

LENTZ, HOLLY M., Ph.D. *This Woman's Work: An Exploration of Women's Experiences with Role Transition*. (2008)
Directed by Dr. Nancy Nelson Hodges. 230 pp.

The many identities that comprise the self surface and are displayed through dress (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). In communicating the self, the importance of setting and one's role in that setting must be considered and understood for each social interaction (Goffman, 1959). However, individuals often undergo role changes, and these role changes are usually marked by rites of passage (Turner, 1960). Dress is one of the primary ways that role change is communicated during a rite of passage. In role transition, dress is used in a reflexive manner to communicate the transition to others and to facilitate transformation of the self, the ultimate outcome of role transition. This study looks specifically at women transitioning from the college student role to that of an apparel industry professional and the importance of dress within this process.

An interpretive methodology was used to structure the study, and multiple methods were employed, including a demographic questionnaire, a daily dress journal, and in-depth interviews (Kvale, 1996). Five women, all of whom graduated from college and are currently working full-time, comprise the study's participants. Three levels of interpretation were developed based on the data collected. First, personal narratives were developed to examine each participant's experiences with role transition. A thematic interpretation based on the similarities and differences within these narratives comprises the second level of interpretation. Three conceptual areas—transition, consumption, and transformation—frame the themes that surfaced to connect the individual's experiences with those of the group. The third level of interpretation was then developed to theorize

how dress is used as a bridge between states of being and becoming, linking the old self with the new one during the transition process.

In this study, participants' experiences with dress are key to understanding how role transition ultimately leads to transformation of the self. The three levels of interpretation provide an in-depth understanding of dress as a tool for role transition and means for performing transformation. This study fills a gap in the literature by illustrating how dress provides a unique location for interpreting how individuals experience the transition from student to professional. Further research is needed to explore the implications of this location for other role transitions.

THIS WOMAN'S WORK: AN EXPLORATION
OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES
WITH ROLE TRANSITION

By

Holly M. Lentz

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
2008

Approved by

Committee Chair

©2008 by Holly M. Lentz

To my husband, David, and my children, Thomas and Samuel. You have each given me a reason to complete my education and this work. Your love and support are the things that I hold most dear, and I thank you all. Also, to my family, who has given me a foundation to do everything.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
The Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A work of this magnitude can never be successfully completed alone. Therefore, I appreciate and recognize the assistance of many individuals. First of all, I acknowledge the help of Dr. Nancy Nelson Hodges. Her countless hours, patience, and time have made this work possible and my effort worthwhile. I would also like to thank Dr. Gwendolyn O’Neal, Dr. Killian Manning, and Dr. Tu Watchravesringkan. Each of these committee members has provided support throughout the process. I consider each member to be a role model for my future academic career.

I would also like to thank my five participants, who have made this study possible. Each of the five women shared their stories and experiences about becoming a professional and I am grateful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Research Question	3
Background	3
Identity and the Self	4
Role Transition and Transformation of the Self	6
Conceptual Framework	8
Methodological Considerations	8
Theoretical Considerations	9
Purpose and Objectives	10
Scope and Significance	12
Summary	13
II. THE LITERATURE THAT INFORMS THE RESEARCH	14
Dress and the Self	15
Defining the Self	18
The Self and Objects	24
Identity and the Self	27
Gender, the Self, and Identity	30
The Self in Consumer Behavior Research	31
Consumption and the Self	31
Brands and the Self	34
Theorizing Dress, Identity and the Self	36
Dress, Ritual, and Performance	38
Dress and the Experience of Transition: Why Women?.....	41
Summary	43
III. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK	44
The Phenomenological Worldview	45
Data Analysis: Linking Methodology and Epistemology	51
Theoretical Considerations and Implications	53
Summary	56
IV. PERSONAL NARRATIVES	58

Jessica Peterson	59
Marie Waterman	77
Alicia Davis	94
Sara Hurley	111
Amy Harris	131
Summary	148
V. THEMATIC INTERPRETATION	149
Transition	151
Identity Change: Becoming a Professional	152
Dressing the Part	156
Consumption	159
Inspiration from Others	159
Articulating Change: Planning for Professional Dress	162
Purchasing Change	166
Transformation	169
Ideal Job, Ideal Self, Ideal Dress	169
Ideal Purchases	172
Not There Yet: Progress on the Path to Transformation	174
Summary	176
VI. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND FURTHER DISCUSSION	177
Dress as a Tool for Transition	178
Identity and Dress	179
Identity and Rites of Passage	181
Consumption and Changing Identities	184
Dress as a Means for Performing Transformation	186
Transformation and the Self	186
<i>Communitas</i> , Dress, and Performance in the Liminal Space ...	187
Summary	195
VII. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS	196
Considering Perspectives	198
Constructing Knowledge of Experience	203
Reflection	206
REFERENCES	211
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE	221

APPENDIX B: JOURNAL PROMPTS 224

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE 228

APPENDIX D: IRB CONSENT TO ACT AS HUMAN PARTICIPANT FORM 229

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
TABLE 1: Clothing Terminology	16

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Dressing the body is a uniquely human action that involves multiple processes, both physiological and psychological. Throughout history, dress has been an integral part of the human experience, with archeological evidence showing the dressed body as far back as prehistoric times (Ash & Wilson, 1992; Tortora & Eubank, 2005). Dress references the body to a particular time period and may articulate other, less definite, yet germane characteristics about an individual, including identity, self-concept, and the psyche (Barthes, 2004; Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992; Stone, 1995).

Historical study provides evidence of specific time periods and places that showcase the dressed body, such as the toga worn by male citizens of Ancient Rome, men's waistcoats in the 18th century, flapper dresses from the 1920's, or Mohawk hairstyles worn by punks in the 1970's. Not only is dress an historical signifier, but the dressed body also communicates aspects of one's culture, roles, and position in society (Damhorst, 2005). Roles can be considered on two main bases: achieved and ascribed (Solomon, 2004). Achieved roles are those that are attained, such as a college degree or an athlete running a marathon. Ascribed roles are those that exist from birth, and in most cases cannot be changed (Miller-Spillman, 2005). Examples of ascribed roles include gender, ethnicity, or race, to name a few.

Implicit in this definition of roles is the element of change. That is, roles that are achieved are often fluid and change with the individual. An individual has the capacity to occupy an infinite number of both ascribed and achieved roles at a given time. For example, a woman may be both a mother and a doctor. Her ascribed roles, therefore, include her gender as female, and her achieved roles, as mother and doctor. An individual may also hold positions within social organizations or institutions and be involved in other activities which, in turn, add to the number of roles that that person occupies. Roles associated with identity can change over time. For example, if the female doctor retires or seeks another occupation, her professional role would no longer be that of a doctor, and would change in favor of another role, or the professional role may cease altogether, as in the case of retirement or death.

Roles may be associated with different parts of an individual's self, such as family roles, professional roles and so forth. These roles can be communicated to others, either verbally or non-verbally (Goffman, 1959). Dress is one of the primary ways roles are communicated. For instance, seeing the aforementioned woman in a white coat within the workplace communicates that she is a physician. Hearing a patient refer to her as "doctor" or her children refer to her as "mother" also helps to explicate her roles.

This research is an exploration of the experiences of five women who are currently undergoing role changes in their lives. Each participant is a recent college graduate in the process of embarking on a career in the apparel industry. Their experiences with transitioning from students to professionals, and particularly their experiences with dress during this transition period are considered. The guiding question

of this research is thus two-fold: *What is it like to move from being a student to becoming an apparel industry professional? And how is this transition experienced through dress?* Guiding this research is the reflexive relationship between dress and role change, or transition. That is, the nature of dress and its use as a tool during role transition is an important foundation of the research purpose. Participants' experience with dress within role transitions is explored.

Background

Dress, as both idea and practice, must be fully understood in order to frame the reflexive relationship it has with role transition. Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992) define dress as an: “[a]ssemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body” (p. 2). Through modifications, dress can alter the body, either temporarily or permanently, thereby changing natural bodily processes. Examples of this include cutting one's hair, trimming one's fingernails, tattooing the skin, or shaping the eyebrows. Body supplements, such as apparel or footwear, are other aspects of dress, and can be combined with modifications for the total effect. One important distinction regarding dress is the uniquely human characteristic of this activity and the way in which dress revolves around the body. Likewise, dress has the power to identify the individual's position in society and determine social interaction, thereby revealing one's identity through the articulation of that position (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). In sum, dress is at once both an intensely personal and a socially meaningful process.

Dress is a system which non-verbally communicates one's identity and position. The reflexive relationship between dress and identity is often mediated by culture and

culture-specific knowledge (Kaiser, 1996). Enninger (1992) acknowledges three main functions of dress: communication, a signal system, and meaning conveyance. Dress communicates one's position by the type of items worn. As a signal system, dress is affected by social norms and social interactions, remains present throughout the entire interaction, yet is limited in the combinations which can be placed on the body. When communicating meaning, dress as a combination of objects requires specific cultural knowledge for interpretation. This knowledge is important when understanding that communicative systems give varied meanings to items of dress. Dress therefore is often considered to be a material form of culture, as well as a product of the culture in which it is developed and used (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

Identity and the Self

Ways of understanding and defining the relationship between identity and the self can be as varied as its creators. Therefore, a look at the self from various perspectives provides a comprehensive understanding of the concept of self. The three perspectives on the self that will be considered are: (a) social psychological, (b) symbolic interactionist, and (c) postmodernist.

The first perspective, the social psychological, posits that there are three components that constitute the self, and from these three components, all other aspects of the self can be derived. These components include emerging and fluid identities, other individuals or "selves," and objects. Schematically, the many identities of an individual surface or are displayed as the individual interacts with other people or "selves," as well as with objects within the individual's environment (Damhorst, 2005; Roach-Higgins &

Eicher, 1992). The interaction, or dialogue between the individual, others, and objects with the environment is critical to the development, maintenance, and re-creation of the self. Without this dialogue, the self's multiple identities do not form. Within social psychology, the self only exists because of the emergence of identities, therefore, the self ultimately exists through interactions. The self can be communicated by verbal or written expression, by nonverbal methods and, most importantly in this research, through the use of appearance and dress (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).

Mead's (1982) ideas regarding symbolic interactionism lends further understanding to the convergence of the self in social transactions. The second perspective important to understanding the self, symbolic interactionism, posits that individuals, and consequently the self, acquire identities as a result of interaction with others. When dress is involved, an individual uses dress as a means of establishing and negotiating his or her own identity, while also using dress to understand the identities of other individuals. In social situations, dress therefore symbolically communicates the wearer's identity to others and vice versa (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). Fluid and constantly emerging, identities are the characteristics which work together to create the whole of the self and its representations in terms of certain attributes (Davis 1992; Stone, 1995). These attributes can include age, gender, race, or sexual preference. Consequently, the self is a confluence of an individual's identities, created through the individual's social interactions and experiences (Damhorst, 2005).

The postmodern view of the self, the third perspective, states that the self exists in both social and personal terms. The self is thus a composite of both internal and external

forces, and therefore the self encompasses more than just an individual's attitudes, opinions and perceptions. Media, literature, modern philosophy and political agendas are all reflected in and mirrored by the self. Therefore, the self acts as a bridge between an individual's inner and outer worlds, the result of a fluid and kinetic process of development or creation (White & Hellerich, 1998). As will be discussed in Chapter Two, many postmodern philosophers have grappled with the complexities of the self. The self is a central tenet of postmodern thought as it is believed to reify the decentralized society in which it is formed. Dress, therefore, is used to reflect this multifaceted, multidimensional self through such means as bricolage (Hebdige, 1979; Kaiser, 1996). Bricolage brings together a variety of elements and strategies for dressing the self to communicate identities in an act that is both personal expression and social commentary.

Role Transition and Transformation of the Self

Creating the distinction between role transition and transformation of the self is necessary to understand the research participants' experiences. *Transition* is generally defined as a change of some kind, with varying degrees of profound social effect (Turner, 1982). *Transformation*, however, signifies the result of such change. In this research, transition is understood as the process that these women are experiencing, while transformation is the final result of role transition. Exploring each of these five participant's experiences includes role transition and its implications for transformation of the self.

Role transition may or may not lead to transformation of the self. Goffman's work regarding how the self is presented, displayed, and acts helps explain the notion of transformation. According to Goffman (1959), in social transactions, individuals and groups must agree on three key points: categorization, identification, and comparison. First, each person knows the group or category in which he or she belongs. In essence, this means that we know who we are by the category that we fit into. For example, a football player recognizes him or herself as a "team member" by the time spent practicing and playing with others on the team who share the same interest and talents. Second, the self identifies with other individuals in the group and in turn, the group as a whole. This identification is vital to the understanding of the roles the self plays. Therefore, the football player recognizes the relationship that he or she has with other team members and the group as a team. Third, the self and the roles it plays is compared with other groups that are either similar or different from its own. Thus, the football player compares the individual self and the team to other football teams or other groups of athletes, such as baseball or basketball teams, understanding the similarities and differences between groups. For Goffman, there are two implications of such identification: the impression that is made on others and the setting in which the social transaction takes place. When the self is presented, established, and confirmed by other group members, then one's transformation can be understood as complete. According to Goffman, this is the goal for the self.

Studying the changes an individual undergoes when moving from the role of student to that of working professional allows for identification of the social transactions

experienced at various stages in the transition process. Because each individual negotiates his or her identities and thus creates the self within social environments, the workplace provides an optimal site for understanding the experience of role transitions. College graduation requires that an individual leaves his or her student self behind in favor of developing a new one. In this research, college graduates currently working in the apparel industry are the participants because they are experiencing the ways that dress is central to their role transitions and ultimately to the transformation of the self.

Conceptual Framework

Methodological Considerations

Understanding the individual's lived experience is a primary goal of this research, therefore, a phenomenological framework will be used. Phenomenology, according to Merleau-Ponty (1968), is the study of essences, and understanding the essence of being a woman engaged in role transition is paramount to this research. As van Manen (1990) writes, "[l]ived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research. The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence..." (p. 36). By discovering and articulating the lived experiences of the participants in this research, a deeper understanding of role transition is able to emerge.

Phenomenology, according to van Manen (1990), aims to transform phenomena from lived experience into a meaningful account of that experience, generally in the form of "texts." These texts make public the private experience of each individual and provide a vehicle for understanding this experience (Sokolowski, 2000). Phenomenology can be

likened to an insider's view of a situation and more specifically of a phenomenon. Therefore, to ask the question "*What is it like to be a recent graduate working in the apparel industry?*" necessitates the use of phenomenology to reveal the essence of the experience as lived by the participants.

Sokolowski (2000) has identified three "structures" present in nearly every phenomenological understanding: (a) parts and wholes, (b) identity, and (c) presence and absence. Parts are independent structures, such as the moments of experience of a phenomenon that comprise the "whole," which refers to the entire, collective experience of the phenomenon. Identity refers to the uniqueness of the experience. Presence in a situation is the familiar and what is present and known. Absence, on the other hand, includes forgotten experiences or those imagined but not lived. According to Sokolowski (2000), these three structures play an integral part in phenomenology and in the interpretation of experience. The use of a phenomenological approach allows for an understanding of how dress facilitates role transition and transformation of the self.

Theoretical Considerations

According to Turner (1982), transition is much like a ritualistic practice. Van Gennep (1960) identified rituals as a vital element in rites of passage. Rites of passage occur in three main stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. Transition, a sort of social limbo, allows the individual to relegate his or her former identity to the past, while moving towards a new identity and a new self. According to Turner (1982), in the transition phase, the concept of liminality emerges, as a "betwixt and between" state, or the ritual preparation for change. Liminality, or the liminal space, allows for the audition

of new identities in social situations, without the permanent commitment to a fully developed self, which signifies completion of the transitional process.

As a signifier of one's identity, dress can effectively be used in this liminal space to facilitate role transition and ultimately to indicate a transformation of the self. Material objects have the ability to communicate what the self verbally cannot and reveal aspects of an individual's self to others (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992). Belk (1988) states that the possession of certain objects allows the individual self to do things it would not otherwise be capable of, which in turn, allows the self to accomplish new levels of being. Dress, thus, is both the vehicle for communication during the transition and the means of transforming the self. Participants' lived experience with role transition is explicated through a discussion of transition, dress, and liminal space.

Likewise, performance theory also aids in the explanation of role transitions and the transformation of self relative to dress. Performance, according to Fine and Speer (1992), is more than just re-creating behavior. Instead, performance allows the individual's knowledge of the world and personal point of view to be communicated. When one performs the self through dress, he or she is communicating what is believed to be appropriate in the social situation and interaction (Fine & Speer, 1992). In the present study, the participants' performances through workplace and personal dress are explored.

Purpose and Objectives

The goal of this research is to understand role transition and transformation of the self as experienced through dress. The five women of the study come from diverse

backgrounds, live in different areas of the United States, yet each works in the apparel industry. The participants, all recent graduates, were asked to volunteer in the study to share their experiences with transitioning from student to professional.

During the summer of 2006, preliminary research with apparel students participating in internships revealed issues important to dress and role transition that are used to inform the objectives of the present study. Highlighting the intersection between dress, identity, and the self, the four primary objectives are to: (a) explore the experience of role transition from student to working professional and the use of dress within this transition; (b) explore the experience of transformation of the self as an outcome of role transition and the use of dress to create and express this self; (c) examine the connections between dress as object and the meanings it holds for individuals experiencing role transition; and (d) investigate the salience of these meanings during role transition for transformation of the self. Participants' experiences with role transition and transformation of the self are articulated through discourse about dress in their daily lives and against a backdrop of the apparel industry workplace environment.

Three methods were used address the specific objectives and to reveal the meanings of participants' lived experience. First, a demographic questionnaire was used to gain background knowledge of each participant's educational and professional experiences. Second, participants were asked to keep journals to chronicle their daily dress choices and explain the personal and professional reasons for these choices. These journals reveal both the lived experience of the participants and insights into their transforming selves. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each

participant. Interviews were used as a means to discuss participants' thoughts and opinions on dress, the new roles they have taken on, and what both mean for the self. In tandem with the interviews, time was spent observing the dress choices of each participant via discussion of her journal and exploration of her wardrobe items.

Scope and Significance

For as many individuals that exist, there are as many understandings of the self. Reflecting on the social psychological conception of the self, three main factors in defining the self are: (a) its emerging, fluid identities, (b) other individuals or "selves," and (c) material objects. Considering the presence of others in experiences of role transition is important. An individual who displays the self through dress uses dress to present identities for others to appreciate and understand (Stone, 1995). Participants' use of dress to create new identities is informed, at least in part, by external influences. Such influences might include peers, co-workers, supervisors, mothers and sisters, television or movie actors, and magazines/media. The importance of such influence during role transition will be explored from the participant's perspective.

The exploration of the women's experiences provided by this study sheds light on the place of women in the workplace, and more specifically, the apparel industry workplace. For two centuries, the United States workforce has shifted with regard to gender. This is especially the case for the textile and apparel industries. The Industrial Revolution's impact on mechanizing and standardizing production of many goods brought women out of the home and into the workplace (Leopold, 1992). Many women took jobs in textile and apparel manufacturing facilities. In the beginning, most working

women were unmarried. Today, women continue to work after marriage and children, occupying managerial and executive level positions in nearly every industry, including apparel (Crane, 2000). Experiences of the participants in the workplace are therefore considered in relation to their career goals and their perceptions of the importance of dress relative to these goals.

