children or family life. The attire and bodily conduct depicted suggest emancipation from the productive but tedious
duties of daily life and the promise of self-improvement. These images encouraged the view that one could transform oneself through dress. The new styles had a liberating ethos: “The gown encased her narrow hips and fluttered to her ankles. . . . [H]er shoulders were free and breast partially covered, fullness and freedom were noticeable everywhere, [and] her red delicate shoes radiated like American roses. . . . The shawl lay lightly around her shoulders and gave the white dress brightness and color.”

Not intended for women alone, the journal sought to promote fashion among men and depicted within its pages a range of masculine constructions: the stern moralist, the rakish dandy, and the devoted escort. Men’s fashions were understood as novel and expressive and even personalized, like women’s. For example, one article observed, “Today men follow women’s lead in fashion and intersect so closely that [male and female] attires, despite the modifications necessitated by sex, share a unity and similarity in character.”
Contemporary critics found the modish attire featured in the journal less troubling than its close association with fashionable and unproductive lifestyles. The current nonfunctional apparel seemed to encourage new modes of public conduct. Leisure activities associated with women visually and textually in the journal highlighted the attraction and novelty of feminine amusements. Such images featuring new modes of expressive dress, preoccupation with the mirror, and playful leisure extended the realm of personal identity in new directions that seemed to challenge the prevailing virtues of moderation and community in the city’s republican ethos.

The transformation in clothing from the traditional woolens and dark silks to elaborate fabrics, dresses, and wigs inspired by the émigrés in the 1790s to pale, lightweight, fragile, and classical drapes and chemise garments portrayed in the growing number of fashion journals in the early 1800s reflected a society in the midst of great flux. The
rapidly changing styles in attire and accessories brought novelty and variety to social life. In the simplicity of their style and sheerness of the fabric, the new fashions of the early 1800s emphasized female and male bodies and reflected a libertarian spirit. When considered against the context of traditional values that venerated moderation, frugality, and to a certain extent conformity, the new fashions provided Hamburgers with opportunities for self-expression and new forms of social conduct that featured leisure and pleasure. This focus on individualism and public display of sexuality troubled the majority of Hamburg’s publicists. Contemporaries found disturbing not so much the clothing (or lack of it) but what the attire represented. Traditional moderation in dress venerated group cohesion, inducing the individual to share community values, whereas fashionable dress expressed diversity, novelty, and the individuality of choice. If traditional clothing functioned as a visual means of social regulation, the new modes suggested self-indulgence. Fashion, therefore, appeared to offer many Hamburgers a new source of autonomy from traditional social mores that advanced the primacy of the community.

Fashion also intruded into the household. The fashionable lifestyle required appropriately stylish households, and observers bemoaned extravagant expenditures on houses, gardens, carriages, and servants as examples of personal vanity. Once designed for durability, family comfort, and usefulness in business, private houses of the commercial middle class increasingly were constructed outside the city as highly decorated miniature palaces filled with exotic carpets, ornate mirrors, alabaster tiles, and mahogany furniture and graced by gardens adorned with artificial mountains and grottos. Ornate English carriages and cabriolets replaced the simple rented coach and carried more and more families to newly acquired summer homes along the Elbe. Stables brimmed with more horses than their owners could ride. The expansion of households also necessitated an increase in the number of servants. Footmen, liverymen, pastry chefs, parlor maids, valets, and dressing maids joined the traditional housekeeper. Such servants were also necessary to assume the productive work of the household if the mistress pursued a fashionable lifestyle.