Summary

The use of dress to facilitate movement into a new role is central to this research. Exploring what it is like to transition from student to professional provides an in-depth understanding of the reflexivity between dress, identity, and the self. This reflexivity will be further explicated in the next chapter by a review of the literature that is pertinent to the overall study and particularly for understanding the participants' lived experience.

CHAPTER II

THE LITERATURE THAT INFORMS THE RESEARCH

The body of literature that informs this research is both multi-disciplinary and interrelated in practice. In this chapter, areas of research pertinent to the study include anthropology, sociology, communications, as well as the study of dress. Scholars such as Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992) and Damhorst (2005) are relied upon to establish the definition of dress used in this study. Kaiser's (1996) description of the systematic and communicative functions of dress in society is also pertinent. Through the anthropological and sociological studies of Turner (1982), Goffman (1959), Stone (1995), and Van Gennep (1960), concepts relating to transformation and rites of passage are explored along with experiences of the individual in social settings. Singer's (1998) identification of the transformation process will also be examined.

Identity and the self are concepts salient to role transition and therefore influence one's dress choices. Identity is considered through the dress studies of Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992), as well as the communications studies of Enninger (1992) and Anderson and Schoening (1996), and the performance studies of Fine and Speer (1992). Belk (1988) and Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981) discussions of the importance of objects and their role in the development and maintenance of the self are also considered. The types of selves that will be discussed are extensive, and include the private and public, the actual, ideal, nostalgic, as well as the undesired self (Holbrook,

1993; Ogilvie, 1987; Rubinstein, 1995; Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). Each self will be discussed in order to identify its relationship to dress within the participants' experiences.

Combining each of these disparate fields is accomplished through a consideration of extant consumer behavior literature. Specifically, the importance of brands in the negotiation of role transition is identified. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) and Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrman (2005) consider brands as tools which unify individuals, and consequently, link one individual's identity to that of the group to which he or she hopes to belong. I posit that such a link is important to understanding participants' experiences with role transition.

The focus of this research is role transition and the transformation of the self, and specifically how dress relates to the shaping and communicating of the self. In this chapter, I review the literature pertinent to the study relative to each concept, thereby bringing the connections between each into focus. A review of literature on dress and the self is followed by an overview of research on the self and role transition. Concepts important to understanding the self, objects and identity are discussed, including gender and consumption. Finally, the theoretical implications of role transition for the self are discussed.

Dress and the Self

Dress is a uniquely human characteristic and a process that has been widely accepted as a crucial part of the human experience. Dress not only has the power to locate an individual in his or her historical and social context, but provides insight into one's psyche and persona (Barthes, 2004). Terms that are frequently associated with

dress include *appearance, adornment, ornamentation, fashion, clothing, textiles, apparel* or even *costume* (Kaiser, 1996). Definitions for these terms are provided by Kaiser (1996), and included in Table 1. While all of the definitions provide distinct meanings related to the subject, the definition included for “dress” is the most precise given the purposes of the present research.

Table 1-Clothing Terminology

Adornment	Any decoration or alteration to the body’s appearance.
Apparel	A body covering, specifically referring to an actual garment constructed from fabric.
Appearance	The total composite image created by the human body and any modifications, embellishments, or coverings of the body that are visually perceived; a visual context that includes clothing as well as the body.
Clothing	Any tangible or material object connected to the human body.
Costume	A style of clothes belonging to a particular cultural or historical context (often used to refer to ethnic or historical clothing, as well as clothing designed for performances or rituals – drama, Halloween, etc.).
Dress	Verb: the act of altering appearance; noun; the total arrangement of all outwardly detectible modifications of the body itself and all material objects added to it.
Fashion	A dynamic social process by which new styles are created, introduced to a consuming public, and popularly accepted by that public.
Style	A distinctive characteristic or way of expression; style in clothing describes the lines that distinguish one form or shape from another.
Wearable Art	Use of clothing as a medium for artistic communication, to reflect the uniqueness and personal creativity of the artist or designer.

Source: Kaiser, 1996, p. 4.

Dress is often considered to be a language of its own, with its own set of rules. Damhorst (2005) identifies four main characteristics that signify dress as a language: grammar, channels of transmission, context of use, and dress elements. Like a spoken language, the grammar of dress has rules for its use primarily through proper combinations and sequences of items. Certain items of dress can be used with others, while some combinations are either socially taboo or physically impossible. Visual communication is not the only channel of transmission for meanings. Meanings of dress can be communicated via smell, touch, taste, and sound, to the individual wearing dress and to others viewing the wearer's dress. As for the context of use, the situation and setting where one's dress is used to communicate is important to meaning. Elements of dress, including its purpose, type, its fashion or style, as well as cut, construction, or composition are part of its structure as it exists on the body.

The individual's experience in society is often shaped by dress. Dress non-verbally communicates what words often cannot (Stone, 1995). Although it protects the body, dress goes beyond utilitarian significance to take on social importance, signaling and communicating aspects of one's identity (Belk, 1988). Crane (2000) states that "clothing behavior is always socially motivated" (p. 19), and that it signifies underlying social agendas. It is particularly so during times of social upheaval, such as during the 1920's after women gained the right to vote or the 1960's when they fought for equal rights (Crane, 2000).

Hebdige's (1979) work on subcultural meanings of dress and their social

significance is explicated through punk subculture. The author describes how the safety pin through the earlobe and the Mohawk hairstyle become subversive emblems, which speak for the wearer's views. Likewise, Ash and Wilson (1992) consider the development of black style in Britain as it developed out of a resistance to the dominant European culture. While having now affected youth culture, regardless of race, its origins are tied to an influx of immigrants from the West Indies, who sought to bring their original culture with them. Similarly in America, the zoot suit was one specific example of dress that both expressed an individual's identity and made statements about the wearer's social ideas (Wilson, 1992). Wilson states: "The zoot suit was defiance, a statement of ethnic pride and a refusal of subservience" (p. 198). The present study focuses on the individual's role transition, which occurs in a social environment. As each participant intends to communicate her professional role, her dress signifies this intention.

Defining the Self

Role transition is a process involving the self in a social environment. However, the knowledge of where one is socially is not always so easily determined or obvious. Understanding of the self may be hindered or obscured through miscommunication of identity, particularly when it is dependent on other people or groups (Stone, 1995). Individuals making role transitions are often concerned with the impression that they are making in the social setting and context in which the transformation occurs. Managing one's impression becomes paramount and one's dress serves as a vehicle to present the proper self (Enninger, 1992).

Goffman's (1959) work regarding the public presentation of the self involves the roles that individuals play and the interaction of the individual with others in all types of social settings. Symbolic interactionism, as a theoretical base for Goffman's work, looks at the self and the other individuals in a given social situation. A certain self is presented, depending on the social situation, which may change as the situation or the other individuals involved in the situation change. The individual's consciousness of the situation is seen as the driving force enabling him or her to enact the self that is called for (Mead, 1982). Consciousness, in this respect, is the individual's perception of the situation. As this consciousness is unique to each individual, situations are understood subjectively. Objectivity does not exist relative to the experience, as others and the individual view the situation from their respective points of view. Because the self is reflected through the situation, the individual understands him or herself via their own perspective as well as that of others.

Mead (1982) makes the distinction between the individual's referral to the self as "I" versus the referral to it as "me." For Mead, the "me" is the perceived self resulting from the social situation. The "I" is the intimate self, that is, the consciousness of acting within the situation. In other words, the "me" is what is presented while the "I" is fueling the understanding of this presentation (Reck, 1964). For both, social interaction forges the meaning through which the self is understood (Goffman, 1959).

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) likens the individual to an actor on stage performing for and with the other individuals involved in the situation. Three types of spaces exist for the actor to perform on, to enact the self,

and to interact with others: the front stage, the backstage, and the outer region. The front stage is where the actor is the focus of the situation. Great care will usually be taken with appearance, dress, discourse and action. Fitting into the proper role on the front stage takes precedence (Goffman, 1959; Rubinstein, 1995). The second type of space is the backstage setting. The purpose of this setting is to provide rehearsal space for the actor (i.e. the self). In the backstage space, stakes are not as high for the individual to produce an appropriate or convincing appearance as they are for the front stage setting. However, the backstage is a place for the preparation of what is to take place on the front stage (Goffman, 1959; Rubinstein, 1995). The third type of space discussed by Goffman is the outer region. The outer region exists in a setting that is unrelated to the front or back stage areas, where the individual is outside of his or her normal roles. In the outer region, there is little risk of making the wrong impression and the social situation does not depend on the presentation of the correct public self because the actor is outside of the setting wherein social interaction occurs.

An office setting provides an example of each of these three spaces. In the backstage region, as an employee prepares for work in the morning, she may discuss and decide on the appropriate combination of clothing with a roommate, colleague, or friend. However, when the employee arrives at work, she is immediately on front stage for the other employees and clients to view. The outer region in this example is the time and place where the individual is not dressed as her work self, perhaps on the weekends or on vacation, and wearing different dress than that worn for the office.

According to Goffman (1959), there are three main purposes of the front stage performance: social categorization, identification with the social group, and social comparison. Social categorization allows the actor to define the attributes and qualities that different groups possess. In defining these groups, the actor can then decide with whom to identify. This process of identification serves to define roles for the self, in that the individual identifies with groups that encompass those roles as part of an individual's identity (Goffman, 1959). Such roles can be career-oriented, demographically-oriented or based on shared beliefs or attitudes. Once the identification has occurred, the individual, now as a member of a group or set of groups, compares that group(s) with other groups that the group comes in contact with, thereby "situating" the self in its social context and defining the self through social interactions within that context (Stone, 1995).

Self-concept is a concept that is influenced by social situations, but is derived from an individual's own perceptions (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). Simply stated, one's self-concept is the set of attitudes and beliefs about one's skills and talents, including appearance and dress, and how these elements fit together to create the self (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). For example, an individual may feel that he or she is skilled in creative writing, but IS not talented at math and science. One's beliefs, as experienced through past performance, shape one's self-concept in regards to these academic subjects.

A definition of the self as fluid and as the composite of a set of emerging identities provides a basis for exploring the multiple dimensions of the self experienced by individuals. These multiple dimensions can include the public self and the private self, as well as the real, actual, ideal, and undesired selves. Because the self is

communicated in different ways depending on the social situation, different attitudes or appearances may be displayed. Therefore, the public self will often change depending on the context or setting, with one or more identities being more obvious than others in a given situation. In contrast, the private self is the composite self that is more intimately communicated (Rubinstein, 1995). The public self is understood by the individual as a result and reflection of his or her social roles or status. The private self constitutes at least part of the public self (the self that is portrayed to the outside world) and as such, the two are inextricably linked.

Within these two realms of the public and private, the individual defines the self in one of three ways. The first is the actual or real self. The actual self refers to who one actually is, defined by the limits which actually exist relative to one's skills, abilities, attitudes, appearances or possessions (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). In contrast, the ideal self is a vision of what the actual self could be in the future or under different circumstances or settings (Cantor et al., 1987; Ogilvie, 1987). The ideal self is never achieved or actualized, it always remains unattainable, but a goal of what the self could be like, nonetheless. On the flip side, the ideal may stem from nostalgic comparison, through the belief that one was once, but is no longer, an ideal self (Holbrook, 1993). The notion of self-concept discrepancy suggests that the ideal and the actual self are always in conflict. In times of role ambivalence or ambiguity, such as during liminality, the discrepancy between these two selves is heightened (Eastburg, Johnson, & Woo, 1988). Liminal space may, therefore, allow for the inventory and assessment of the actual versus the ideal self.

Theories in personality research have extended the self into a third dimension--the undesired self. The undesired self is the self that motivates change in the individual (Ogilvie, 1987). According to this perspective, the undesired self is created by a combination of certain attitudes or possessions (the lack thereof), which allows the individual to envision an ideal self in opposition to the undesired qualities, thereby preceding the ideal self in formation. In other words, the undesired self is that which defines the ideal self. As will be discussed later in this chapter, both the undesired self and the ideal self create the need for change in material possessions in general and in dress in particular.

Through agency the self is given the ability and the power to “do,” rather than just “be.” The “doing” results from an individual’s ability to complete an action, as well as the free will that is necessary to make the choice to complete that action (Neisser, 1993). To some degree, the individual thus has control over the social situation in which the action takes place, or over the knowledge and consciousness of one’s self relative to its formation. Neisser defines two kinds of self with regard to agency: the ecological self and the interpersonal self. The ecological self refers to the existence of the self in its physical environment, while the interpersonal self exists as a result of a social situation or interpersonal exchange. Both types of self exist as a perception of the individual, who perceives the self both in the environment and as a discursive element during an exchange.

While understanding the purpose of each social exchange is not the focus of this research, according to Goffman (1959), the experiences of the individual in social

exchanges all have meaning for the self and serve as symbols for the self. For the self, these experiences can be disparate with some aspects of the self while consonant with others. In essence, a sense of being fragmented in various situations exists (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). As an individual incorporates different objects or items of dress, some items may communicate certain aspects, such as one's attitude or personality. In this research, the participants are wearing items or objects of professional dress, objects that were not likely part of their wardrobe while they were students. Therefore, the inclusion of professional dress communicates aspects of the self in the workplace, but may exclude other aspects of the self predominant in other social exchanges, such as that of the family or friendships.

The Self and Objects

The most basic information about ourselves as human beings, the fact that we are human, has been traditionally conveyed to us by the use of artifacts. (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. 92)

An important component of the self is objects, whether material or social. In an interaction, objects can reveal aspects of the self, but the self can also be extended to objects used through an object's association with roles or identities (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). As material possessions, these objects can give the self control, and even communicate what the individual cannot (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992). According to Dittmar (1992), "[p]ossessions symbolize not only the personal qualities of individuals, but also the groups they belong to and their social standing generally" (pp. 10-11). Possessions are therefore mediators between the qualities of the self and the group,

thereby signifying one's identity to the outside world.

As Rochberg-Halton in Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) states,

Valued material possessions...act as signs of the self that are essential in their own right for its continued cultivations, and hence the world of meaning that we create for ourselves, and that creates our selves, extends literally into the objective surroundings. (p. 335)

These material possessions signify who a person is and communicate what the self alone may not. Defining the extended self is necessary for understanding the role of possessions in the creation and maintenance of the self, but examples of the extended self can take many forms. Belk's (1988) seminal work, *Possessions and the Extended Self* takes into account various philosophical ideas about how the self is extended to objects. Belk (1988) considers the extended self from three angles: having, doing and being. These angles work in a reflexive manner, influencing and dialoguing with one another, and are inseparable in their existence as part of the self. The having of objects, or possessions, allows the being and doing to take place; the individual has (having) possessions that allows him to do (doing) actions he would not be able to otherwise, and can foster his and other's concept of who he is (being).

Objects can be classified based on the type of meaning or purpose they have in an individual's life. Utilitarian objects are those that are merely for use, such as a set of tools for an auto mechanic or a chef's knives. While utilitarian objects signify the professional role of the individual, they are also useful in completing the job required of him or her. Another type of object are those that convey social status, such as a high

performance sports car, expensive jewelry, or designer clothes. These objects can serve as symbols of the wealth or status that an individual has or seeks to have, as he or she hopes to convey meaning through the objects that are understood by others who share similar values (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

While the explicit meaning of an object is not always easily deciphered, its ability to communicate the self by extension does not often go unnoticed. For instance, Tian and Belk's (2005) investigation of possessions in the workplace illuminates the ways that the self is presented through personal objects displayed at work. Mehta and Belk (1991) found that objects, both owned and acquired, play an important role in the development of a new self by Indians who have immigrated to the United States. In a study of the importance of objects among homeless women, Hill (1991) found that possessions, while few in number, held significant symbolic meaning for the women. These possessions included objects that were either kept from a time before their homelessness, acquired after becoming homeless, or were lost as a result of becoming homeless. Additionally, many of the women alluded to possessions that in the future, would, for them, be the symbols critical to establishing a "home."

Just as objects are germane to understanding what it means to be homeless, objects are explored in the present study as a means of assisting in an individual's role transition and transformation of the self. Dress, as a material object, becomes an extension of the self in the way that a mechanic's tools or chef's knives communicate their respective professional roles. Dress, therefore, is positioned as a tool for both shaping and expressing participants' transforming selves.

Identity and the Self

An identity is the deconstruction of one's self (Sampson, 1989). The self exists as a system of multiple identities that are displayed in social interactions with other people; displayed in communication between individuals and through the objects used to express the self (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). Aspects of one's identity can be communicated through appearance and dress, as well as other objects such as one's home or automobile. In interpersonal and relational exchanges, before verbal contact is made, aspects of one's identity are communicated through dress, insofar as dress is the most obvious mode of communication. If one's identity is obvious in a social situation, then one's position and role is obvious as well. For example, an individual's identity as a police officer is communicated to others by her uniform. When the officer walks the street, her role, or social position, as an officer is therefore distinguished from that of others through the uniform. Communicating through dress often provides information about a person's identity, yet this information varies depending on the norms of a culture and can change and evolve, depending on the social situation. One's identity can serve to connect as well as separate an individual from others (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). In the relationship between the individual and others, aspects of the self can be alike or different from the others, and when communicated, either bring similar individuals together or set them apart.

One perspective for understanding the process of constructing and communicating identities is Stone's (1995) *Program and Review*. *Program* refers to the intention of each individual to communicate social status through dress and the consideration that the

individual gives to how the dressed appearance will influence others. *Review* is the consideration of this individual's program by others who are part of the same social exchange. In order to maintain one's current identity, the hope, according to Stone (1995), is that the individual will be evaluated similar to his or her intended program. When this occurs, the identity becomes part of the self. However, the individual is not normally just a passive recipient of identity, but has the power to create and communicate identity (Stone, 1995). Stone posits that there are four ways in which identity is organized: (a) universal, which are qualities that everyone possesses like age or gender, (b) through an individual's name, (c) titled, or one's professional title or role, or (d) through relationships with other individuals or groups.

Constructing and expressing an identity are important functions and purposes of dress. One's dress, as material culture, often has the power to communicate multiple kinds of information about the self (Belk, 1988). In preparing and executing a dressed appearance in a social situation, the wearer satisfies her or himself by announcing to the various social groups that "I belong to the (group)," whatever that group may be. One way for an identity to be constructed as such is through identity narratives, or stories about the way that the world makes sense relative to one's identity (Rubinstein, 1995). In this case, the identity emerges as part of a larger context of its familiar surroundings. For example, the reasons an individual chooses a particular style of dress to wear to a formal occasion, such as a wedding, may be related to the time of day, season, the individual's role in the wedding, or even other attendees. These reasons consequently shape the

identity narrative of the individual when expressing the self in relation to this specific wedding.

As with all other types of narratives, identity narratives require two prerequisites: time and space (Rubinstein, 1995). Each person can generally note a sequence of events that has occurred. What happened first, second, and third as a type of schemata, is part of the temporal big picture of events, such as when a story becomes something more than the sum of each individual chapter. Relationships are also important to identity narratives, as relationships with others can actually communicate the self. The recipient of the narrative understands the values and priorities of the narrative's creator through the relationships communicated as part of an identity narrative.

Anderson and Schoening (1996) consider three ideas—identity, agency, and subjectivity—which are useful to understanding the role of the individual in the communication of identity. In this respect, identity is an inward construction of the “I” that exists in time and space. Likewise, identity is also an outward concept, the “me” that exists as a result of interactions with others. According to Anderson and Schoening (1996), agency is the power of the identity to act on the part of the individual. If one has agency, then the ability to choose aspects of an identity is up to the individual. The resulting story, through subjectivity, thereby communicates those aspects of identity important to the individual. Men and women, in many instances, communicate identity differently depending on the strength of agency and subjectivity, or the link between the “I” and the “me.”

Gender, the Self, and Identity

Understanding one's self involves coming to terms with one's gender and how it is viewed through the larger cultural lens. Gender is a multi-dimensional concept which affects and shapes identity, and is thus more than a singular aspect of the self. Dolan's (1988) description of how power structures develop roles that women play in society is helpful in framing the significance of gender. Power structures that exist in society factor into the role that one plays, subject to the acceptance of that role by others involved in a given social exchange. Consequently, individuals are known only by the role that they are "seen" playing (Dolan, 1988). For example, individuals who cross-dress from one gender to the other deliberately seek to be "seen" through gender roles. For many cross-dressers, "passing" or becoming unrecognizable as a cross-dresser is the ultimate sign of success (Hegland & Nelson, 2002; Sutherell, 2004).

According to Entwistle (2000), dress serves to showcase one's gender through the body. In essence, a skirt instantly marks an individual as female and having a female body, while a tuxedo does the same for a male. Dressing the body, as an act of identity, works concomitantly with one's actions and words to communicate gender (Butler, 1990). Butler describes such acts as "performative" in nature, and that such performances of identity are fabrications derived through social interactions. Bauman (1984) states that all social interactions are, in essence, performances about the construction and negotiation of identity. Since gender is shaped by identity, it is affected by the performances of the individual. In performing, the individual is making a "statement of knowledge about the world" (Fine & Speer, 1992, p. 8). When the

individual has accomplished a successful performance, the behavior can be repeated so that eventually the performance becomes part of one's identity and the self. Performance of the self reflects one's knowledge of human behavior and uses the tools of "perception, intuition, and judgment" (Fine & Speer, p. 8). When an individual repeatedly performs in a consistent manner, this performance is eventually incorporated into the self. For instance, a young girl learns how to perform her identity as female, and over time, this performance becomes part of the self, for her and for others. Similarly, I posit that as an individual successfully performs as a professional, the self eventually takes on this identity.

The Self in Consumer Behavior Research

Interrelationships between the self and material objects can be understood through the study of consumer behavior. Two areas of focus in current consumer behavior research are salient to the present research: (a) the importance of the self in consumption and (b) the role of brands in the transformation of the self. The use of dress as a vehicle for and an expression of this transformation requires the consumption and use of material objects.

Consumption and the Self

Sirgy (1982) chronicles an historical understanding of the self in consumer behavior, covering the topic from a theoretical and an applied perspective. According to Sirgy (1982), the self is a complex, multidimensional concept, influencing purchasing decisions unique to each individual. Thompson & Haytko's (1997) research on fashion discourse specifically explores the ways that individuals use objects of dress to

communicate the self. The individual, as consumer, creates his or her own narrative, and uses dress to justify the self and/or negotiate tensions between various identities. Implicit in the authors' research are the discourses surrounding fashion that develop as a result of culture-specific knowledge. Murray (2002) expands Thompson and Haytko's research by including the use of objects as signs. Murray asserts that the consumer has the power to create the meanings that are attached to signs, yet at the same time, the meaning of certain objects are imposed on the consumer by culture, society, and history. Murray's research confirms the supposition that cultural meanings wield power over the consumer's use of objects to communicate the self.

Consideration of liminal space with regard to role transitions is critical to this research. As stated in Chapter One, liminal space is an ambiguous and ambivalent place between two roles, where an individual no longer assumes a particular identity, but has yet to transition into a new role. According to Noble and Walker (1997), symbolic consumption plays a part in negotiating liminal space. The authors explore the role transition from high school to college student. Results suggest that the consumption of symbolic items help to alleviate the tensions of liminal space and to thus "facilitate a major life change" (p. 29), thereby establishing a connection between the liminal space and consumption. Likewise, Piacentini and Mailer (2004) found that symbolic consumption is used by teenagers to create a harmonious bond between self-concept and the actual self, and that they use dress to express the self and to compare it with others. Yurchisin, Yan, Watchravesringkan and Chen (2008) consider role changes in the college student's life through the notion of compensatory consumption. According to Yurchisin,

et. al (2008), compensatory consumption refers to “when individuals attempt to satisfy their social-psychological needs with the consumption of mass-produced goods” (p. 2). Similar to symbolic consumption, the authors found that compensatory consumption was likely to occur when students were in the midst of life changes.

In a study of consumer motivations for reconstruction of the self, Schouten (1991) investigates cosmetic surgery use among males and females. Schouten explored how self-concept and body image motivates an individual to change his or her appearance. Because the self-concept is derived from social interactions, it will change if it does not meet the individual’s own, or other’s, expectations. Schouten found that some patients were not motivated enough by their current self-concept to follow through with the surgery. Others felt that the risk was just too great and “actively rejected” the notion. A third group, however, actually incorporated the ideal of a new self-concept and completed the surgery. Symbolic consumption, for Schouten’s participants, was a means to present the self as a completed transition.

Lennon, Rudd, Sloan and Kim (1999) similarly posit that if a person is not satisfied with the self, then he or she chooses from the available options to change the self, including transforming into an ideal self as articulated by cultural norms and values. According to Lennon et al. (1999), when one decides to transform the self, consumption of certain objects, such as dress, may help to facilitate the transformation. However, the importance of consumption to shaping the self has also been explored from a negative perspective. Wattanasuwan (2005) considered voracious consumption to be a means of enslaving the self, a limitation to communication between individuals, as well as a

financial burden for those individuals driven by voracious consumptive behaviors.

Consumption types, whether symbolic, compensatory or voracious, are closely connected to the development of the self, and often intersect through the use of dress. Likewise, as an individual goes through a role transition, he or she will likely choose objects believed to signify the new role. In my preliminary research, I found that participants often alluded to specific brands of clothing as future consumption goals. As such, the present research considers the role of brands within symbolic consumption at various stages of role transition, and to the ultimate transformation of the self.

Brands and the Self

Brands provide benefits to the consumer. For instance, Fournier (1998) argues that brands can act as consumers' partners and that "consumer-brand relationships are valid at the level of lived experience" (p. 344). A search for the common ground between a brand and consumer has resulted in the development of five dimensions of the brand-consumer relationship: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997). These five dimensions are perceptions identified and defined by the consumer, which serve as symbols of the similarity between the product's attributes and uses. The relationship between the consumer and a brand requires a degree of emotional commitment from both parties. Branding that appeals to the consumer's emotions, allows the brand and consumer to together construct their own "story," which in turn, justifies further use of the brand (Thompson, Rindfleisch, & Arsel, 2006). Hess and Story (2005) found that emotional branding strategies are most effective when the brand

provides trust and satisfaction to the consumer. By signifying to the consumer that he or she made the right choice, the relationship serves to bolster the self.

The relationship of the self with brands is often forged through social interaction, as is the case in brand communities. Brand communities, according to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), are a "structured set of relationships among admirers of a brand" (p. 412). Algesheimer, Dholokia, and Herrmann (2005) describe the role of brands in this group of admirers, as well as the benefits and drawbacks of aligning one's self with a particular brand. A major benefit is the relationship with other admirers that one acquires when becoming aligned with a particular brand. That is, the development of collegiality or a sense of community. Drawbacks of aligning the self with a brand include negative peer pressure, as well as the risk of a reputation change for the community at large. For example, if a group of female athletes all wear a certain brand of shoe, then in order to fully become part of the group, new athletes in the group would gain a feeling of belonging by purchasing and wearing the brand of shoe. However, if the same shoe brand experiences a negative reputation change, individuals wearing the brand might be seen in a similar light simply by association.

A brand may be tainted by its connection with a celebrity whose image falls out of favor with consumers. Sometimes the positive or negative outcomes of brand and self come through celebrity endorsement of brands (Solomon, 2004). As popular culture icons, celebrities have the persuasive power to endorse branded products sold to consumers (McCracken, 1989). In order for the endorsement to be effective, however, the consumer must consider some component of the celebrity's self to be similar to his or

her own self. The consumer may also envision some aspects of his or her ideal self that exist in the celebrity and believe that by purchasing the endorsed product, he or she will be more like the celebrity, thereby moving closer to his or her ideal self.

The concept of role transition has been studied from a variety of perspectives in regards to the transformation of self, including rites, rituals, and social settings important to the concept. However, the importance of dress or branded dress to role transition has yet to be fully explored in the literature. Similarly, while objects related to transitions experienced by such groups as teenagers, homeless women, or college students have been examined, the importance of objects to the transition from student to professional has yet to be explored in-depth. Therefore, this research fills a clear gap in knowledge relative to women's experiences during this stage of life and the role of dress within these experiences. The next section will describe the literature pertinent to framing this topic within a theoretical context.

Theorizing Dress, Identity, and the Self

Shaw (1994) asserts that the communication of identity serves two functions: reflection on the self and invoking tacit knowledge. Identity mediates reflection on the self, as it uses tacit knowledge to communicate and negotiate major life or role changes. Identity, then, plays an important role in the conveyance of meaning and communication of signs and signals, which, through the knowledge of proper dress choices, signifies an individual's role transition and transformation of the self.

Dress provides a visual means of communicating the self, as the individual's narrative is explained in his or her choices made visible on the body. Dress establishes a

relationship between the wearer and the viewer, because, according to Enninger (1992), dress performs a variety of important functions, is a signal system, and conveys meaning. Protection, indication of social occasions, and reflection of social norms or expectations are all important functions of clothing. In order for these functions to operate, the viewer and the wearer must understand the cultural and social meanings of dress within a given interaction. For example, a red velvet robe and jeweled crown may not be a daily dress choice made by a king or queen, but when worn in particular settings, these dress items indicate an important social event, and therefore communicate the monarch's status and role in the event. Individuals use dress to manage the impression that is made on others. This is particularly true when an individual is going through a transition, as wearing the appropriate clothing to signify the new self confirms to others that the wearer is concerned with establishing the proper identity for the setting (Enninger, 1992).

Dress functions as a signal system in three ways (Enninger, 1992). First, dress remains present throughout a social interaction, differentiating it from verbal communication, which is only present for one moment in time. Second, dress communicates meaning as a visible medium of exchange. Third, dress draws its meanings in part from the setting in which it communicates. As a result, dress is used to establish membership within a group. As a vehicle to convey meaning, dress is both private and public because it is selected and worn by the individual, while its meanings are communicated to the group at large (Enninger, 1992). Dress can be used to suggest things about the self that may or may not be true. That is, an individual's dress may

suggest a completed role transition, when in actuality that individual has not experienced the full transition.

Dress, Ritual, and Performance

Related to identity is the concept of performance (Fine & Speer, 1992).

Performance both shapes and reflects the individual's identity because it requires perception, intuition, judgment, and knowledge about the world as well as understanding of our own behavior and that of others. Social interactions construct and negotiate one's identity, thereby creating a reflexive relationship between the performance of identity and the outside world. Identity, whether displayed through dress or other means, becomes part of the individual's personal performance repertoire and can be repeated when needed to define and create the self (Bauman, 1984; Goffman, 1959).

Inherent to the concept of performance is social setting, a context wherein an individual can communicate or perform for and with others, thereby constructing an impression for others. Turner (1969) identifies the nature of these social settings as *communitas*. *Communitas* is the psychological nature and spirit of community with social relationships as its core. In the present research, *communitas* is an appropriate designation for the nature of the settings that the participants function within, insofar as social relationships are paramount in the role transition from student to professional and the concomitant transformation of the self. Turner's (1969) three forms of *communitas* are existential, normative and ideological. Existential *communitas* refers to the personal experience of community membership, anticipated to be of importance to the participants in this research. Normative *communitas* are large scale social systems, such as the

prevailing forms of western government. Finally ideological *communitas* are utopian societies, few of which actually exist.

According to van Gennep (1960), in order to gain membership into a *communitas*, individuals must undergo certain rites of passage or rituals. Rites of passage generally involve three phases. The first phase is *separation*, where an individual sets him or her self apart from others involved a particular setting. This separation can be marked by physical space, temporal space, or both. The second phase, *liminality*, is the phase that provides ritual preparation for change. In the liminal phase, an individual experiences social limbo and ambiguity, being separated by space, time, or both, and leaving previous social relationships behind. As part of the liminal phase, elements of one's old identities come in contact with new ones, combining to form a new, transformed self. This play between the familiar and the novel is where liminality forges and facilitates transformation of the self. The participants in this study are all experiencing the liminal phase, as they are in process of transitioning. The final phase, *incorporation*, is the opportunity for one's new self to become part of another social setting.

Turner (1982) posits two rite of passage processes related to creating a new identity. The first is status elevation, where one achieves elevated status in the social exchange. Two examples of status elevation would be a promotion at work or election to an important position in a social group. The other is status reversal, where the aspects of the personal self that currently exist are reified and continue to evolve. Liminality, the transitional space between roles and the two processes, ensues as either the personal or social identity is reified.

Bettis and Adams' (2005) study of adolescent girls sought to understand liminal space during the transitional period of going from a child to an adult. Adolescence is a liminal space that exists in between these two age categories. The authors expand liminality to include femininity, because femininity is learned and can be displayed in a variety of ways. As they found, the learning of feminine behavior reveals periods of liminality between girlhood and womanhood, and therefore is a site wherein transformation ensues.

Inherent in the concept of liminal space is the need for an understanding of who one currently is, what is expected to be accomplished or enacted in the new role, and where one is in relation to the new role. To understand the different points along the trajectory of one's changing identity, one must be aware of others' identity or the Derridean concept of *differance*. Derrida posits that in communicating an identity, we are also communicating what it is not (Derrida & Ronnell, 1980). For example, by saying that one is "female," one is also understanding and communicating the concepts of "not female," such as "male" (Murray, 1989). Similarly, when a person's dress communicates his or her identity, it encompasses not just personal characteristics, but also what dress communicates about other members of the group at large.

The experience of the three phases of a rite of passage requires a catalyst of some kind (Turner, 1982). Social dramas are often the impetus for change of roles and transformation of the self. According to Turner (1982), social dramas are "spontaneous units of social process" (p. 57), and occur within social groups that are bound by similar interests and values. Social dramas occur in four phases: *breach*, *crisis*, *redress*, and

reintegration. In the breach phase, a division occurs between individuals or between the individual and the group. In crisis, decisions for future action are considered. The third phase involves lead group members bringing future action to those who have been separated. Reintegration is the final phase where the individual(s) rejoin the existing group, form a new group, or become members of another pre-existing group.

For the individual who is transitioning his or her identity, social dramas allow for the rite of passage and its associated rituals to begin. Thus far, little research has been done on dress within such rituals or ritual forms of dress as both vehicle for and mode of expression during a rite of passage. The present study therefore considers dress as an important means of initiating, enacting, and completing the rite of passage that participants experience as they go from being students to becoming professionals.

Dress and the Experience of Transition: Why Women?

Over the past two centuries, the role of women in the workplace has changed drastically (Leopold, 1992). Opportunities for careers with greater responsibilities and prestige have increasingly characterized women's roles in the textile and apparel industries, as well as within the greater workplace landscape. Green's (2001) study of women academic professionals identifies ways that dress can be used to signal a "turning point" (p. 12) in their careers. Green found that women who were in supervisory roles often think that a new suit will provide a feminine, yet professional look, and serve to communicate authority. The women of Green's study believed that their dress choices showcased the personal (i.e., feminine) self and the public (i.e., professional and authoritative) self at once.

In a similar study by Banim and Guy (2001), female participants provided a variety of reasons for keeping outdated, often unworn clothing. Three identities—continuing, discontinued, and transitional—were cited as primary motivations for keeping these items. Continuing identities, nostalgic in nature, involved clothes that the women did not currently wear, but were kept for their ties to a former self. Discontinued identities, identities that the women sought to separate themselves from, were reflected in clothes kept as reminders of the distance between past identities and the present. Transitional identities were symbolized in clothes kept because the transition was not yet complete.

As Merleau-Ponty (1968) states, “the body is the vehicle of being in the world” (p. 82), and it is through the dressed body that we better understand what it means to be in the world. Like the participants in Banim and Guy’s study, the women in the present study are experiencing role changes that permeate everyday life and thus impact the ways that they dress to communicate the self. As will be explored more fully in Chapter Three, a phenomenological approach will be used in order to understand role transition from the participant’s own unique perspective. Phenomenology begins with the lived experience of the everyday and has the power to both contextualize and make sense of lived experience (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

Everyday life, a uniquely modern concept, was not explored or even deemed significant to understanding the world around us until the late nineteenth century (Felski, 2000). Although writing about daily life goes back to ancient Greek civilization, validation of activities that comprise daily life does not occur until the late 1800’s.

Because women's work has largely been comprised of daily (i.e. mundane) activities, this dismissal of their importance reflects the value placed on the activities associated with one gender over the other. The value of women's versus men's experience has largely been the focus of twentieth and twenty-first century feminist thought. As Austin (1990) points out,

A feminist approach to anything means paying attention to women. It means paying attention when women appear as characters and noticing when they do not. It means making some 'invisible' mechanisms visible and point out, when necessary, that while the emperor has no clothes, the empress has no body. It means paying attention to women as writers and as readers and as audience members. It means taking nothing for granted because the things we take for granted are usually those that were constructed from the most powerful point of view in the culture and that is the point of view of women. (p. 36)

In the present study, the point of view of the five participants as women is both the starting point and ending point for an interpretation of lived experience.

Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a definition of dress and explored the relationship between dress, identity and the self. Concepts salient to understanding the self, including such factors as material objects and consumption, found within the literature were discussed. Role transition and transformation of the self were explored in light of the purpose of the study and relative to theoretical discussion of the self. In the next chapter, the research design is explained and the methods used to collect data are discussed.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This study seeks to address the questions: *As a woman, what is it like to transition from being a student to becoming a professional in the apparel industry? And how is this transition experienced through dress?* As discussed in Chapter One, this study approaches the topic of dress and role transition through the methodological framework of phenomenology, and by integrating the concepts of transition and transformation with theories of liminal space and performance. As was demonstrated in Chapter Two, this research fills a gap in knowledge regarding women's lived experience with role transition and the link between role transition and transformation of the self. The relevance of these concepts, their connection to the questions that frame the study, and how they inform the methods used to collect data are discussed in this chapter. A description of the participant sample and the process of analysis are also provided.

I begin with an overview of phenomenology and its uses specific to this interpretive study. Included in this overview are the epistemological and methodological considerations involved in the phenomenological approach to inquiry. The participant sample and the methods used to collect data—a demographic questionnaire, a dress journal, and the in-depth interview—are discussed relative to this approach.

The second part of the chapter describes the ways that lived experience is used as the point of departure for data analysis. A consideration of data analysis techniques and relevant issues is included, specifically relative to the use of a multi-level approach to interpretation. This discussion includes an explanation of the ways that aspects of feminist thought informs my role as researcher and the relationship between myself and the participants during analysis.

In the third part of the chapter, theoretical considerations are discussed relative to the methodology of this study. I consider Turner's concept of liminal space and its implications for understanding identity and the self, and how the concept ultimately can be used to explain and understand transition and transformation. Articulation of the uses of dress in role transition and transformation of the self via performance theory is also included.