Fashion’s influence resonated in public life. As the city replaced the court as the showplace of fashion by the early nineteenth century, modish leisure activities became increasingly associated with urban life. Growing affluent cities such as Hamburg provided a wide audience and a range of venues for the culture of display that highlighted
self-presentation, social recognition, and the consolidation of new forms of socialization. By the early 1800s, utilitarian reading societies shifted their focus from the transmission of information to such recreational activities as concerts, card games, billiards, and dancing. As the waltz gained popularity, dance clubs for all social classes became increasingly frequented, and dancing became more recreational and less instructive. New restaurants, cafés, and taverns experimented with strategies to attract customers and presented their patrons with entertaining spectacles, including exotic painted panoramas, shadow plays, festive illuminations, fireworks, and live musical performances. Opportunities for walking or promenading, recognized as the most common pastime for Hamburgers, expanded as the city's physical structure altered to accommodate growing numbers of social strollers. Promenaders enjoyed strolling the Jungfernstieg along the Inner Alster Basin as well as along the Wall, where the city's demolished fortifications were transformed into a park in 1804. Urban public spaces, the site of eighteenth-century enlightened culture, ultimately became the nineteenth-century showcase for material goods and entertaining leisure that featured fashionable women and men on display. In the words of one contemporary, “Our streets have become a fashion show.”

In the press, commentators distinguished between two opposing kinds of urban sociability, one inspired by enlightened impulses associated with rational discourse and useful purposes and the other obsessed with aimless pleasure seeking, frivolous public conduct, and ostentation. In the eyes of contemporaries, “enlightened sociability” combined education with pleasure in reading circles and civic associations and supported communication networks among people who shared edified values. Comparing the growing “sociability of amusement” to the utilitarian reading clubs and civic societies of previous decades, publicists feared that pure pleasure seeking had replaced a purposeful exchange of ideas. Hamburg’s fashion critics agreed that everyone had the right to comfort and pleasure and “to enjoy what is reasonable and rational as long as it doesn’t impair one’s duty to one’s business or community.” Many people, however, interpreted this fashionable sociability, where faddish card games, ostentatious balls, and lavish banquets superseded reading, civic programs, and rational conversation, as a diversion from public duties and as a sign of civic indifference.

Women in particular became increasingly visible in Hamburg’s fes-
tive urban society—private and public, day and night—opening their homes to tea socials and lavish dinner parties as well as appearing along with their male counterparts at the theater, concerts, balls, restaurants, and city promenades.72 One observer described opera and musical concerts as the “realm of women.”73 The Enlightenment in Hamburg generally had provided women and men with increased but unequal opportunities to participate in public life. Although excluded from formal politics and most civic associations, women developed their own social networks that featured enlightened sociability, philanthropic activities, and intimate circles of friends.74 Fashionable lifestyles, however, seemed to offer women new avenues for social interaction and leisure activities that emphasized recreation rather than enlightenment. Leisure became an end in itself.

According to its critics, the fashionable life demonstrated a misdirection of personal priorities and a cavalier attitude toward private and communal duties. Fashion represented a waste of money and time as men and women spent more of both on their appearance. Dress and fashion seemed to reorient women’s time toward their toilette instead of their familial and household responsibilities.75 Critics condemned the new practice of donning negligees and morning gowns before noon, followed by elegant social attire for afternoon and evening activities.76 One publicist suggested that women who pursued fashion also typically indulged themselves in reading romantic novels and participating in frivolous social events, leading ultimately to the mismanagement of their households and neglect of their children.77 Another observer described fashionable women as having lost all sense of “serious business and diligence,” while another claimed that what women gained in fine external conduct, they lost in inner virtues.78 Hamburg’s republican women traditionally dressed for public appearance to represent the social status of their households, whereas fashionable women, as contemporaries understood them, adorned themselves for public consumption as a form of self-expression. Critics maligned fashionable women as vain girls who danced their health away; fickle, disloyal wives who dismissed their husbands’ honor; and uncaring mothers who neglected their children.79 New forms of fashionable consumption appeared to draw women’s focus away from the household’s overall well-being and toward egocentric individual desires. Social critics, however, did not limit their condemnations to women. They did not feminize consumption as an innate gendered inability of women to control their behavior as consumers.
Concurrently, contemporaries judged men who dressed fashionably as generally having squandered their time riding, drinking, flirting, and gaming, neglecting both their families and their businesses. A doctor and self-described Patriot contrasted the two opposing lifestyles: the traditional citizen rose early, worked until four, dined at home at eight, and retired at eleven, whereas his fashionable contemporary gamed until midnight, dined into the wee hours of the morning, and slept until midday. The writer denounced the latter lifestyle as dissolute and disorderly, arguing that it harmed both personal health and the general welfare of the community and that it was ruinous to the citizens on whose quality of work and civic activity the city depended. In 1802, when one of Hamburg’s leading citizens and the founder of the General Poor Relief, Caspar Voght, forsook his citizenship to assume an imperial title and established an “ornamental farm” following the English model outside the city, the local press responded with concern that “Baron von Voght would always honorably remain ‘Free citizen Casper Voght’ to his Hamburg peers.” Voght’s high-profile example of evading civic duties in favor of individual ambitions appeared frightening to a generation of Hamburgers for whom civic responsibility formed the cornerstone of the republican ethos. Thus, fashionable lifestyles were understood to be dangerous in the economic, civic, and moral senses. According to contemporaries, such conspicuous consumption inevitably led to a range of negative consequences that included infidelity, bankruptcy, the neglect of children and families, the mismanagement of households and businesses, and ultimately the ominous decline in republican virtues and communal civic identity. In critics’ eyes, the consumer culture of fashion fostered private vices and public corruption in both sexes.