The Phenomenological Worldview

Phenomenology is a significant philosophical movement because it deals so well with the problem of appearances. The issue of appearances has been part of the human question from the beginning of philosophy. (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 3)

Phenomenology originated with Edmund Husserl in 1907 and was intended to address and expand what is meant by "being" (Husserl, 1965). Mensch (2001) explains Husserl's understanding of being "as a function of presence" (p. 2). Presence and time are inextricably linked, in Husserl's summation, as the understanding of the self and being is constantly both revealed and revealing, i.e., a consciousness framed in time

(Mensch, 2001). Since Husserl, postmodern philosophers have expanded his foundational work on being to focus more on the deconstruction of experience, rather than on the linear concept of time (Thomson, 2005). The postmodern concept of self-awareness, or being, sharply contrasts presence. A postmodern self exists only because it is self-aware and removed or absent from presence (Taminiaux, 1991). What is really in question regarding the self is consciousness, leading to understanding and meaning of the world in which the self exists (Taminiaux, 1991). At the center of consciousness is the self having and understanding an experience. Making sense of experiences, in turn, bolsters and fosters the self (Stenstad, 2006).

In order to understand phenomenology, its ontological and epistemological contexts must be considered. Ontology is reality, or the nature of existence, and is unique to individuals as it frames aspects of perception and belief. Hultgren (1989) cites Heidegger's stance on phenomenology, with knowledge being ontological, not epistemological or methodological. Epistemology therefore follows from ontology and answers the question: *how do we know what we know?* If ontology addresses the questions of existence, then epistemology provides the paths by which the individual can arrive at the answers. Methodology follows from epistemology and refers to specific ways and means of constructing knowledge (Kvale, 1996). Methodology constructs and employs the practice of gathering data, as shaped by the researcher's ontology and epistemology. Interpretive, or qualitative forms of research use methodologies that start with lived experience, rather than scientific processes.

Lived experience is at the core of the epistemological assumptions of this study

because the self is constructed from the essence of lived experience. As a function of the self, dress, in turn, helps the individual to make sense of lived experience by explicating the self's intention and the reaction of others to that self. Calefato (2004) describes the experience of dress in this way:

The clothed body expresses the way in which a subject is in and of the world through his/her aesthetic and physical appearance, his/her relation with other bodies and lived bodily experiences. Clothes are conveyors of meaning and value, that give shape to a system of objects in which the body finds the space for innumerable and complex sensorial identities. (pp. 2-3)

Dress, then, becomes a kind of lived experience which serves to create and articulate the self that the wearer wishes to communicate. The clothed body and the use of dress is therefore an optimal site for viewing the participant's experiences with role transition and transformation of the self.

Understanding the specific lived experiences of women making role transitions is the goal of this research. I explore lived experience as the basis for understanding dress, transition, and transformation. To truly understand role transition and transformation, we must begin with the lived experience of those going through such changes. Therefore, five women were selected as participants, all of whom are college graduates within the last two years. Each is currently employed in the apparel industry and is at a different stage of the transition process. Each agreed to commit time to voluntarily participate in the study.

Different qualitative methods often share similar forms and functions, and therefore can be employed together through a multi-method approach (Merriam, 1998).

Using a multi-method approach in this study provides opportunities for repeated contact with each participant, and a sufficient amount of data regarding her lived experience.

Designed to reveal different facets of lived experience, the following three methods were used to collect data: (1) in-depth interviews, (2) participant journaling, and (3) a demographic questionnaire.

Knowledge, according to Kvale (1996), is constructed by individuals through their relationships with the world. Therefore, knowledge is not created in a vacuum, but emerges as individuals experience their worlds. An interview, and the knowledge which emerges from it, exists as a result of social interactions between the participant and the researcher, as a conversation between two individuals, and ultimately tells a story about the lived experiences of the participant (Kvale, 1996). Therefore, interviews provide an ideal site for knowledge construction. According to McCracken (1988), the researcher plays an active role in an interview to identify unique experiences, inconsistencies, implications, and assumptions which arise during the conversation.

Others even go so far as to describe interviewing as “the sharing of personal and social experiences of both respondents and researchers, who tell (and sometimes write) their stories in the context of a developing relationship” (Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997). Interviewing, therefore, is more than just a question and answer session. Instead, it is a relationship that deepens through a natural give and take between researcher and participant. Interviews vary in intent, structure and content, depending on the final product that is desired, the participant’s willingness to participate, and the researcher’s skill level (Merriam, 1998).

In the present research, interviews were used to collect most of the data. Rubin and Rubin (2005) identify two purposes for the interview method. One, an interview allows the researcher to gain greater understanding of a phenomenon, and two, for “[d]escribing and portraying specific events or processes” (p. 5). The interview questions used in this study combine both purposes. Included in Appendix A, questions were developed to address the study’s four objectives, which are: (a) to explore the experience of role transition from student to working professional and the use of dress within this transition; (b) to explore the experience of transformation of the self as an outcome of role transition and the use of dress to create and express this self; (c) to examine the connections between dress as object and the meanings it holds for individuals experiencing role transition; and (d) to investigate the salience of these meanings during role transition for transformation of the self. Each of the interviews includes discussions of the participant’s wardrobe, dress choices, her likes and dislikes, meanings communicated by her dress, and criteria she uses to select dress.

Journaling, the second method employed, gives participants the opportunity to candidly communicate their feelings in writing. For topics that are sensitive, participants can open up in a journal without the grief or embarrassment that might arise from an interview or other face-to-face encounter (Sprague, 2005). In the process of journaling, participants have the opportunity to discuss, describe, and reflect on past experiences. According to Hultgren (1989), “reflection ... is lodged within a theory of experience. It is through this kind of reflection that assumptions can be challenged and experience reconstructed” (p. 135). Given that understanding lived experience is the goal of this

research, journaling offers, as Hultgren posits, a “journey” into the story of the participant from her own unique perspective.

Each participant was asked to keep a journal recording her daily dress choices, her feelings about her dress relative to her professional goals, activities, and any other pertinent information. She was asked to record daily entries in the journal for two full working weeks, while engaged in her daily activities on the job. Participants were asked to focus journal entries on their use of dress relative to job-related experiences, and prompts were used to guide participants’ writing such that experiences with dress and role transition could surface. These prompts are included in Appendix B. The journals included participant’s written entries, as well as any visual media such as personal photographs that she wished to include.

McCracken (1988) recommends that a demographic questionnaire be completed in conjunction with interviews. This type of questionnaire is useful in providing information about the participant’s background, in a concise biographical form. Because the interview gives the participant the opportunity to communicate her story, in her own words, a questionnaire serves to fill in the background information. Included in Appendix C, the questionnaire was used for the purpose of familiarizing me with each participant’s work experience, family background, and the completed questionnaire created a jumping-off point for the interview.

In-depth interviews were conducted with each participant in her home. I compiled three to five hours of interviews with each participant. The first part of our time together involved collecting information via the demographic questionnaire,

initiating the interview process, and providing an opportunity for viewing and discussing various items and combinations of dress owned by the participant. The rest of our time was spent discussing her journal and the issues pertinent to her experiences with role transition and transformation included in it, as well as completing the interview, ensuring that all interview prompts have been covered and any issues arising from the journals had been sufficiently dealt with. Spending this prolonged period of time with each participant gave me with a deeper understanding of her motivations and perceptions, as well as those cultural and social expectations that she perceives to be important in making dress choices. Field notes were kept during the data collection process and photographs of the participant's dress were taken to further explicate the experiences of each individual.

Data Analysis: Linking Methodology and Epistemology

Interpretive inquiry is different in many ways from other approaches to research and particularly those that are quantitative. Interpretive or qualitative research, according to Merriam (1998), has five main characteristics: (a) an interest in the construction of meaning, (b) an *emic* or insider's perspective, (c) the use of inductive strategies, (d) producing rich descriptive analyses, and (e) employing the researcher as the main data instrument for collection (pp. 6-7). Qualitative research provides the participant the opportunity to communicate his or her own perspective on the meaning that has been constructed from experience, which, in turn, secures rich descriptions that are open to individual interpretation (Kvale, 1996; Merriam, 1998).

Spender (1985) identifies ways that women communicate with other women as different from the ways that women speak with men and men speak with each other.

This can be a source of strength and unity among women, especially when a female researcher listens intently, allowing the participant to share deep feelings and insights into her own experiences. Working with the participants in this study brings up the idea of “woman talk” and the problems surrounding conventional vocabulary and terminology (Spender, 1985). That is, according to Spender (1985), the use of certain standard terms and vocabulary do not always apply to the experience of women as well as they might to men. Because it was my responsibility as the researcher to listen and understand the experiences specific to each participant, by having the participant keep a journal, I was able to capture her experiences in her own words to the fullest extent possible.

Data from the interviews, journals, observations, and questionnaires were used to develop a personal narrative that reflects the lived experience of each participant. The issue of voice, and specifically the participant’s voice, refers to the representation of participant experiences based on what they say (Edwards & Ribbens, 1998). Because I believe this to be an important issue within the interpretation of data, I sought confirmation of each participant regarding her own narrative. That is, I shared a draft of the participant’s narrative with her to provide an opportunity for clarification and to communicate any changes that she felt were needed.

Analysis and interpretation of data resulted in emergent themes used to explicate the meaning of participants’ lived experience. According to van Manen (1990), themes help make experience textual. Just as the multi-method approach was used to collect data, a multi-level approach to analysis was implemented. Beyond the personal narratives, two more levels of analysis structure the interpretation. Based on the

individual narrative, integration of journal content with interview responses and questionnaire information across the five narratives allowed for a thematic interpretation of participants' experiences as a whole. Similarities and differences among the participant's experiences are considered in this second level of interpretation. While the personal narratives of each participant allows for the individual stories to be communicated, a thematic interpretation across the narratives provides a big picture understanding of experience among all five women. The third level of analysis, discussed below, considers the theoretical implications of the data for understanding dress, role transition, and transformation of the self.

Theoretical Considerations and Implications

According to Hultgren (1989), a focus on understanding meaning as the starting point of research serves to address ontological questions about being and reality, and to situate an individual in the world. When considering the transition from student to professional, it is necessary to consider the various stages of the transition and how these stages are experienced by the participants. More precisely, it is important to address the transition as a process, and to examine how role transitions lead to the transformation of self as facilitated by dress.

Turner (1982) cites van Gennep's ideas regarding role change and suggests that it relies heavily on social structures or *communitas*, as was discussed in Chapter Two. In order to be inducted as a member of a *communitas*, one must partake in certain rites of passage or rituals (Turner, 1982). Regardless of the specific rite of passage, three phases are involved: separation, transition, and incorporation. For the purposes of this research,

understanding role transition as a rite of passage-like process, and the experience of it as one of social limbo and ambiguity is critical. In role transition, the liminal space characterizes the state of an individual self as he or she is secluded from the former self, but has not yet enacted the new, transformed self. As Turner argues, liminality allows the individual to play with elements of his or her self and to combine these existing elements in novel ways in order to actively create the transformed self.

Transformation, or the fulfillment of *becoming* a new self, can only occur once one has experienced the three phases of a rite of passage, and particularly the time spent in the liminal space. Singer (1998) suggests there are three positions on transformation: *emic*, *etic*, or a combination of both. The *emic*, or insider's perspective, is the psychological component of transformation and often helps an individual to deal with major life issues, such as death, marriage, success, or personal decisions. The *etic*, or outsider's perspective, allows the individual to view transformations of others and to internalize how another's transformation applies to his or her own. However, a combination of both the *emic* and *etic* perspectives creates a third type of transformation. As an individual understands his or her own self, that individual can make the transformation because of both *emic* and *etic* knowledge. In this type of transformation, one knows the past self and the present self. Reflection on the transformation experience can provide an individual with clues as to how future transformations of the self may occur (Singer, 1998).

Within a postmodern epistemological framework, dress has the power to communicate the experience of the self in transition and also express the self as a

transforming entity. Calefato's (2004) explanation of the functions of dress as a type of communicative system, which include its own syntax and grammar, further validate its importance in social settings which involve role transitions. As societies or groups set rules for acceptable and unacceptable combinations of dress, items of dress take on significance or meanings which apply to all members of the group. Individuals who understand the codes and messages can thus use dress to convey meanings to others.

For the individual, communication of the self through dress occurs in the form of a performance (Fine & Speer, 1992). Goffman (1959) alludes to the individual as a social actor, in that the individual gives a performance of the self and its intentions. Performance is a complex discovery and making of behavior, not simply a repetitive process of "re-behaving" (Fine & Speer, 1992). When the social actor performs, the actor is communicating knowledge that they have about the world and the behavior that is necessary according to the social context. This performance requires keen insight, judgment, and intuition about human behavior; both one's own and that of others who will be evaluating the performance. Dress, as a type of performance, has the power to negotiate, embody, and reflect individual and group identity through non-verbal communication. Performance therefore bridges the individual's identity with the social order.

At the intersection of performance and ritual are the social expectations, including norms, for the individual. As a socially derived phenomenon, gender comes into play with social norms dictating actions and behavior for both males and females. One's gender is thus not just a personal development, but is also subject to social acceptance.

Depending on one's gender, one must act in certain ways, but not in others. Gender thus becomes a context driven "idea" that is interpreted and enacted by individuals for the group (Spender, 1985).

In performing, one both creates and expresses the self (Fine & Speer, 1992). When one's performance is successful, it is agreed upon by others in the social situation, and the repeated actions of performance ultimately become part of one's self. For example, performance of gender begins to indicate identity, as the individual internalizes the performance when it is successful and learns the social norms governing his or her particular gender. As Shaw (1994) states, "individuals clearly select meanings from experience that serve to allay fears, enhance self-esteem, and identify objects of their desires" (p. 13). This selection of meaning from experience is thus used in performance to provide coherence among a group of individuals, which, as Goffman (1959) writes, is a requirement for all social interactions.

The third level of interpretation theorizes issues of experience that surface as the five women transition from student to professional. Building on the first and second levels of interpretation, this level serves to understand the ways that women eventually transform the self through their performances in the liminal space. The workplace is the context for understanding how the women use dress to enact and establish the self in its new role.

Summary

In this chapter, I have described the methodological framework that was used in the study and how it addresses the study's two-fold central research question: *What is it*

like to move from being a student to becoming an apparel industry professional?, and *How is this transition experienced through dress?* I have discussed the multi-methods used as well as the participants. Last, I described the three-step process of interpretation that took place upon completion of data collection. The next chapter presents the first level of interpretation in the form of the personal narratives of each participant.

CHAPTER IV

PERSONAL NARRATIVES

In this chapter, I present the first level of interpretation, which is comprised of personal narratives of each the five participants. The narratives reflect the unique experiences of the women, both professionally and personally. The narratives are developed based on information gathered through the depth interviews, along with participant journals and demographic questionnaires. Each of the individual narratives is presented separately, yet all follow a similar structure. The narratives are structured around commonalities that surfaced which are used to provide a framework for interpretation.

Each participant's narrative begins by considering her personal background and current professional role. Her decision to pursue a career in the apparel industry, education, and description of her current job are considered. The narrative describes the participant's daily tasks, thoughts about dress, dress code considerations, and current priorities when choosing items of dress. Additionally, each participant's role transition from student to professional is explored. Narratives reveal changes in participants' dress choices since college graduation and subsequent changes in buying habits. Expectations of others are linked to such changes. Also included in each narrative is a discussion of

the individual's ideal self. This discussion includes how the individual anticipates her dress will change when this self is achieved and specific items of dress that, for her, signal a successful transformation.

Jessica Peterson¹

Jessica Peterson was born in Burlington, North Carolina in 1986 and lived in nearby Graham throughout her primary and secondary school years. When she finished high school, she moved to Greensboro, North Carolina and attended the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). Jessica's parents still live in Graham, NC near Burlington. Jessica graduated from UNCG in 2008 with a Bachelor's degree in Textile Products, Design and Marketing and a minor in Business Administration. During her junior year at UNCG, Jessica began working as an intern at a large apparel company in Greensboro and is still working there. At the time of the interview, Jessica was engaged and planning to be married. Jessica and her husband-to-be plan to stay in the area and continue working.

Jessica made the decision to work in the apparel industry while still in high school. As a senior, she was required to complete a project of her choice. For her project, Jessica learned to sew and realized that she enjoyed it and wanted to pursue it further. While she initially considered doing interior design, she believed that the apparel field was more appealing.

Jessica: I've always been interested in the creative fields. So in high school, I thought I might want to do interiors. So I looked into that. Found out that wasn't really what I wanted. And then we had to do a senior project in high school. And

¹ All names have been changed for the purpose of confidentiality.

I was like, “I think I’m going to learn how to sew.” I didn’t know how to sew. And during that project I was like, “Ooh, I like this. This is what I want to do.”

Jessica applied to several universities in North Carolina, but only one of them offered an apparel major.

J: I had gone and applied to UNC-Charlotte, Greensboro (UNCG) and Chapel Hill (UNC-Chapel Hill). And got accepted to all of them. But when I decided that’s (apparel) what I wanted to do, I knew what I had to do.

Not only did the knowledge and ability to sew affect Jessica’s college choice, but it also changed the way that she felt about dress in general. When she learned to sew, she became aware of the meaningful impact of dress in her life.

J: Dress became most meaningful when I learned how to sew and began to design and make my own clothes. It meant so much more when I had put a lot of hard work into it instead of just money. I felt very proud of my accomplishments and wanted people to know that I had made it.

Although she has graduated, her current job title is still that of “Intern.” Jessica secured the internship as a result of a scholarship that she received through the Young Menswear Association (YMA). Therefore, her recent graduation has not yet had a major impact on her career.

J: I got the YMA scholarship. They had like a thing you filled out and they would help place you if you wanted an internship. After I got the scholarship, I got a call from the head of HR. She called me like a few days later for an interview. I no sooner got back to my apartment and she called me. That happened in less than a week. That was March 2007. I started in late March and did the internship for summer. And I was like great, I’m done. I was really hoping as soon as I graduated, I would get hired. I’m back to full time now and it’s paid.

While Jessica was in college, she had always intended to work for an apparel company as a career, though she was open to any choices that might be available in the overall industry. However, she expected to go from being an intern to a full time employee upon graduation.

J (journal): I haven't changed my career path since I started college, but I didn't necessarily picture myself in the specific job that I have now. I pictured myself working in an apparel company, but I had no idea what company that would be. Also, I did not picture myself still working as an intern after graduation.

Jessica's job description and her responsibilities have changed somewhat in the time since she began her internship. She still has some of the original responsibilities, such as working with shipments and what her colleagues refer to as "grunt work." Recently, however, she has been given tasks more like those of an entry level position -- known as a "Specialist" --in the company.

J: Right now, lately, I've been given the responsibilities of a Specialist. But I'm not. So I think it's kind of a test to see if I can do it. So hopefully they'll open a position for that, so that I can be hired for that. So really I don't do a whole lot of the intern responsibilities. I do some of the boxing and the organizing and all that. But right now my responsibilities are line sheets. We're getting orders in for Spring/Summer 09. And so as we get orders, we have to do line sheets for each shirt that is bought, by each account. So you have to do those and put them in the system and then they go through this long process and everybody looks at them. So right now that's my main task. They do lots of other things. But at this point in the timeline of development, that's what they do.

In school, Jessica's major concentration was design. However, for now, she is working in the Merchandising Department. For her, the opportunity to work in a capacity other

than design is giving her much needed experience and it is also an area where she feels she is proficient.