The departure of Hamburg’s women and men from their traditional and modest lifestyle, combined with their preoccupation with fashion and frivolous leisure, suggested more than simply conspicuous consumption and social emulation of foreign manners. Contemporaries viewed fashionable lifestyles as based on new attitudes toward the self and on desires to seek novelty and pleasure. The intense individualism involved with self-fashioning a public identity demonstrated liberation from the community-oriented civic morality. If fashion attracted some Hamburgers as an avenue for self-realization, critics were repulsed by perversions of femininity and masculinity that featured women disengaged from home and family life and men absent from work, home, and civic responsibilities. Hamburg’s fashionable inhabi-
tants’ attraction to modish dress related to an unwillingness to conform to traditional attire and was interpreted as rebellious by their peers. The evidence of fashion’s critics clearly indicates that both men and women were attracted to modish lifestyles that defied the republican virtues they were expected to embody. By parading an alternative ethos, fashionable women and men attempted to shift the boundaries of acceptable norms of femininity and masculinity away from community mores and toward individual autonomy. Thus, according to contemporary sources, new, shared modes of conduct generated social disorder and moral corruption among members of both sexes.

These public criticisms of female and male consumers raise many questions about the assumed polarity of the gendered spheres. Public criticism of fashion was not directed solely at women. Modish women were not singled out as the only menace to social and moral order, and neither sex was openly accused of exhibiting sexual deviance. Male interest in attire and appearance was not denounced as unmanly or effeminate. If critics blamed women for abandoning their traditional roles in the home and men in business, these publicists did not employ gendered language to construct separate essentialist qualities of femininity and masculinity in their criticism. Rather than feminize consumption, contemporaries charged both sexes with selfishness, egoism, and betraying republican values and responsibilities. Both female and male consumers displaced the priority of the household in their pursuit of fashionable lifestyles. Inseparable from family needs, traditional consumption was organized around the requirements of the collective, not the individual. Thus, publicists accused women and men of the same vices—frivolity, ostentation, and ultimately selfishness—and held both sexes accountable for disregarding the virtues of moderation, family, and civic obligations. These publicists believed that women and men attained self-worth and identity from their integration into the household and community, not from their individual appearance, conduct, or ambitions.

In their criticisms of fashionable society, most publicists celebrated a vision of community made up of households rather than individuals. By emphasizing the active and responsible role of women’s work in the home as essential for the fate of the family and the community, they upheld the feminine ideal of woman as responsible mistress of the household and contested a leisure- and consumption-oriented femininity. Women’s sociable activities could be purposeful. For example, women enhanced the family business or promoted enlightened socia-
bility when they presided over and participated in dinner parties and teas. As mothers and educators, they ensured the continuity of the family. Because saving money was as valuable as earning it, running a household economically was a valued skill handed down from mother to daughter through practical instruction. Commentators reminded their compatriots that the household’s economic viability and happiness depended on the serious duties of women as mothers and household managers in a culture that strove to sustain for the next generation what the present enjoyed more than it sought to amass material possession and wealth. This required devotion to the virtues of moderation and frugality—the same values exemplified by the modest gray and black woolens and silks Hamburgers remembered as their mothers’ apparel. Commentators were quick to point out that donning new, provocative, and self-indulgent styles related to forfeiting the responsibilities of household management and child rearing to servants. This could lead to long-term problems: unsupervised and spoiled youth would develop into egotistical young adults. Publicists lamented that young women brought up with fashionable lifestyles emerged from childhood as “sofa puppets and fashion dolls,” able to dance, sing, and paint but incapable of managing the household economy.

Similarly, observers complained, young men appeared to have no interest in their city’s constitution and little instruction in practical business skills. Ferdinand Beneke, a well-known social critic, described the youth of Hamburg as “wild, unmannered, uneducated, unrepulican” individuals who regarded their Vaterstadt with apathy. Merchant John Parish admonished his sons and their generation of “gentlemen of pleasure” for squandering time on extravagance and deviating from the “true path of the merchant.” These youth, disinterested in the practical impulses of Hamburg’s enlightened civic culture and the hard-nosed world of business, flaunted material goods and leisure in an alternative youth subculture. These were disturbing signs for Hamburgers who viewed the future of their polity as dependent on bequeathing their republican identity and morality to subsequent generations.

The fear that luxury would debase republican culture was widespread throughout the eighteenth century, but Hamburgers had a tangible frame of reference, seeing evidence of these concerns in the disintegration of their civic infrastructure. As the middle classes reaped material benefits of commercial prosperity, the lower classes suffered a decline in their standard of living as a consequence of inflation and an
influx of cheap refugee labor.95 With society increasingly stratified, displays of conspicuous affluence alongside growing poverty became commonplace, and many Hamburg republicans feared the loss of their cherished self-image as a community where distinctions of wealth and status were less manifest than in aristocratic and monarchical societies.96 Critics noted that the more ostentatious the republic, the more divided the people.97 Contemporaries pointed to declining support for the city’s celebrated poor relief programs and general educational reforms, which had been central to Hamburg’s civic agenda, as signaling the change in public priorities. Critics found it disgraceful that as Hamburgers increased their personal wealth, they neglected poor relief.98

These ominous shifts in public values moved contemporaries to publicize the dangers of materialism, to seek revitalization of traditional communal values, and to define the limits of public conduct by both sexes. Some publicists relied on moral exhortation to awaken republican virtues; others drew up specific guidelines for reshaping their compatriots’ manners, morals, and behavior. One contributor pointed out that Hamburg was not a monarchy and thus could not forbid luxury; the reformation of manners consequently depended on inhabitants setting good examples for each other.99 Only by returning to the virtues of their ancestors could Hamburgers regain their republican ethos. Journals instructed readers to accustom their children to simple lifestyles and to teach practical skills and sound values.100 Some publications tried to be more specific, defining the simple lifestyle in case readers had forgotten. To avoid falling prey to fashion, for example, a proper republican should restrict his or her wardrobe to cotton; use jewelry and decoration in moderation; keep only useful furniture; discard fancy and/or foreign furnishings, saddles, and carriages; and limit the number of servants per household, discharging the footmen outright. Publicists encouraged Hamburgers to simplify their entertainment by serving guests only in-season food; limiting the meal to six dishes and two desserts; offering two rather than ten bottles of wine; restricting attendance at concerts, dinner parties, and the theater to no more than twice a week; and appearing at no more than two balls per season.101 Far from being puritans or misers, critics of fashion did not condemn social interaction and pleasure but called for restraint and moderation.