J: The job is not necessarily what I wanted to do coming out of college. I wanted to do more creative and less of the technical stuff. But I'm good at the technical stuff. But it gives me a chance to shine because I'm good at it. And then move up to different areas. And like I've always said I wanted to learn all the different areas of the apparel industry and that's just one of them.

When asked about the best part of her job, Jessica talked about her colleagues. Moreover, she likes working at the company because of the many opportunities that it offers. As one of the largest apparel companies in the world, she believes that the company cares about its employees' well-being, which in turn, makes her content as an employee.

J: I would say the people. They make it fun. It's not, "Oh I have to go to work today." I don't know how to explain it. They care about you. They care that you feel well and that you're happy with what you're doing. I can tell that, when a company does care that much about you, it makes you want to be there. It makes you want to work there.

There are, however, aspects of her job that she does not like. In particular, she would like to be hired quickly, which would also mean a raise in pay.

J: I'm still an intern. I thought I'm going to get hired somewhere you know. I kind of held out for (my company) so I didn't really apply anywhere else. Because they talked so highly that I would get hired. But it's just a slow process there. They're very careful about how they hire. So they don't spend money where they don't want to. So I think that's the most disappointing that I'm doing the job of a specialist, but I'm getting paid as an intern. And it's hard some days because I get discouraged.

Consequently, Jessica may soon consider looking elsewhere for employment. She plans to stay in Greensboro, but may look for something else if she not hired as a full time employee in the near future. Jessica cites her reasons for the possible change as having to do with salary and benefits as well as advancing her career. Still, she remains hopeful that a position as a Specialist will soon be offered to her.

J: I can see things working. But I knew I had to stay in Greensboro, at least until the wedding. So that's why I'm like it doesn't hurt to just hold out and wait and see if something opens up. But if it looks like it's not, then I'll definitely be putting some applications out there.

In Jessica's opinion, the company's dress code is decidedly casual. In fact, Jessica has no written dress code, but follows the lead of her colleagues in the merchandising department. While she was initially surprised by the lack of standard dress policy, she has become comfortable with the relaxed atmosphere and the appropriateness of jeans and other casual items.

J: There's really not one (dress code). There is one, but I don't know if I've ever been told that. You don't wear other big competitor brand of jeans. Like these (Old Navy jeans that she is wearing), they don't say the name brand on them. They're not Wrangler, but they don't say the logo. But Levis, you don't wear Levis. I know things like that are really big. It's very casual and relaxed.

Working for a denim company with a relaxed dress code makes jeans an important item for Jessica. Moreover, the jeans that the company produces are what she considers to be of the most value to her wardrobe.

When dressing for work, Jessica takes two things into account: daily activities and the weather. Because she sometimes has to open boxes or complete organizational tasks, she dresses accordingly.

J: If I'm going to be in the boxes, I'll wear something more like this (jeans, short-sleeve knit top, and flip-flops). But if I know I'm going to be sitting at the computer doing line sheets all day, I can pretty much wear whatever I want. I might wear a little more because it gets cold with the air. So if I know I'm going to be sitting there not moving, I'll probably want like a jacket or something. But if I know we're going to a meeting or something, then it will be different.

In her journal, Jessica further reiterates the importance of daily activities when making dress choices.

J (journal): When I get dressed for work, I think about what I am going to be doing that day. Whether I shaved my legs the night before or not, influences whether I show my legs or not in my dress. The main thing that I think about is the weather for the day and if I think I will be cold in the office.

A second journal entry alludes to the climate in her office and her need to have warmer items, even during the summer months.

J: (journal): Today we had one meeting that lasted almost all afternoon, and this outfit was somewhat comfortable. I was actually really cold in the office today, and it just so happened that we had a sweater in the office that perfectly matched my shirt. I chose this outfit based around the shirt because I wanted to wear it. When I was getting ready to leave my house, I noticed the button on one of the sleeves was missing, but I didn't have time to change. I didn't feel exceptionally confident in this outfit, but I didn't feel unconfident either. When I got to work, my boss and I had on very similar shirts.

Not only do her activities influence her dress choices, but Jessica also considers the opinions of colleagues and supervisors. Whenever such people will be present, she tends to dress accordingly. An excerpt from her journal illustrates such considerations.

J (journal): Royal blue H&M eyelet sleeveless dress with white short sleeve Old Navy cardigan, white/royal blue floral ballet flats, royal blue circle stud earrings. Today we had our weekly staff meeting and there were several tasks I had to complete because my boss was still out of town. The night before was my last night staying at my boss's house, and I didn't get a chance to go to my house and pick out an outfit for today. So, I wore the same outfit I had worn on Sunday to church. I never do this, but since no one I would see today had seen me yesterday, I figured it was okay. I love this whole outfit and I feel like the color looks really good on me. I got several compliments on my shoes, and I was fairly comfortable in the entire outfit. However, when I got home, I noticed that the dress had ripped at the seam of one of the pockets. I was very upset because the dress was brand new.

In another example, Jessica was invited to go on a recent trip to Canada to meet with one of the company's accounts. Because this was her first major business trip, she wanted to choose an outfit that was appropriate for the importance of the meeting, yet fit in with the rest of her colleagues. Much to her surprise, the meeting was a relaxed one.

J: I went to a meeting in Canada, with Wal-Mart Canada. And it was so casual there. I noticed what people wore to the meeting.

H: What did you wear?

J: I wore a pair of khakis and a knit blouse. And that was pretty much what everyone else was wearing, like dress pants and a blouse.

While in college, Jessica dressed for comfort and did not always carefully consider her choices. Because her role was that of student, she felt that she could wear very casual items.

J: In college, I could pretty much wear whatever I wanted to class. I could wear lounge pants and a t-shirt, and not have to think about it.

In her journal, Jessica reflects on the changes that she has seen in her dress since college. She was ready for such changes to occur and enjoys wearing the nicer clothes that now comprise her dress choices. These changes have also affected the way that she feels about herself, making her feel more confident and professional.

J (journal): Since I graduated from college and am now working everyday, I now have to dress nicely every day. In college, I was able to wear t-shirts and gym shorts to class whenever I wanted. I was ready for this change, and I didn't have to buy a lot of clothes. I was just forced to wear everything I already had in my closet but didn't wear to class. The only thing that I really had to buy was some VF brand jeans, but I was able to get some for \$2 each at our sample sales. The only thing that I didn't expect from this change in dress is that I actually enjoy wearing nicer things everyday. Of course, I would love to wear a t-shirt and lounge pants someday, but dressing nicer makes me have more self-confidence.

In contrast, Jessica describes the relaxed nature of her weekend dress. For her, weekends are a time when she can wear casual clothes that are not appropriate for work. But, since she attends church on Sundays, she also makes an effort to wear clothes more like her work choices.

J (journal): During the day on Saturday, my dress is very casual and relaxed. I wear things that I would never wear to work, and I feel a lot more comfortable and relaxed than I do in what I wear to work. On Sunday, I dress up because I go to church, and these are things that are either similar to what I would wear to work or a little more dressy. I don't feel very different on Sundays, except for maybe a little more relaxed because I do not have to work.

Jessica has made some changes in terms of what she wears. Jessica has worked at the company for over a year, full-time during the past summer and part-time during her

final year at UNCG. Now that she is working full-time again, she puts more effort and thought into getting dressed.

J: But now especially working in an apparel company, you want to look nice. Because you never know if the Wal-Mart buyer is going to be there that day. You want to look nice. You don't want to look like a bum. I've definitely seen that I dress up a lot more. We don't wear suits or have to wear dress pants or anything like that. You pretty much see people wearing jeans everyday because it is a denim company. So, I do wear a lot more nicer things than I did for school. But the thing is I already had that stuff I just never wore it to school because I didn't need to dress up.

Jessica's idea of appropriateness for work is very specific. For her, wearing clothes that are too revealing, too tight, or too short is inappropriate. Therefore, she tries to stay away from such items.

J: My own thing is don't wear too much where your shoulders are showing or halter tops or things. But I've seen people wearing that...Too short, too low cut, and I see a lot of that. I don't really know, but I don't think I would feel comfortable wearing that. And probably not anything too short.

She acknowledges the importance of the impression that is made on others as well as the need to wear nicer items. Interestingly, she also brings up the unique experience of working for an apparel company. When probed as to how the apparel industry differs from other industries, she explains the importance of fashion and the concomitant expectations for dress.

J: The thing is, it's very relaxed. But at a bank, you would be expected to wear dress pants and a blouse probably. But you wouldn't be looked as much on your fashion sense. I feel like in my area because we are the merchandising and design area, people do have fashion sense because that is their interest. Everybody's

always talking, “Oh, I love that top.” You want to look nice so that you get compliments. And you’re respected more if you look nice everyday.

In keeping with her desire to stay fashionable, Jessica described some items that are currently staples in her wardrobe, while mentioning the importance of the seasons and how her dress changes along with them. In the winter, she feels that her clothes are more “boring” than what she wears in the summer.

J: Now that it’s summer I wear a lot of skirts and capris and stuff like that. In the winter, I pretty much only have jeans. I have khakis but it’s pretty hard to dress outside of jeans in the winter. In the winter, at work, my clothing is a lot more boring. And um, like lately, I’ve been wearing a lot of skirts and capris. Not casual, but semi-casual.

In her journal, she described a recent day when she felt comfortable in her dress choices. Because she felt this way, Jessica could focus on her responsibilities and not what she was wearing.

J (journal): Light blue United Colors of Benetton short sleeve, button-up shirt, navy Gap Bermuda shorts, blue plaid ballet flats, navy/silver loop drop earrings, multi-beaded necklace. I chose this outfit because I wanted to wear Bermuda shorts because it was so hot. These navy shorts were new and so was the shirt I paired them with. I felt like the outfit looked a little like a school uniform, so I dressed it up with my necklace and earrings. I felt comfortable and cute in this outfit. Today was a busy day because one of our major tasks at work had to be done today, and my boss was still out of town, so I had to do it. I was glad I was comfortable so that I could focus on not making any mistakes. I received compliments on my shoes and that I looked cute.

In tandem with a desire to dress “nicer,” Jessica has made changes in her purchase habits. She describes her current style as fashionable, trendy and preppy, and therefore

buys work clothing that is consistent with her preferences. When shopping, she thinks about the items that she has in her closet and what she might need in the future.

J (journal): I don't go shopping for things that I couldn't wear to work much anymore. When I do go shopping, I consider what I already own and things I need. Then of course, I buy things that I just really like, even if I don't need them. One store that I really like is Old Navy, but I will shop pretty much anywhere to find what I need or want. There is not a consistent amount of time between my shopping trips. I may shop a few days in a row if I need something or I am just in the mood. Or I may go several weeks without going shopping.

Jessica has certain priorities in mind when she is shopping, and the increased importance of work in her life has changed her consumption patterns. Consequently, shopping for work clothing rather than for other occasions comprises the majority of her shopping trips.

During the interview, Jessica mentioned some brands that exemplify her current style of dress and that she purchases regularly. For example, she frequently shops at Old Navy because the retailer is affordable.

J: I wear a lot of Old Navy now. It's inexpensive and it's trendy. That would be the only one that I'm kind of a big fan. I go there regularly. I love some Coach purses. I love different big name purses. I wear a lot of Gap, too. I shop a lot in department stores too.

Once Jessica is hired in a full-time position, she intends to shop differently. Jessica plans to shop more often and look for items that are better quality than the ones that she currently purchases from Old Navy. Similarly, she hopes to shop at more boutiques and specialty stores, where she currently shops for sale and clearance items.

J: I hate to say it but my shopping would increase. I save very well, but I could see if there's something that I've been wanting for a long time, I might go out and finally get it. Right now I don't look at anything that's not on sale. I'll want it too bad. I think I might pay attention to quality. Right now I have quantity. As far as stuff I buy, I might buy more nice things and less cheap things. I love to go in and look at Ann Taylor and J. Crew and Banana Republic. I love Lilly Pulitzer and I love Lacoste. But I only buy it when it's on clearance. Like the kind of beach resort wear, I love that. In the future, it would be more boutiques, higher end, like Ann Taylor. I'll probably still go to Old Navy. But I don't know how much I'll buy there because it isn't really good quality.

For Jessica, being able to afford such quality items means both financial and professional success. But, she believes that her clothes already communicate professionalism to a certain degree. For example, she writes about a day when she felt confident and sophisticated in what she wore.

J (journal): Black long-length shirt with cowl neck and $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeves, white H&M linen pants, black flip-flops, pink/purple three strand stone necklace, and silver ball stud earrings. Today was not a very busy day, and it felt good to get to dressed up a little bit. This was a dressier outfit because I wanted something that would accent my new hot pink pedicure. I thought a black and white outfit would look nice, and the white pants were new. So I chose the rest around them. I got compliments on the shirt and shoes, and I felt very sophisticated in this outfit.

In this excerpt, Jessica acknowledges the importance of the compliments that she received from her colleagues. Because others made a point to comment on what she was wearing, her sense of self was bolstered when she received the response that she was hoping for. But receiving compliments from her colleagues is not unusual for Jessica. Her boss and other employees in her department often make positive comments on her dress choices.

H: Does anyone compliment you at work?

J: Almost every day. My boss is very complimentary. She's the most positive person I've met. Other people, you can tell they look up to my fashion sense. And I'm not saying that to be conceited. But you can just tell that they don't think that way. They think pants, shirts, shoes. You get more compliments from them because they admire it. They're like, "I can try that."

Jessica wrote in her journal about one such day when she received many compliments on her dress. Surprisingly, however, she felt comfortable, but not confident in what she was wearing.

J (journal): Yellow short sleeve polo with plaid mock button-up shirt underneath, light Wrangler skinny leg jeans cuffed, tan Rainbow flip-flops, flip-flop earrings. This was a last minute outfit that I threw together because I was running late. Today was a busy day because my boss had left to go out of town, and I had to take over her responsibilities, many of which I knew nothing about. In addition, I was staying at her house and watching her dogs. I got several compliments on my shirt and earrings, and someone even said that they recognized the shirt because it used to be one of our competitor samples. Overall, I felt comfortable in this outfit, except for when my jeans started to stretch out. However, I did not feel very confident in this outfit.

On another day, she experienced a similar situation in which the fit of her jeans affected her comfort level.

J (journal): Light peach H&M Swiss dot short-sleeve button-up shirt, dark Wrangler skinny jeans, teal/white striped stiletto sandals, and white pearl earrings. Today we had a couple of meetings, but it was still a pretty relaxed day. I chose this outfit because I wanted to wear jeans today and the shirt was new. I also like to wear those shoes as a punch of color. I got several compliments on my shoes, and someone commented on how skinny my jeans were. I commented on how a coworker and I matched because our shirts were the same color. I didn't feel completely comfortable in my outfit because the jeans are really tight with no stretch, and they ride down throughout the day. The pant legs also don't stay down over my shoes, and I have to keep fixing them. However, I do like wearing high-heeled shoes because they make me feel so tall.

Jessica is often influenced by her boss and explains that she is a role model because of her professionalism and her professional dress. As a professional, she handles herself with dignity and strives to make her department a positive environment. Jessica describes her boss's management style:

J: I would say my boss, she has such a great personality. She handles everything that comes her way. She doesn't let it bother her. And she's gone out of her way to make things better (when there are problems in the department). But she went out of her way to fix it. I want to be somebody that everybody likes. If she knows somebody is upset, she'll try to fix it.

Because her boss is slightly older, Jessica describes her dress as basic yet sophisticated, something that Jessica admires and hopes to embody in the future.

J: She has more of a basic style. She once told me she went to private school and she had to wear the same thing every day until she got to college. So she has her set outfits. You can tell she rotates them. She buys nice things rather than buying low quality things. It's kind of a preppier sophisticated style. She's twenty-seven or twenty-eight.

Influence and inspiration for Jessica's dress choices comes from a variety of sources. While she did not cite an individual celebrity or group of people as dress role models, she looks to celebrities and the popular media as overall influences. The impact of celebrities on Jessica's dress is revealed in the following excerpts:

J (journal): I really don't think I have a role model with regards to dress. If there is anyone that I look to for clothing inspirations, it would be celebrities. However, there is not one celebrity that would be my role model because there are always fashion statements that I do not like of each celebrity. I am also very opinionated about fashion, and thus, I would consider myself without a role model in that area.

J: ...It's celebrities in general. Because I do look in the magazines and I see what they're doing. And I'm like, "Oh, I can try something similar to that." But there's not one celebrity that I have liked everything they wear, that I admire they're whole style. I admire a lot of what a lot of celebrities wear. But not one who's like, "Oh, I've got to see what so-and-so is wearing." When I dress, I don't really think about anybody else but me. And what I've seen in general (with celebrities and in the media).

Jessica's personality facilitates a sense of individuality regarding dress, and while she may not have any role models per se, she likes the fashions of the 1950s. She considers Audrey Hepburn and Jackie Kennedy Onassis as icons of this period.

J: Like Audrey Hepburn's style. A lot of the older movies inspire me. I like a lot the 50's style, Jackie Kennedy Onassis.

Another media influence on Jessica's dress has been the television series and motion picture, "Sex and the City." In particular, acquiring a pair of Manolo Blahniks, a brand of designer shoes, has become a goal for Jessica. She explains the impact of their exclusivity on why she has considered purchasing a pair.

J: One item of dress I would really like to own is a pair of Manolo Blahniks. I love the show and now the movie, "Sex and the City." I learned about Manolo Blahniks from the show, and their exclusivity really makes me want a pair. I wouldn't say that I wanted them for a long time, but it was the first thing that came to mind. One day, if I become wealthy, I would like to purchase a pair if they are still popular. I think Manolo Blahniks say the person is high-class and fashionable, which is something that I would love to be known for.

For Jessica, obtaining a pair of Manolo Blahniks would communicate to others that she is fashionable, but they would make her feel good about herself. This is an important item of dress for Jessica signaling success.

J: I would love to have a pair of Manolo Blahniks. I saw “Sex and the City”, and I never knew about them before that. And they’re such a big deal. And a status symbol and I mean I love shoes. That’s what I decided on. But I don’t think I could purchase them for a long time. I don’t know if anybody around here (in Greensboro) would notice. But I would know. I would feel different. I think it says successful. Whenever I wear a purse or shoes or whatever I’ve paid a lot for, I just feel better about myself because this is really nice. And you know, if somebody did notice, they just scream status and fashion.

Wearing clothes that make her feel confident is important to the professional image that Jessica wants to portray. She believes that even now her choices are in line with the role of Specialist.

J: I think they would tell or show people that I do have a career in fashion. If you look at my closet, I have one suit. You wouldn’t think I was at a big corporate business or something like that because I couldn’t wear half that stuff there (in another industry). So it would show that I had a career in a casual atmosphere, I would say.

While Jessica’s choices matter to her, in her opinion, they may not matter a great deal to the supervisors making the hiring decisions. When asked why, she replied that the hiring officers are typically men and not the women from whom she regularly receives compliments. Therefore, according to Jessica, the professional expectations placed on her have little to do with what she wears and more to do with corporate mandates.

J: I really don’t know. It’s important to me, but I don’t know if it’s important to me getting that job. I don’t think that me dressing just a little bit nicer is going to get me the job. Because I mean, most people that I have to impress with my work ethic are mostly men and they’re not going to notice.

Jessica feels the tension between these two ideas: dressing appropriately for her colleagues and corporate hiring mandates. Still, she chooses to dress in a way that helps her to feel confident about herself. For instance, in the following journal excerpt, she talks about wearing dresses and how they affect her self-concept.