The city’s publicists explicitly compared what they perceived as traditional values with fashionable vices. For example, Christoph Suhr’s
print, *Old and New Times in Hamburg*, depicts two female servants dressed very differently (figure 6). The traditionally attired servant stands next to her solid and unadorned clothing chest, which contains an orderly assortment of folded clothing and a Bible. Behind her is a simple, solid chair supporting her large sewing basket. She wears modest dark clothing, ready to begin the day’s work. In contrast, in front of an elaborate chest displaying silk dancing shoes, a romantic novel, and unfolded personal articles, her fashionable counterpart leans on an ornate broken chair that supports a small sewing basket and a modish parasol. Her empire waist silk gown reveals more torso and leg than her neighbor’s full linen or wool skirt. Unlike her counterpart, the fashionable servant is still occupied with her toilette and prepares to gaze, inattentive to her duties, at her reflection in the mirror to adorn her hair. One publicist distinguished these two types of women as “housewifely [hausfraulich]” and “fancy [feinfraulich].” As in the print, the anonymous author of a short article, “Elegant and Ordinary,” contrasts traditional Hamburg attire, calico dresses, cotton stockings, and leather shoes with new modes, satin and taffeta dresses, silk stockings, and Moroccan shoes; traditional foods such as potatoes, turnips, and herring with exotic oysters, pineapples, and lobster; and traditional public behavior such as walking, punctuality in business, and timely payment with driving, negligence, carelessness, and debts. Both the illustration and the article represent attempts at middle-class moral regulation that sought to redirect compatriots’ private and public priorities.

Fashion journals, especially the *Hamburgisches Journal der Moden und Eleganz*, generated images of gender that contradicted the republican ideal upheld by the critics. The journal’s name, emphasizing fashion and elegance, celebrated the excess in consumerism that many publicists detested. Yet journal articles and fashion plates generated contradictory images of gender and projected an unfixed notion of femininity as old and new conceptions coexisted within its pages. Illustrations of modish public women driving carriages, at the theater, and scolding their male counterparts celebrated unrestrained independent women (figures 7, 8, 9). In addition to the prints, the journal highlighted the social nexus of fashion and leisure with articles on balls, the theater, and festive parties. At the same time, however, the journal presented its readers with cautionary tales on the dangers of coquetry and idle leisure. If it tempted women to identify with icons of independence and amusement, it also reminded them of the risks associated
with those images. In the journal’s first issue, the editors assured the frugal and strict moralist that he should not worry about his wife and children “swimming playfully in the currents of luxury and modernity.” The editors promised that their publication would “advise, warn, and shock as it instructs [women] to prefer good taste, fine morals, and a true philosophy of life [rather than] bad taste, irreligiousness, and aimlessness in life.”

While the fashion plates associated women with appearance and leisure, the editors published articles and poems that warned of the vices of idle self-absorption associated with fashion and highlighted women’s domestic responsibilities. Thus, the journal illustrates the extreme tensions and fractures in gender constructions during this era of great experimentation.

Public exchange on fashion continued without any perceivable resolution. Not all affluent commercial families adopted the new modes of dress and behavior. For example, Johanna Margaretha Reimarus Sieveking, matriarch of a leading Hamburg family, continued to set a
proper republican example by entertaining guests at her summer estate on the Elbe while attired in a simple white cotton gown, but she never became a trendsetter among the population at large. The cosmopolitan influences of consumerism and the fanciful ethos of fashion proved too strong to be subdued by models of republican moderation. Moreover, the governing elites considered neither legal regulation nor increased taxation on luxury goods appropriate means of limiting consumption in a republic that thrived on free trade. Rather, outside forces suspended the moral dilemma centered on fashion and leisure when the French occupied the city in 1806 and annexed it into Napoleon’s empire in December 1810. Stripped of wealth and independence and with free speech silenced under Napoleon’s rigorous censorship, Hamburgers turned their attention to the day-to-day hardships associated with French military occupation and economic exploitation. Questions of civic and moral degradation associated with fashion
and luxury nevertheless returned to the public forum after 1815 following Napoleon’s defeat and the revival of the city’s economy.112

The cultural code of fashion in turn-of-the-century Hamburg calls into question the interpretative paradigms associating fashion with gender enslavement and empowerment and elucidates the fluid and uneven development of gendered constructions of femininity and masculinity. Expressing alternative values through dress and conduct, Hamburg’s fashionable inhabitants—both women and men—underscore the idea that contemporaries did not see the gendered private and public spheres as conceptual absolutes characterized by the rigid separation of the sexes. Women and men adopted fashionable and frivolous lifestyles in their homes and in public, and both sexes—at least according to critics—embraced individualism and betrayed the traditional values of their republican community. Furthermore, these public moralists held both women and men responsible for the upbringing
of their children and for the efficient management of their respective tasks in the home and in the countinghouse. If such criticisms present gendered roles for female and male productivity, their language emphasized what they understood as the shared goals and mutual obligations of women and men in the republican community, not innate or “natural” gender differences.

The polemics on fashion in Hamburg constitute a profound commentary on moral politics. Criticisms of fashion reflect a republican worldview that regarded public and private as fluid and overlapping and believed that both spheres had a vital influence on the common good. In the contemporary press, civic virtue constituted the prism through which Hamburgers evaluated their society. In the context of increasing external threats to the city’s independence and integrity resulting from warfare and French expansionism, Hamburg’s commentators regarded as lethal internal threats to their local republican ethos. Exhortations on the dangers of fashion revealed growing anxiety about the governability of an expanding urban society that increasingly disregarded the moral structure of the traditional republican

Fig. 9. Woman driving a sleigh. *Hamburgisches Journal der Moden und Eleganz*, January 1802. (Courtesy of the Kommerzbibliothek, Hamburg.)
polity and advanced alternative models of femininity and masculinity in private and public conduct. Commentators interpreted these fashionable lifestyles as expressions of fundamental changes in civic culture. At the core of this transformation lay a distinct shift in civic morality in which traditional republican communal values fell prey to a modern emphasis on the individual. Far more than just frivolous materialists and prudish traditionalists, Hamburg’s fashionable women and men and their critics reveal that the republic’s civic culture was in the midst of a significant transformation. They demonstrate that public identities of both sexes represented important indicators of that transformation.

Notes
The author thanks John Lambertso for providing the photographs for this chapter. Figures 1–5 and 7–9 reproduced courtesy of the Kommerzbibliothek, Hamburg. Figure 6 reproduced courtesy of the Plankammer Staatsarchiv, Hamburg.


luxury to femininity, see Christopher Berry, *The Idea of Luxury* (Cambridge, 1994).


17. See, for example, Christian Ludwig von Griesheim, *Verbesserte und vermehrte Auflage des Tractats: Die Stadt Hamburg in ihrem politischen,


19. See inventories listed in eighteenth-century wills, Erbschaftsamt, 232-2 D71, Staatsarchiv Hamburg. For example, the clothing inventory from the 1771 will of Frau Anna Plaehn geb. Tiedemanns included only brown silk, blue woolen, and gray and white silk dresses.


24. See, for example, Rambach, Versuch, 188–99; Meyer, “Skizzen,” 123–24; Jonas Ludwig von Hess, Hamburg, topographisch, politisch, und historisch beschrieben (Hamburg, 1810–11), vol. 2; “Hamburgs alte und neue Zeit: Eine Parallele (Fortsezzung),” Hamburg und Altona 2 (1803): 23. Steven Uhalde addresses the althamburger as an ideal type in “Citizen and World Citi-


29. Johann Carl Daniel Curio, Hamburgische Chronik für die Freunde und besonders für die Jugend des Vaterlandes (Hamburg, 1803), 404.


39. Diary of an English governess, 24 July 1797, James M. and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection, Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. See also “Weiblicher Putz im Verhältniss zu weiblicher Schönheit,” *Wöchentliche gemeinnützige Nachrichten von und für Hamburg*, 1 September 1792; *Der unsichtbare Zuschauer: Oder Hamburger Allerley: Eine Wochenschrift*, 3 November 1794.

40. See [Minder], *Briefe*, 87; Der tägliche Gesellschaftler: *Ein Taschenbuch zum Nutzen und Vergnügen auf das Jahr 1801* (Hamburg, 1800), 59–61; “Hamburg vor und nach der französischen Revolution”; Rambach, *Versuch,*

41. See, for example, “Hamburg vor und nach der französischen Revolution”; Merkel, Briefe, 243; Rambach, Versuch, 199–200; [Minder], Briefe, 87.