J (journal): Gray bubble sleeve knit dress, pink New York and Company flip-flops, pink/purple three strand stone necklace, and silver ball stud earrings. Today, again, I had a lot of responsibilities and meetings at work. I picked this outfit because I wanted to wear a dress, and I knew this one would be comfortable. I got several compliments on my dress and necklace. This outfit also made me feel more confident. I think dresses tend to increase my confidence level.

Because she faced an increased number of responsibilities on this day, she chose an outfit that made her feel good about herself.

Even if hired in the near future, Jessica is not planning to work long term at the company. Instead, she and her fiancé are planning to have children. For her, having children has always been a goal and takes priority over having a full-time professional career.

J: When I picture ten years in advance, I don't picture anything career-wise. I picture a family. That's one of my dreams. It's more important to me than a career. Career-wise, when I do have a family, I would stay at home and have my own business on the side. Um, which I know doesn't give me much room to move up in a company.

When we discussed what the business might be, she explained that she would like to have her own styling and personal shopping business. Jessica believes that having this sort of

business would give her the flexibility to spend time with her husband and children, but also keep abreast of fashion trends.

J: One business that I think I really want to do right now is have my own styling business and personal shopping. So I know there's one similar business in Greensboro. But just working on a client business, I could work from home. I could clean out people's closet and tell them what they need to have and what they shouldn't have. And then take them shopping and pick up styles for them. And shapes for different body shapes and colors for different colorings. And just that kind of thing. That's kind of interesting.

H: So like the show "What Not To Wear?"

J: I've always wanted to have my own business. When I first started college, I wanted to have my own design business. But as I got into that, I was like I don't know if that's really what I want to do. I enjoyed it, but I don't know if I had that much talent or thought it would work. I don't know how I ran across this personal shopping idea. But I've always helped my friends, you know dress sometimes. In my entrepreneurship class, I was writing about that (having a styling business).

When Jessica eventually begins her business, she sees her dress changing from what she currently wears to work. She acknowledges the importance of her role as an entrepreneur and intends to wear clothes that are more typically considered to be professional and sophisticated. For the role of motherhood, however, she plans to wear items similar to now, but with more quality and sophistication.

J: I think I might have to dress a little more professional than I do for work now, so that people take me seriously. I guess it would depend on as the times change. But as far as being a mom, I see myself dressing about the same. I dress pretty conservative for a twenty-one year old. So I see my clothes staying pretty much the same, maybe turning a little more sophisticated. But I don't see myself straying away from following trends and fashion because it's such a high interest of mine.

J (journal): I picture myself wearing conservative, sophisticated clothing. I know I will still follow the trends and fashions of the time, but I will put my own twist on it. More than likely, I will be wearing a lot of dresses.

For now, Jessica acknowledges that a transition is taking place. Because she is technically still working in the role of intern, she has not seen a major shift in her self-concept. She has worked in this role for nearly a year and a half and has not experienced any significant change in her responsibilities since graduation. Still, she believes that when school begins again in the fall and she does not have to attend, the change will become more obvious.

J: Its kind of weird because I did the same thing last summer. I worked full time. I didn't do quite the same tasks, but I was dressing the same, going to work 8-5 everyday. So, it doesn't feel a whole lot different from that. But once it's fall and it's fall time and I'm working full-time, I think that will make it sink in. It hasn't been that much of a drastic change.

Jessica's transition from student to professional has been an on-going process. While she has not experienced major changes, she believes that wearing different dress items are part of her future and may be particularly important when she begins her own business. However, she believes that the dress choices she makes today are consistent with the self she is becoming. For Jessica, that self can best be described as "professional."

Marie Waterman

Marie Waterman is from Durham, NC and lived there from the time that she was born in 1983 until she began college at The University of North Carolina-Wilmington (UNCW) in 2002. Marie graduated from UNCW in 2006, after which time she decided to stay in the Wilmington area to pursue full time employment. Marie's parents, Nina and

Herb Waterman, still live in Durham, where Nina is an art teacher and Herb does consulting work. Marie currently works as an assistant manager at Forever 21, a retail store whose target market is young women under thirty. Throughout college, Marie made several attempts to secure employment with Forever 21, but did not succeed until she graduated. When she began working at Forever 21 a year and a half ago, she began in an entry level position as a sales associate. Within less than a year, Marie moved from Sales Associate to Cashier and finally to Assistant Manager.

Initially, Marie was drawn to Forever 21 because she liked their clothes. She also wanted to work with fashion, and hoped to get some professional experience in the industry. In her journal, she further explains her rationale for remaining with the company.

M (journal): When I was in college, I pictured myself in retail (especially Forever 21) as a part-time job, but never as my career. After I graduated, I didn't plan ahead as well as I should have. With graduation approaching and I needed to find a job fast, I never planned to stay this long. But as I got promoted, and then insurance, etc., I kept finding reasons to stay.

She was not sure exactly what she wanted to do, but because she continued to be promoted, she was motivated to stay.

M: I loved their clothing. I was kind of doing it to kill time or to figure out what I was going to do. I didn't plan to stay there, but I kept getting promoted.

Marie described the organizational structure of her Forever 21 store.

Interestingly, there are far more female employees than male, likely because the retailer sells to young females.

M: Most people start at Sales Associate. They'll move you to cashier or Visual Merchandiser before you go to Assistant Manager. Then, there's the Co-manager, then Store Manager. Above that, there's the District Manager. Our Store Manager is a guy and we have only one more right now. Actually, our stock person is a guy. But our other guy is a Visual Merchandiser. He's been there a really long time. We haven't had that many guys. We don't discriminate.

Except for the store's manager and visual merchandiser, Marie is surrounded by other female employees. Because of her supervisory role, she knows that she has the ability to set an example as a female professional and move up within the company.

As an Assistant Manager, her responsibilities include supervision of sales associates and cashiers. Generally there are four to five of them during each shift. Therefore, she schedules each of her employee's breaks to ensure that each department of the store is covered at all times. She is also responsible for customer service, making sales, loss prevention, and meeting the company's targets and sales goals. For Marie, the negative aspects of the job arise mainly from angry or uncooperative customers.

M: Just the nasty people. It's not usually. There's some policies in the store that a lot of people don't like: we don't do refunds at all. So that makes people angry. When people check out, all the cashiers are instructed to say, "Do you know about our exchange policy?" And so people say, "Yeah," and they don't even bother to look. They're the same people who say, "I didn't know about it." Sorry, I can't control that. Some people don't care. They'll take the store credit. And we don't change mannequins in the window. We can only change the windows once a week. So, sometimes people want things off the mannequins.

We can write it in the book at the desk and hold it for them. But we can't take it off. We get digital directives for the week and it's nationwide. Sometimes we don't have the things and we have to improvise. We're not allowed to mess with the mannequins during store hours either. I've had people get really mad too. I can sympathize with people.

However, Marie's favorite parts of the job are customer service and working with sales associates.

M: I like working with customers. It's also the really negative part of it. But I still like helping people a lot. I like being a manager. And I like it when the sales associates ask me for help.

While Marie is happy with her position at Forever 21, she is considering other options, including the possibility of pursuing a graduate degree in the future. As she explains, her personality might be better suited to helping others in a more direct capacity.

M: I think there's a part of me that does want to do that (help others). I don't feel that in my job right now, that part of me is being fulfilled. I love it when they (sales associates) ask for help with personal things that aren't part of the job. I don't always have the right answers. I like to feel like I'm helping them. I guess that is that part that's not fulfilled, not making a difference. I don't feel like trying to make billions of dollars is making a difference. I mean, it's part of life and it is important. Part of me likes it and part of me...it's just not what I want to do right now.

Marie described the clothes that she wore in college. She believes that she still has that style, but that now it is reserved for days off.

M (journal): I pretty much dress the same as I did in college. I have the same style, but I probably dress down less. It's really easy to throw on sweats and a tee when you're going to an early class and don't really

care how you look. I feel it's harder now, to find things to wear, when I have to do it five days out of the week (for work).

Some items are for days off and weekends only, like hoodies, which she admits that she prefers to wear for their comfort.

M: I have so many hoodies and dress down stuff that I definitely just wear on the weekends. Dresses, I would definitely not wear to work.

Reasons why she does not wear these items have to do primarily with her employer's dress code.

At Forever 21, like many retail stores, there is a dress code that must be followed. In Marie's opinion, the dress code is more prohibitive than directive, but she is still able to wear the jeans that she wore in college. Forever 21 allows their employees to wear clothes from other retailers, but it must be appropriate for the young consumers who shop in their stores. In keeping with this idea, the employees can wear fashion forward apparel.

M: It's more about clothes we can't wear. We don't have to wear clothes from there. They (the dress code) like it to be in the same style, but they can't regulate that. You can't wear another name brand across your shirt, no advertising for another company. You can't wear sneakers. Well, you can wear Converse, fashion sneakers, but not running shoes. You can wear sandals that are open.

Because wearing clothes that are appropriate for her role as a manager is important to her, Marie shared her thoughts on what was inappropriate for the workplace.

M: Like too short, or too low cut, and I'd say sometimes too dressed

down. I mean, sometimes I'll wear a vintage t-shirt or something, but I try to make it more dressy or put something with it. I try to dress professionally. I would definitely say too provocative (is inappropriate). I would say like wearing a shirt as a dress or like Britney Spears. That's one common question that we get, "Is this a shirt or a dress?"

On the topic of professional dress, Marie believes that a double standard exists, but only for women:

M: Sometimes, I think with dressing too provocatively, people are harder on women. It's hard to say. Women can be criticized if they're trying to move up. Women can be really catty. I guess it's a balance between being yourself and being fashionable and being professional.

Writing in her journal, Marie reflected on a time when she felt that she was dressed inappropriately. While the experience did not occur at work, she felt that she drew attention to herself. As she explains, wearing this outfit was actually meant to draw attention:

M (journal): One particular outfit from high school stands out in my mind. I once wore a button up shirt, green plaid pleated skirt and green patent leather Doc Martens to school. I wore some crazy things in high school, but this took the cake. The skirt was probably a bit too short and the boots were left untied and loose. I looked a little like Daria (the cartoon from MTV). I definitely got looks that day. But I didn't mind. It's probably what I was going for.

In her journal, Marie writes about how she decides what to wear to work.

Wearing something suitable for the long shifts (eight or more hours) is her first consideration, but she also thinks about the company's dress code. She acknowledges that daily activities and responsibilities dictate her dress choices. Marie's role as a

manager requires that she stand out as an example for the employees that she supervises, yet remain comfortable for shifts that can last the whole day.

M (journal): When I get dressed for work, I think a lot about comfort. “Will I be able to wear this for eight hours?” is definitely a question I ask. I can’t dress too casual, though, because a lot of casual things are forbidden in the dress code and being a manager, I want to be respected and appear professional.

Marie described how she is trying to change her style, from her casual college days to a more dressed up look. She is trying to do this without making a drastic change and while remaining aware of the culture of Forever 21. Forever 21 sells trendy apparel at a reasonable price, generally for the teenage and young adult market. While she still wears some of the same items that she wore in college, more thought and effort goes into her daily wear than before.

M: I have to say I dress down less. Five out of seven days I actually have to think about what I wear. I have to make sure I can wear it for eight hours and walk around in it. Like some shoes, they kill me after five (hours). It’s not just something that I throw on to go to class. I’m not really dressed up. I try to be somewhere in the middle. I wear jeans a lot.

She tries to find a happy medium by wearing clothes that are neither too formal nor too casual. Therefore, in her journal, she emphasizes how important jeans are to her wardrobe.

M (journal): I have several pairs of jeans. I wear them so often and it’s hard to find a fit I love. So I buy most of the ones that fit well, within reason. I don’t really buy costly ones.

At present, Marie mostly shops at Forever 21, since she works there and receives a discount on merchandise.

M: I don't normally make a special trip to buy work clothes. Mostly I buy from where I work. I'll see something when we get it in and know whether I want it or not. I have so many clothes from there that usually when I go shopping somewhere else (Target, Old Navy, American Eagle), I just buy what I like, not really thinking about work.

As Marie explains, she is starting to make different choices in terms of her purchasing habits. Now when she shops, she thinks more in-depth about her choices and what will look good on her body, but still buys on impulse at times.

M: I think I buy more tailored things now. I used to buy it on impulse. Sometimes I'll just look in my closet and have nothing to wear because I buy the wrong things. I guess I'm kind of trying to buy more of the right things to fit my body. I used to buy screen printed tees a lot. I have so many hoodies. I probably buy less of that. It's also really hard to resist the temptation to buy clothing when I constantly work with it. I probably buy more than when in college. I buy more on impulse, though, so I don't always get what I really need. I had anticipated this (impulse buying) when I started, for the most part.

Marie feels that some of these changes, and in particular thinking more about what she is wearing, have allowed her to successfully communicate her role as a manager. The result is a change in how others view her, as she wants her customers and supervisors to perceive her as authoritative, responsible, and able to handle her job and career.

M: I guess they (clothes) are saying "I'm a manager," when people see me. I am the manager. You know, some people want to talk to the manager. Maybe they can see that maybe I am in charge of something. I would want them (customers) to think I'm fashionable as far as the store's concerned and as far as buying what I'm wearing.

If you have something on and someone says, “Did you get that from here?” That always helps with sales. So, I’m remaining trendy. I do find it a balance. It’s not like I’m trying to dress less trendy, but maybe that I’m getting older, I don’t know. I’m trying to find the in-between. That’s kind of hard. I’ve never had a job where I was a manager before. So the whole thing is kind of a transition. When I dress more professionally, I feel more in charge of things or respected. Like my style is pretty much the same, but I try more.

Marie experiences a certain amount of tension between her role as a professional and her former role as a student. She believes that her style has yet to reflect a real significant change and her hopes are that it will remain trendy. However, she sees professional dress as being an older, more mature version of the dress that she currently wears. Therefore, Marie hopes to reconcile this tension by keeping the same style, but following fewer trends and putting more effort into what she wears to work. In addition to wearing more professional-looking items, she also strives to stay atop of the trends that Forever 21 showcases in their stores. An excerpt from her journal illustrates this desire to stay fashionable yet dress professionally.

M (journal): My outfit—Wide-leg dark trouser jeans, dark brown knee-high riding boots, with pointy-toe underneath jeans, collared, button up cream shirt with small black polka dots, little ruffles on the bust and $\frac{3}{4}$ length sleeves, double breasted corduroy vest over button-up shirt. For the majority of the day today, I was at work (Forever 21), so that’s what I dressed for. I try to dress somewhat fashionable when I go to work but still professional, since I am an Assistant Manager there. And comfort is always key because I’m on my feet for eight hours, so my flat riding boots are a frequent choice. When I got home today at 10:30 PM, however, it was straight to the p.j. pants and t-shirt.

At work, she wears a put together outfit because she is an example for the other employees, but still has to remain comfortable for her long shift. When she gets home, however, she is able to wear casual clothes because she no longer has to communicate her role as a professional to others.

Marie has had people make positive comments about what she wears to work. Such experiences have made her feel good about herself. In her journal, Marie described a meaningful dress experience as a bridesmaid in a friend's wedding. This experience was important to Marie because of the relationship that she has with the bride.

M: The experience that sticks out the most in my mind was when I was a bridesmaid at my friend's wedding. As is the case in traditional weddings, all of the bridesmaids wore the same dress. The dress was pretty simple and nice—a strapless green fitted knee-length dress. The bride was one of my best friends from high school, so it was pretty special.

In an interesting contrast, Marie gave an example of a time when she felt out of place in her dress, this time dressed as a debutante. Playing the role of the debutante was not in keeping with her sense of self. She used her journal to talk about being a debutante and how both the setting and her dress made her feel uncomfortable.

M: I was a debutante after high school, which is really not me, and I had to wear a long, white dress. The dress was very simple. I really like it; not overly poofy or tacky. But I still didn't feel entirely like myself-doing the waltz in a floor-length gown.

Marie recognizes the importance of setting when deciding what to wear. Just like when she was dressed as a debutante, she knows that now, as a manager, she is expected to dress the part.

Throughout much of her journal, Marie repeatedly talks about how she is trying to communicate her role as a manager through dress. In the following excerpt, she describes the importance of wearing shirts with collars and how this style might be deemed more appropriate and professional than some other items, such as vintage t-shirts and hoodies.

M (journal): My outfit: long-sleeve button up collared shirt; white with thin blue stripes, aqua long-sleeve cropped v-neck cardigan (over collared shirt), dark denim wide leg trouser pants, and brown pointy toe riding boots. Today I opened again at work. This time I came in at eight. I felt like wearing a collared shirt. I've been trying to dress more grown up lately and that seems like an easy way to feel a little more sophisticated. Alone it felt too boring, so I decided to dress it up and make it more feminine by adding a short sweater in a spring color.

Marie was asked to consider the role of others in the workplace in general, and specifically in the apparel industry, in regards to perceptions of professional dress. While she believes that dress plays a very important part in one's career, she does not feel that her own dress matters as much as it might in other fields, such as banking or in a corporate office.

M: Impression is definitely a lot. You don't want to say the way people look is important. I think it is. And, you know, when you're in a job, you want to be perceived a certain way. When you're in power, when you're in the corporate world and over a lot of people, you want those people to respect you. You want to give that first impression of maturity and power, I think it plays a big role. In my job right now, I don't feel

that anyone else values it as important, like how I'm dressing. Or how anyone dresses, really. I don't think it is as important as like a desk (job).

Because Marie does not currently see her role as significant or as important as others, she does not feel that her dress makes as much of an impact as it could in other industries. It could be that the lack of fulfillment that she feels in her present job plays a part in her belief that being an assistant manager is not an important position relative to other industries.

Marie was eager to write about her decision-making relative to getting dressed each day. In her entries, she often discusses the importance of how mood and the role that her emotions and time of day play in what she chooses to wear.

M (journal): My outfit: oversized vintage long sleeve sweater, polo-navy with thin brown stripes and thick cream ones, red scarf draped around collar of shirt, vintage wash straight leg jeans, and brown knee-high riding boots (over jeans). Today was work again; early at 7AM. So I was a little rushed in picking out my outfit. I actually only tried on a couple of different things (normally there's something wrong with about the first eight outfits I try on; I've been told by some I should set out my outfits the night before—my mom has done this for as long as I can remember—but I'm in a different outfit mood everyday, so it would be pointless.) I probably opted for my sweater because of comfort, although I love it. Early in the morning, oversized feels better. I tried to balance out the look by dressing it up with my boots and scarf.

Likewise, on her days off, she keeps it simple.

M: I definitely think less about my outfit when I don't have to stay in it for eight hours. Many times, on my days off, I'll stay in my apartment and clean, etc., only leaving to get coffee, or do a small errand. So I'll throw on something simple to do that. I usually feel

better when I like my outfit, but I can sometimes feel cute in a hoody and a headband...especially if I accessorize.

M (journal): My outfit today-grey deep v-neck short sleeve t-shirt, black cardigan, pink and gold hoop earrings, black stretchy cotton headband, light wash distressed jeans, and tan rainbows. I have the day off again today, so when I finally got dressed to make a trip to Starbucks, it was a fast choice. My t-shirt is super soft, pretty long, really comfortable. It was a pretty day, but chilly in the shade. So I grabbed the first sweater I found in my car. And I'll always love ripped jeans (so much for the grown up thing).

On another day, she describes how dressing up a little more changes her self-concept, especially when she is not feeling "polished."

M (journal): My outfit: black collared button down long sleeve shirt, vintage wash straight leg Old Navy jeans, pointy toe houndstooth flats with kitten heels. I had to work again today, so that's what I dressed for. I tried to look put together and professional today...usually when I feel less polished, I'll wear more tailored things to counteract that.

As Marie progresses through her career path and moves away, to some degree, from her college clothes, her goals are focused on becoming more polished and put together in her dress. Informing these goals are her "dress" role models: Audrey Hepburn and Sienna Miller.

M (journal): With regard to dress, I have several people I look up to. One is probably Audrey Hepburn. She was always classy, but still cute and fun. No matter what she wore, she looked beautiful. Another one, from today, is Sienna Miller. Her style varies, from dressy to bohemian, and she always makes it her own. She is pretty. She seems to be squeaky clean. You don't hear about her on the cover of every tabloid.

Megan cites the celebrity influence when describing her dress for a special dinner with her boyfriend:

M (journal): My outfit: white shift dress with thick empire waist and pockets underneath, black round toe platform heels, and pink flower clip in hair. For Valentine's Day, my boyfriend and I went to an Italian restaurant around six o'clock. I bought the dress the day before specifically for the occasion. I loved the way it fit and it was classy-looking with an Audrey Hepburn feel.

On a work day, she describes another outfit that she also sees as classic and sophisticated.

M (journal): My outfit: black turtleneck sweater, vintage wash boot-cut jeans (American Eagle), brown vintage Levi's belt, brown riding boots (under jeans), pink thin headband. Today I had to work at 8:00 AM. I felt like dressing for comfort. It was a little chilly out, but also felt like being simple and classic (part of my dressing more sophisticated kick). The headband was mostly to control my ever-unruly hair, but I love the color.

Alongside Hepburn and Miller, Marie credits her mother, who is an artist, with influencing her own personal style and creativity.

M: My mom is, well, she's always kind of dressed, not differently. She's an art teacher so she's, like, always worn kind of funky jewelry, so that's part of it. Part of it is just wearing what I want. She's like in this group where they make things. Some of them do, like, metalwork. It's really creative. She's always like made things. That's part of it.

Marie also mentioned admiring the style of Betsey Johnson. Although she does not feel that Betsey Johnson's designs are necessarily her own style, she appreciates the individuality they reflect.

M: I guess I admire anyone who has their own style, like Betsey Johnson. She always does crazy stuff that I would never wear. But it's admirable.

When speaking about the future or where she might be in ten years, Marie does not have a specific career in mind. Instead, she talked about her personal feelings and that she would like to feel satisfied. When this time comes, she hopes to be financially stable, which is in contrast to her present situation.

M: I don't know. Hopefully, you know, I want to be doing something I enjoy. Something steady where I'm making enough money. Like right now, it's not really, I don't have any money saved. Hopefully, I'll be in a place where I can have a little money. Right now, everything's not there.

In her journal, she talked about how clothing changes might coincide with future life events. Not only is she planning to work for a while, but she also hopes to start a family, which will require different items of dress.

M (journal): In ten years, I'll hopefully be in a career I love that's also fulfilling and meaningful. I may be going back to school for nursing. I'll probably be wearing the same thing I do now. Maybe more sweats if I have a family by then, which, if finances allow, I would like to have.

Alongside pursuing a meaningful and fulfilling career, and perhaps even a family, Marie believes that her shopping habits will change. Quality items, such as slacks and other staples to her wardrobe, will be added when she is financially able.

M: I'll probably shop less, like less impulse. I'll probably have more money to go out and buy nice things. I'll probably have more nice, expensive staples in my wardrobe, you know, instead, like nice slacks.

An excerpt from her journal provides an example of the relationship between her dressing and shopping routines.

M (journal): My outfit: dressing for work again, madras plaid tube top-below hip length with snaps down the middle and two pockets on chest, light denim vest over shirt, dark skinny jeans, riding boots over jeans (same as before again). I purchased the tube top from Forever 21 the day before. I always feel like I have nothing to wear (although I have tons...a lot of it's probably from fifth grade, I'm a pack rat). So when I buy clothes, it usually doesn't take me long to wear them. I threw it on first, and it was just a matter of finding something to wear with it. It was long enough to hide my "hips in skinny jeans", so I picked those. And they're skinny enough for my boots to fit over, so...that's why that choice was made. The vest is old but I love it and I found it when I cleaned out my car last week. So I was just waiting to put on something I felt like wearing with it.

In the future, Marie also hopes to purchase brands from high-end designers and mentioned Marc Jacobs as a particular brand she would like to buy. Additionally, if money was not a concern and she could have whatever she wanted, it would be an Hermes Birkin bag, one that many celebrities currently carry.

M: Right now, I buy mostly from Forever 21. There are definitely brands that I can't afford, like Marc Jacobs. I would love to own something like that, designer stuff. I can't. I used to think about brands when I first started loving clothes, like in middle school. Now I don't think about the label as much. But you know a lot of the better labels have a better fit, better quality. I still don't think I could pay a lot of the prices on the runway. I don't think I could stomach it. If money was no object, I'd probably buy one of those ridiculously expensive bags. Yeah, I'd feel bad while I was doing it. But maybe a Birkin bag. I'll go on E-bay and type it in, because sometimes they'll have fake ones you know. They're (the real ones) like \$12,000.

Marie is aware of the messages of success that are communicated through such items. Similarly, her current desire is to look the part that she plays as a manager and be successful to that end. While she is not sure what career she will have in the future, Marie hopes that others will perceive her as a professional with an important role to play.

M: ...Responsibilities are a big part of it (making dress choices). Now that I'm a manager, I want to be dressed up a little bit more. Not dressed up, but a little bit apart from the others. I guess it does make people see you as more in control. I'm playing the part. I should exude, not power (because) I'm not authoritative. But I do want to look more professional.

For now, Marie continues to develop professionally while making decisions about future plans. While she may pursue a service-oriented career in the future, she is not planning to leave her Assistant Manager position at Forever 21 anytime soon. She acknowledges that her life is in a transition phase and that she is somewhere in-between the college and professional selves.

M: I definitely feel like I'm somewhere in-between. You know, when I graduated, I didn't see myself working in retail for years. It's definitely hard for me to figure out my place, what I want to do. It's definitely the in-between. I'm trying to find the balance.

For Marie, fulfillment and finding a career that will suit her personality will cause the transformation of self to further occur. She acknowledges that she is not yet a professional, though no longer a student, which for her, is a difficult place to be. This "in-between" means that she is currently negotiating the tension between her old self and the new one while being in a state of flux in regards to her career path.

Alicia Davis

Alicia Davis was born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina in 1983. She attended elementary and secondary schools in the Winston-Salem area. Alicia is the only child of Richard Davis, and Jennifer and Art Murphy, who reside in High Point and Winston-Salem, North Carolina, respectively. Alicia attended Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia and received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Graphic Art. After graduation from Hampton University in 2005, Alicia enrolled in the Consumer, Apparel and Retail Studies program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to pursue a Master of Science degree.

Alicia's original career goals were to work as a graphic designer, but after an internship in the apparel field, she decided that she wanted to pursue further education, and ultimately a job, in the fashion industry. The decision to change careers was influenced by her personal love of fashion and desire to work as a buyer for a high-end department store. Currently she is working as an Allocation Analyst for the TJX Corporation in Framingham, Massachusetts. TJX Corporation has over 3,000 employees at its home office. Having been employed for six months at the time of the interview, Alicia has been given more responsibilities, including meeting buyer's requests for shipping strategies, working on advertisements, and sale features. She is learning that the role of an apparel industry buyer has more to do with the consumer's preferences than with her own:

A: I love shopping so I wanted to couple the two: shopping and someone else's money. But it's a whole lot more to consider. You can't base it on your likes, your preferences. You have to do a lot of research. It's fun, but it's challenging.

Alicia already gets to experience shopping as part of her daily job. In fact, according to Alicia, she is encouraged to shop TJX's competition, especially other discount retail stores and malls, and can do this for up to three hours each day. She even shopped the competition on a recent trip home to North Carolina. Her commitment to her job is evident:

A: I shopped Ross when I was home (in Winston-Salem). They're a major competitor in the south. I shopped Ross and picked up like \$100 in samples. They had some Carter's for kids, for a ridiculously low price. I didn't have to do that, but I did. That's my job. Even though I was on vacation, that is my job.

While Alicia has not yet become a "full-fledged" buyer, she is working towards that goal as an Allocation Analyst, which is the first step on the professional track to becoming a buyer at TJX. In this position, her responsibilities already involve working with the buyers and TJX Distribution Centers across the United States to coordinate planning and shipping strategies. That is, she must determine which products and shipments will go to various stores and distribution centers.

A: On Mondays, we have to rip reports for every department, every class. And it's the analysts' responsibility to rip reports before nine. So I get there at 8:30. Um, the day starts at nine. We have to get together a shipping strategy for each department by 11:00. I'll check out the purchase order. And if the purchase order is right, then I'll go to the buyer. Then we have to come up with our planning strategies by 3:00. And then by 5:00, we have to go over numbers for the week. Throughout the week, it consists of carrying out the shipping strategies that you came up with on Monday.

A retailer of clothing and home fashions in the United States, Canada, and Europe, TJX owns eight chains of stores and employs over 100,000 people worldwide. (www.tjx.com). This means that a lot of product shipments must be completed each day, many of which are Alicia's responsibility.

Alicia's thoughts and feelings about her current responsibilities are not always positive, as she has high aspirations to become a buyer. At times, Alicia becomes frustrated with what she is doing and feels that she is ready to move on to another position.

A: I'm not crazy about shipping. It can be monotonous. You're shipping Monday through Friday. You might have a couple of problems, a couple meetings. I'm not passionate about it. I'm just doing it move up, so...And I was (one of two) people in my class with a Master's degree. And it's hard, sitting beside someone who has an undergraduate degree, and we're all starting out at the same level.

Still, Alicia sees her tenure at TJX to be valuable and full of future opportunities. In fact, she considers the experience that she is gaining to be the best part of her job. She remains positive and has seen other employees, who were former Allocation Analysts, advance quickly in their careers.

A: I think the potential for growth (is what I like most). Being that it can actually happen, becoming a buyer. I've see people promoted in six months, in two years. A girlfriend of mine started two years ago and she's already an associate buyer. So if I have confidence, show that I have a passion, that I have a passion for this company, it will happen.

Alicia sees the ultimate value of her education, but that it must be coupled with experience in order to move further in her career. At times, however, she finds her lack of experience a difficult place to be.

A: My initial training was twelve weeks. Five weeks in class, seven weeks on the job. We have classes once a month, where we're taught new systems of applications. At TJX, if you have any buying experience, they will get you through the training that I went through and put you into an associate buyer. Which, you know, I understand. I don't have that experience. I have the education. It's kind of hard. Experience definitely outweighs education.

There is a written dress code for TJX employees, which in Alicia's opinion is quite casual. The company's dress code allows for individual choices and is general in nature, with a few specific restrictions regarding certain items and seasons of the year. For example, the summer dress code during May through August differs from the rest of year.

A: I would say TJX is very relaxed...May through August, it's casual. Pretty much anything you want, as long as it's tasteful. September through April, I think it's very relaxed. Just no denim bottoms. But Fridays, you can wear denim. Guys, it's pretty traditional. They have to wear ties, Monday through Thursday. I don't think it's fair.

When speaking generally about professionalism and gender differences, Alicia talked about proving herself and the changing landscape of gender roles in her workplace. According to Alicia, the ratio of women to men at TJX is approximately 70/30. She believes that TJX is one of many companies that have women in executive positions in the United States today.

A: There aren't many men. But our CEO is a woman, our first female CEO. It's different, but it speaks to that majority. I would say the executive board is mostly male. The executives, they treat us as equals. They eat in the same cafeteria as we do.

Likewise, Alicia has had interactions with upper management in the short time she has been there, both in meetings and in more casual settings, such as the cafeteria or during social outings.

Alicia's opinion of appropriate professional dress for women includes specific items as well as general guidelines for what to wear. Certain items, such as flip-flops and tank tops, and clothes that are too tight or revealing would lie at the extreme end of the inappropriate dress spectrum. Appropriateness in dress, for Alicia, is determined by the social context. For her, she makes a clear distinction between work clothes and other clothes. In her closet, she even has separate places for work clothes versus "going out" clothes.

A: Tube tops, with no straps, tight fitting pants, jeans. On jeans day, I think a lot of women take it to the extreme. It's jeans day, but it's not "club" jeans day. I have seen that and it's not tasteful at all. Flip-flops, just tight fitting clothes period. If you're going out, there should be a difference in clothes. When you're at work, you're there to work. In my closet, I have separate sections. I've seen it (inappropriate clothes) and it's not pretty.

When asked about the effect of inappropriate clothes on an individual's career, she believes that this signals a lack of seriousness and career focus. She distinguishes herself from such fellow employees.

A: It says you don't take your job seriously. I don't think they have goals set in the company or in general. They're not working towards anything. Just saying "I'm here from 9 to 5."

While Alicia has never knowingly crossed the inappropriate dress line, she described an instance when she felt that she was dressed inappropriately. The choice to wear a dress that had a hemline shorter than she was comfortable with made her want to stay at her desk and keep interaction to a minimum throughout the day.

A: I have this khaki dress, like $\frac{3}{4}$ length and it has a hood on the back. The last time I wore it, it came to my knees. And when I put it on, I felt kind of like, is this too short? Nothing's hanging out, but is it appropriate for work? I wore it, although I was uncomfortable. And as the day wore on, I got more and more uncomfortable. And at lunch time I was standing in line in the cafeteria and I saw one of my girlfriends. I actually asked her if the dress was too short. And she said, "No, Alicia, you look fine." I'll never wear that dress to work again. Even though I got a second opinion, I tried to stay as still as I could in my chair all day, except for going to lunch. I just know that I stayed in my chair all day...Very valuable lesson.

Not surprisingly, she recounted this experience in her journal also commenting that, "No one said anything about the dress, so that made me feel a little bit better." In this example, Alicia acknowledges not just the importance of wearing clothes that are appropriate for work, but also the role of others in establishing her self-concept as a professional. The choice to wear this khaki dress detracted from the image she has of herself as a professional and made her uncomfortable. Asking her friend's opinion further reveals this discomfort.

In addition to wearing clothes that are appropriate for work and that follow the established dress code, Alicia must consider the weather and climate of Boston. Thus,

two more priorities for dress are comfort and practicality. For example, in her journal, she described how her dress choices often had to do with the weather. As the Boston metropolitan area is cold during December and January, she often dresses for the purpose of warmth. In her journal, she writes of two such instances.

A (journal): December 10-Today's outfit: black turtleneck, cream necklace, cream and black polka dot shirt (sleeveless), black slacks, black boots. Today's outfit needed to be warm and practical due to inclement weather. By double-layering my tops, I knew that I would keep warm. I sat at my desk for the majority of the day with the exception of going to lunch. I think that my dress selection today was very appropriate for a Monday.

A (journal): December 20-Today's outfit: khaki pants, blue, cream, tan striped sweater, cream long sleeve shirt underneath, cream flats. Well I knew that it was going to snow again today so I wanted to wear something warm and practical for the weather. I also expected to be quite busy today since it was my last day working before going home for Christmas. I got several compliments on my sweater today. I think that abstract stripes caught people's eye.

On another day, the same thoughts dictated her choices.

A (journal): January 3-Today's outfit: black slacks, dark purple sleeveless sweater turtleneck, black long sleeve button up, black flats. Today's outfit was decided based solely on the weather. Today's windchill was -10 degrees!!! I knew that the thick sweater turtleneck would be warm. I also knew that by the sweater being sleeveless, I wouldn't get too hot in the office.

In many cases, Alicia has to achieve a balance between looking professional and staying warm. On the day that her division was planning to have their Christmas luncheon, she reconciled both requirements.

A (journal): December 13-Today's outfit: red turtleneck, black, grey, red wool dress with belt, red leggings, black knee boots. Today's outfit was inspired by our Christmas luncheon. I thought I would dress very festively for the occasion. However, we did not have our luncheon due to a snow storm today. The office closed early at 1:30 so the day was cut short. I'm glad that I wore my knee high boots because of all the snow.

The luncheon took place the following day, and Alicia described how her goals of looking festive, while maintaining comfort and warmth, were achieved.

A (journal): December 14-Today's outfit: red, yellow, green, purple, and black striped wool sweater, red hooded long sleeve shirt underneath, light denim jeans, red patent leather flats. Because today is Friday, I was able to dress down and wear jeans. I'm very glad because I had to clear several inches of snow from my truck. Because the weather was bad yesterday, our departmental holiday luncheon was rescheduled to today. I chose to wear red to be festive for the luncheon.

Moving from North Carolina to Boston, the weather and climate changes have played a major role in what Alicia chooses to wear. When asked about any other changes to her professional wardrobe, Alicia mentioned that her priorities had changed. While trend is still important, quality has become a key factor as well.

A: I would say that trendy is still a priority. But, I have seen that when I buy now, I'll feel the material and say, "Will I have to buy another pair of black slacks next month because I've washed these and they faded?" And then with the weather, I feel for weight. I've gravitated more to wool slacks. When I was in school, I didn't care. I could throw on jeans and they're pretty warm. So yeah, I think those things have changed. I didn't think about those things before. I didn't have to.

Another issue that Alicia brought up was the importance of the activities that she does each day, in tandem with the setting in which her work is performed. Activities at work dictate what she wears, but comfort is also a priority. As she explains:

A (journal): When I am deciding what to wear to work I begin thinking about what activities I will be involved with at work the next day. I also consider the weather and temperature and dress accordingly. If I wear heels one day, I try to wear flats the next day in order to give my feet a break.

Alicia talked about other changes in her life that stem from her recent relocation. For instance, in the evenings and on weekends when she goes out to dinner or dancing with friends, she often feels overdressed.

A: When I first moved here, like the whole club scene here is different from back home. Going out in Atlanta, Miami, with my girlfriends, we'd go out. We'd do our makeup, our purse would match our shoes. We'd go out. When girls go out here, it's jeans and a nice top. It's just not as dressed up as I was used to. I've toned down my "going out" attire.

Likewise, in describing her weekend style, she cites the differences between clothing that she wears to work and what she wears on the weekends.

A: My weekend dress is definitely more laid back than my work dress. I feel as though I can express myself more in my weekend dress...more colors! My weekend dress also usually includes club attire which would be completely inappropriate for work.

When asked if there was ever a time that she would wear something to work that she also wore to a club she said, "No." In fact, Alicia believes that there should be a clear difference between the two and even keeps both kinds of dress in different areas of her

closet, saying, “If you’re going out, there should be a difference. In my closet, I have separate sections.” In the front are her work clothes, which can be easily accessed. Her weekend clothes are in the back of the closet.

Considering all of the changes that Alicia has experienced in the past three years, such as acquiring her undergraduate and graduate degrees, as well as moving to the Boston area to begin working full-time, there have been concomitant changes in her dress choices. First of all, Alicia talked about the change from being a student to becoming the professional that she is today.

A: My dress since graduating from UNCG has changed based on the fact that I work 5 days a week. I wear more slacks and button up shirts as opposed to jeans and “cutesy tops.” I would not say that it was a question of whether or not I was ready for this change. I just conform to what is asked of by my employer. Before starting at TJX, I expected that I would have to wear business suits to work everyday, but have found that TJX has a business casual dress code. I did have to purchase several pairs of slacks because as I mentioned, I did not have many before starting my job.