43. Rambach pointed out, however, that replacing the wig with natural hair promoted rather than hindered personal hygiene (Versuch, 198–200). See also “Modebericht,” Hamburgisches Journal der Moden und Eleganz, June 1801, 252.


49. Merkel, Briefe, 233.

50. One publicist denounced the fashion journals as decadent and called on city authorities to forbid them: see “Freimüthige Gedanken eines ächten Patrioten über die Ankündigung eines neuen Mode-Journal für Hamburg, u.s.w.,” Wöchentliche gemeinnützige Nachrichten von und für Hamburg, 5 May 1798.


52. “Eingang.”


56. Ibid., 122.


61. See, for example, John Owen, *Travels into Different Parts of Europe in the Years 1791 and 1792* (London, 1796), 2:557; “Hamburgs alte und neue Zeit (Fortsezzung),” 292–93.


64. Dance—in particular, the minuet—was a means to teach personal bearing and social conduct. See Heikki Lempa, “German Body Culture: The Ideology of Moderation and the Educated Middle Class, 1790–1850” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1999), 260–69.


66. On Hamburger as great walkers, see Rambach, *Versuch*, 223. On the social importance of walking, see Gudrun M. König, *Eine Kulturgeschichte des Spazierganges: Spuren einer bürgerlichen Praktik, 1780–1850* (Vienna, 1996); Lempa, “German Body Culture,” 344–82. Lempa points out that both dancing and walking were viewed as forms of social recognition and self-presentation. By the 1800s, they had become disassociated from earlier educational, health, or aesthetic motivations and were considered social ends in themselves.


73. [Minder], *Briefe*, 73.


76. “Hamburgs alte und neue Zeit (Fortsetzung),” 134–35.


78. See *Der tägliche Gesellschafter*, 62; “Warum werden so viele Mädchen alte Jungfern?”

79. “Warum werden so viele Mädchen alte Jungfern?”; *Der Hansestadt Hamburg*. Mariane Prell’s memoir describes children left with servants while their parents partied through the night (*Erinnerungen aus der Franzosenzeit in Hamburg von 1806 bis 1814*, 3rd ed. [Hamburg, 1898], 8–9). See also Rambach, *Versuch*, 219.

80. See “Hamburgs alte und neue Zeit (Fortsetzung),” 136–39. On flirting, see also “Sonst und Jetzt”; on the general change in attitudes and behavior, see “Vornehm und gemein”; *Der Hansestadt Hamburg*.


88. On mothers and daughters in Hamburg, see Willebrand, Hamburgs Annehmlichkeiten, 90–92; [Craus], Ueber Sitten, 23–24.


93. See John Parish to sons, 28 December 1801–14 January 1804, Familie Parish, vols. 1, 2, Staatsarchiv Hamburg.


96. “Hamburgs alte und neue Zeit (Schluss),” 276–77.


100. See, for example, “Ueber Luxus.”


102. For an another analysis of the print, see Dagmar Müller-Staats, Klagen über Dienstboten: Eine Untersuchen über Dienstboten und ihrer Herrschaften (Frankfurt, 1987), 92–94.

103. Merkel, Briefe, 333–34.

104. “Vornehm und Gemein.”

105. Alan Hunt, Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation (Cambridge, 1999), 17. In the case of Hamburg, middle-class moral regulation did not target exclusively the lower classes but also middle-class peers.


111. Albrecht, “Die Nationaltrachtsdebatte.”

112. For an account of Hamburg during this period, see Katharine B. Aaslestad, *Place and Politics: Local Identity, Civic Identity, and German Nationalism in North Germany during the Revolutionary Era* (Leiden, 2005). After 1815, public criticism of luxury reemerges without the communal imperative; rather, it is associated with individual irreligiousness and “inner emptiness.” See Pielhoff, *Paternalismus und Stadtarmut*, 142. Furthermore, many publicists after 1815 blamed Hamburg’s fall to the French not on imperial military strength but on the internal civic and republican decline of the early 1800s.