Alicia talked about some specific items that have changed in her closet since she began working full-time, keeping in mind the importance she places on warmth, quality, and trend. At this point, the specific item that has signaled the greatest change in her role is slacks. When Alicia was in school, she wore jeans a lot. Now, instead of jeans, she wears slacks.

A: It’s (clothing) definitely changed from school to now. I did a lot of jeans in school. And I can’t do jeans now. I think that was the biggest thing: finding slacks. I think slacks are aging. That’s how I felt. I don’t want to wear slacks. I’ll look like an old lady. I’ll look like my mom. But now I feel that if they fit the way I want them to

fit (it's ok). If they're not tight, but not slouching. I have found that I actually like wearing slacks. They make me feel important in a sense.

While wearing slacks made her feel older than her actual age, she sees them as an appropriate alternative to jeans in the workplace. Prior to working as an Allocation Analyst, slacks were reserved mainly for occasional dress, rather than daily wear. Now, slacks provide a sense of security and belonging that perhaps jeans once did in her role as a student. Indeed, slacks of some variation or other were worn for nine out of the fourteen days that she kept her journal.

A: I would say that my initial discomfort came from the word "slacks." That sounded old to me. And previously, I did not wear slacks unless I had a presentation for school or was going to church, and just had to put them on. So now, I'm in a situation where I have to put them on. I don't want to feel uncomfortable and out of place. I go to TJ Maxx and Marshall's because there is a variety of designers and cuts all in one place. So I can pick up ten different pairs by ten different people, try them on, and pick them up, all in one shopping event. And they're reasonably priced.

Given Alicia's desire to be part of the company and move into a buyer position, she strives to fit in with her colleagues. Thus, her opinion of slacks has changed and this item is now an integral part of her daily wardrobe.

Alicia sees what she wears to work as a crucial part of developing her professional self. The importance of this idea is illustrated in the following excerpt from her journal.

A (journal): One of the most recent dress experiences that was quite meaningful was what I wore on my first day at TJX. I started on a hot July 30, 2007, so I wanted to dress coolly but professionally. I knew

that the office was on a relaxed dress code for the summer but wanted to make a statement. I decided to wear a Jackie O style, black and white linen dress with black pumps and white accessories. I felt very confident with this outfit on.

Because this was her first day at TJX, Alicia chose something that would be appropriate, but would also make a statement and provide her some much-needed confidence. This would be the first impression that she would make on her peers and supervisors. Alicia was aware that the summer dress code was in effect, but still wanted to look professional in her new role as a working woman.

Reflecting on her experiences with dress at work over the past six months, Alicia has had both positive and negative experiences, such as the day that she wore the khaki dress with the short hemline. But in another instance, a compliment from her boss resulted in a positive experience, prompting her to think further about what she wears and her motivation for doing so.

A: I've found that dressing professionally gives you a feeling of power and importance. It's a different feeling than when you throw on jeans. Confidence, maybe. It's a good feeling. And even at work today, my planning manager, who I've seen in a suit, um, I can count the number of times on my hands. But she made the comment, "Alicia, your suit is so nice. Why are you so dressed up?" I have it. Where else am I going to wear it? It's funny because it's so out of the norm. And I also feel that I, I don't know, it's not a statement to make. But I want them to see that she's (Alicia's) on top of it. She's dressing for the title. Or dressing for what she wants to be.

In her opinion, dressing in a professional manner makes her feel good about herself and stand out from her peers. In this case, a pants suit made her feel confident. Interestingly, Alicia also wrote about this day in her journal, but did not suggest that this day was out of

the ordinary in any way. Her activities in the office did not include any important meetings and she spent most of the day working at her desk. She simply wore the suit because she felt that it was appropriate for the weather and her corporate environment.

A (journal): December 11: Today's outfit-light grey pant suit, dark grey turtleneck, grey flats and silver necklace. Today I went for a very professional look with a suit. Because TJX does not require associates to wear suits, most people do not. However, I like to every now and then. It gives me a feeling of importance and power. I was at my desk the majority of my day with the exception of going to talk to the buyers.

While wearing a suit may be unusual for the corporate culture at TJX and especially for her position, Alicia hopes to progress quickly up the corporate ladder and is focused on achieving her professional goals. She believes that dressing for the position that she hopes to one day achieve is necessary for her success.

In the interview, Alicia described a particular instance where she used dress to convey how she wanted to be seen as a professional and one who was serious about her career.

A: We had a meeting with the VP of Marshall's a couple of weeks ago. Pretty close contact, we're in the conference room, around the table, and he's at the end. So he's going to see me. I'm going to have my name plate here (in front of her). I want you (the VP of Marshall's) to put a name with a face: Someone who's professionally dressed as well that wants to be in a professional manner. I thought about what I was going to wear well before the meeting. And I think that speaks to clothes that say a lot. You don't want it to say, "Oh, she's a slob. She's colorblind." I want my clothes to be true to who I am.

Alicia dressed to signal her commitment to her career and to help the Vice President connect an appearance with a name. In terms of her job and the impression that she makes, she wants to be perceived as a professional. Alicia has her career goal of becoming a buyer in mind, and being “true to who I am” means that she is ready to handle that position. As Alicia gains experience, she is focused on her future goals. For many years, she has wanted to work for Saks Fifth Avenue as a buyer. However, as she spends more time working, she is considering other options. At the present time, she would like to be in a warmer climate, because the New England climate is a major change from what she was used to in North Carolina.

A: I definitely want to be a buyer. For what company? I’m not sure. Maybe TJX, maybe not. My dream employer, at this point, would be Saks. But definitely with a high end department store or an independent designer. They have buyers, too. I don’t think I’ll be in the New England area. My ideal area would be Miami.

As Alicia alluded to in her discussion of working in the apparel industry, shopping is one of her favorite activities. In her journal, she talked about motivations for shopping and her rationale for choosing one store over another. Consideration of her role as a professional currently guides her purchase behavior.

A (journal): When I shop for work clothes, I try to remain unique to my own personal style but also remain professional at the same time. I consider style, as well as practicality in regards to weather. I do a lot of my shopping at TJ Maxx as well as Marshall’s because of their awesome bargains. I also shop at Forever 21 as well as H&M quite often. I shop for clothes (work/non-work) an average of once a week depending on what else is going on in my life.

Alicia cites an example of how dress she would like to purchase would communicate her new role. She believes that a cream, knee-length wool coat would communicate both her commitment to fashion trends as well as her role as a professional.

A: I recently have decided that I would like to have a cream/off-white knee-length wool coat. I think that the color creates a very sharp and distinguished look. I have seen this style coat in several magazines and like the way that they look. I actually wanted to get one over the holidays but could not find the exact style that I wanted. If and when I do find the perfect style, I think that it will say that I am a fashionable, sharp, professional, young woman.

Regarding Alicia's purchase decisions, whether for slacks or other dress items, she does not necessarily see herself as brand loyal.

A: I don't have a favorite brand. I buy what I like at the time. I'll wear a favorite color. I'm really, really not into brands. I don't think that will change as I progress in my career.

However, Alicia is aware of certain brands and even mentioned a particular designer when she talked about an item of dress that she recently tried on.

A: There were a pair of Michael Kors alligator boots (at work) and they were (size) 8 1/2. That would be my dream right now. They were sweet and the smell of the new leather...They were \$300.

Alicia talked about the people in her life who have been professional dress role models for her, as well as the people whose style of dress she admired. Interestingly, these two were not the same. The following journal excerpt cites her mother's influence as being the greatest in terms of professional dress:

A (journal): In regards to my professional dress, my mother is my role model. I remember watching her get dressed for work when I was younger and thinking to myself that she look very “put-together.” Her professional attire always said, “I’m sharp and ready to do my job.” The qualities that I admire most in my mother are her kindness, considerateness, and a giving heart.

During the interview, Alicia shed more light on how her mother influenced her and her dress choices. She elaborated on what being “put together” meant in her own mind.

Alicia recognizes that she is becoming more like her mother: the picture of a professional from her childhood.

A: She would take me to school on her way to work. I had this vision of a well-dressed, professional woman going to the workplace. And this is what you’re supposed to look like: slacks, blazer, heels, nice coat, all put together. She didn’t instill that in me, but that stuck with me. Even some days I go to work, and I’ll think, “Oh my goodness! I look like my mom.”

In discussing the people whose style she admires, Alicia named a few colleagues at her job at TJX with whom she regularly interacts, as well as a few popular celebrities.

Both the colleagues and the celebrities embody the qualities that she sees as priorities for her own dress.

A: At work, we have five buyers in my department, two of them are my age. And the two of them that are my age dress so cute. With their leggings, heels and Chanel bags. It’s trendy and it’s cute. I don’t feel it’s right now. But maybe when I get there (as a buyer), I would like to follow that. Outside of work, there are celebrities that dress well. Beyonce always looks fabulous. Gwen Stefani, she has her own style. It’s ever changing, but it’s always cute. If it’s cute for you, then do it. Mary J. Blige. I think as she has aged and she has come into her womanhood, her dress has done the same. It’s not trashy. It’s very sophisticated. It’s trendy. Just cute.

Alicia readily acknowledges that she has changed since being a student.

Interestingly, Alicia does consider herself a professional, but right now feels that she is a professional more because of what she *does* than who she is.

A: I think that I am a professional, because how else would I label myself? I'm not a student. I'm not a mom. I go to work. I think there are different levels. There's the first job, first career job. I've learned so much: how to interact with others, how to put my pride aside and ask a question. And now I see that experience is so, so, so very important. I think there are levels of professionalism over the years. It builds.

Her self-concept has changed because of the daily activities that she now completes. She works at TJX, rather than going to class at UNCG. Yet, her lack of experience and time spent in her professional role positions her as still in the process of role transition and thus she has yet to fully transform.

Alicia's takes into account many priorities when dressing for work. However, she keeps the big picture in mind, and believes strongly that how she dresses will be read by others who are in a position to help her achieve the ultimate transformation.

A: I think about what I'm going to wear more than I should. I think it is really based on who I know I'm going to have contact with. I also feel that I don't (have) a statement to make. But I want them to see that she's on top of it. She's dressing for the title. Or dressing for what she wants to be. I'm Alicia. I'm working towards this, and that's how I want to be perceived.

Two interrelated ideas propel Alicia's decisions about what to wear: what she will be doing and who she will interact with. In other words, *what* she will be doing coincides with *who* will be present as she is completing these activities. Alicia believes that dress changes, such as wearing slacks instead of jeans, embody the role transition she is

experiencing. Therefore, she hopes that when supervisors see her, they will see what she hopes to express and embody: A professional. She wants to be perceived as a professional that is ready for the title of “Buyer.” Indeed, the attention that Alicia pays to what her dress communicates reflects her commitment to the transformation of self that is currently taking place.

Sara Hurley

Sara Hurley was born in Middletown, New Jersey in 1983 and lived there until she moved to Greensboro, NC in 1989. Sara attended primary and secondary school in Greensboro and then went on to college at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). She is the second born in her family and has an older sister who also attended UNCG. Sara’s parents also live and work in the Greensboro, NC area. Sara graduated from UNCG in 2007, receiving her bachelor’s degree in Consumer, Apparel and Retail Studies with a minor in Business Administration. Until her final semester in college, Sara worked at a local restaurant in order to help with the financial expenses of attending college. While working at this job, Sara met her boyfriend. Just before Sara graduated, the two decided to continue living in Greensboro and buy a home together.

In tandem with her education, Sara’s career aspirations really stem from her love of the courses in her major.

Sara: When I first started at UNCG, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I just decided to stay with my major and I thought there was a good chance that I would not do anything with it. Eventually,

I fell in love with my major and thought that I may be a buyer or a technical designer, but never a merchandiser. Being a merchandiser is now Sara's role, as she accepted an internship at a jeans company in Greensboro, and has been working there for seven months. She believes that she secured the position because of her knowledge of the software program, Illustrator.

S: I feel lucky to have the merchandising position because they wanted a design person for it. They only called me because I put some Illustrator on my resume. Honestly, I haven't ever used it. It's funny they wanted it.

When asked about her job description and major responsibilities, she describes her work as that of an entry level position. These responsibilities include cutting swatches of fabric, inspecting samples, filing colors, and working in the lab to analyze various aspects of colors and dyes. While Sara likes her job, she was surprised by some aspects when she first began the internship.

S: In school, I always pictured a visual merchandiser as a visual in-store person. I never knew that they could be involved with design, communicating with sourcers, and selling to accounts.

Given that the jeans company is one of the world's largest apparel companies, Sara sees many opportunities for advancement and professional movement. She hopes to do just that, instead of remaining in the merchandising department for the long-term. She likes the thought having a variety of options.

S: They have so many different departments: marketing, merchandising, consumer studies, and technical, like flat pattern. I like that.

Sara's short-term career goals include being hired as a full-time employee at the end of her internship. She would also like to stay with the company for the long-term, if possible. The many different areas within the company have exposed her to career options that she did not consider while in college.

S: Once you've been a position for six months, you can apply to anything else. If you're not happy, they encourage you to go try something else. Working at VF, I've gotten into color theory. Consumer research also sounds like a fun area. I would like to stay at VF doing that (consumer research). I know that a lot of people do change jobs and I'm constantly looking, but I love it there.

When she began her internship, Sara expected that she would be required to follow some sort of dress code. To her surprise, she learned that the company's dress code is determined by each individual department. Her department is a decidedly casual one, with no specific dress code outlined. Oftentimes, jeans and t-shirts are worn by even the high ranking employees in her department.

S: From working in a restaurant, I expected it (a dress code). At the restaurant (where she has worked through college), we have to wear collared shirts. I was already freaking out the first day. Am I wearing what I'm supposed to wear? It was up to the department. It makes it hard to know what to wear.

Sara herself believes that nice slacks and collared shirts are the proper choices for work attire. She describes specific dress that she considers inappropriate as:

S: Definitely flip-flops. Kind of like, t-shirts, jeans. Jeans I try to

stay away from, as much as I can. I only wear them once a week. I think the way people wear their hair: have it groomed and down. I see some of the other girls wear things that are too low cut. I try to look feminine, but I don't try to flaunt it. I don't want to make anyone feel uncomfortable or like they can't look at me. Too short skirts...I just try not to push the limits. I mean honestly, I'm not the one to take up the trends when they first come up. I'm not the girl who's ever going to wear leggings. I see leggings at work. I've heard that one of the managers came up to someone (who was wearing leggings) and told her she was going to have to go home and change. You have to take a step back and ask if it's appropriate for work.

As Sara becomes more ensconced in her professional career, she has seen a marked difference in her dress. She describes her college dress as casual, mostly comprised of jeans and comfortable clothes. The need to make the proper impression was not as great as it is now. Now that she is working full time, her priorities have changed, and her daily activities often dictate her dress choices.

S: Honestly, I hardly ever wear high heels because I have to move around so much. It seems impractical. I wear something that I can move around in. Maybe something not too nice. I know I will get it snagged opening a box.

Being physically comfortable is one idea that she often takes into account when deciding what to wear. An excerpt from her journal describes the activities that she plans to engage in that day and how she dresses to accommodate them.

S (journal): Today I went for a "chic" look with a pair of dark jeans, a black $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeve top, and leopard flats. It was a simple outfit, but looked effortless and was very comfy. I knew that I was going to be moving a lot of boxes at work today, so I wanted to wear something I

could move in. I love my pop of leopard in the shoes and I noticed a few people checking them out. Sometimes, I feel a little underdressed in the jeans, but I had a nice balance today. Again, so many people wear jeans, but I am trying to give a more professional appearance since I am newer.

This idea of a professional appearance along with the importance of feeling comfortable surfaced several times in her journal, including an example of how she felt out of place when dressed differently. Although this experience did not occur at work, the idea of appropriate dress and its effect on her comfort level comes through.

S (journal): One time I felt inappropriate with my dress was during an “upscale” bridal shower luncheon. It was in the middle of the summer on a scorching hot day, so I wore a halter top dress with some sandals. I did not take into account that the event was held in a prominent country club and perhaps I was not “conservative” enough. Everyone was dressed in clothes that would have made you think it was fall or winter! I was initially a little bit uncomfortable, but I just brushed it off so I didn’t look it (uncomfortable). I definitely got the “look” from a few of the girls, but a few others said that they loved my dress and wished that they had worn something like that. Whether they were just saying that to make me feel better or not, I just continued with my time there.

When we discussed this experience during the interview, she talked about how she felt when this happened. She felt that she “misread” the situation because of the upscale setting of the country club and the bride’s family whom she described as “very ritzy people.”

S: I felt overdressed. It makes you feel like you don’t want to draw any more attention to yourself. You just want to hide.

There have also been times when she felt that she was dressed inappropriately for work. Feelings of discomfort about drawing unnecessary attention to herself surfaced again, yet she could not recall anyone making negative comments on what she was wearing.

S: I definitely have felt uncomfortable. I think it's, like, I may have thrown on jeans and a t-shirt. I have nothing to wear and I know that no one (at work) would think bad. But for me, I'm trying to meet that standard. And I feel like that's just affected my performance.

As Sara is becoming an apparel industry professional, she has purposefully selected a wardrobe that she feels meets the expectations of her workplace. She hopes that these selections will convey to others that she is a contributing member of the team and a blossoming professional.

S: Black pants, gray pants and lots of khaki pants. Lots of collared shirts. I'm wearing flats most of the time, little ballet flats. I want them (her co-workers) to recognize me and say that I would fit in with them. It's kind of strange. I feel like everyone else is dressing down. So I don't want to go to out there and look too nice almost. It's a fine line. Because I'm trying to fit in with what they look like. I want to look professional, but I don't want to look like I'm trying too hard. You know, I just want to appear like it comes naturally.

Sara is negotiating her own concept of professional dress with the expectations of her workplace. While she wants to be dressed appropriately, Sara also wants to be seen as a member of her department. On the one hand, if she appears to be dressing up too much, she will not fit in with her co-workers and stand out. On the other, she still wants to be noticed and eventually hired as a permanent employee. Yet, fitting in has involved more

than just how to dress. Sara, as a new employee, is still learning to adjust to the work environment. Being accepted by her co-workers is an important part of this. She recounts a time when a social occasion helped her to feel more like she was part of the department.

S: I feel a little bit intimidated. I'm the new girl too. Half the people took me in right away. It wasn't until we had a bowling party, and the people that weren't warm were then (after the party). It's taken five months.

Sara believes that her clothes are very important to developing her professional (versus student) self. For her, being constantly aware of the impact that her dress has on others is critical. In fact, she sees her dress as an important measure of her place in the company as well as the effort that she is putting into her job.

S: Aside from the first impression, every time you're working with people, you're making an impression on them. I don't want to start getting sloppy. They're going to remember that. Just because you started off wearing put together outfits, they're going to remember what you're wearing now. They'll have that last impression also. I think it (your clothes) definitely says a lot. And it says that I care also. You know that I want to work there and they can see me working there. I'm trying to get them to look at me and say, "Oh yeah, I can totally see her working here."

While Sara acknowledges that the first impression that she made at her internship was important, she believes that the ongoing impression that she makes each day is how she will be remembered. Sara refers to the last impression as the one that will speak about her longevity and commitment to the company. Since her dress remains present throughout each interaction with her co-workers, she chooses to wear items of dress that

will draw attention to her and communicate her value as an employee. Sara feels she has made a positive impression on others at work; other employees have said positive things to her about what she wears. However, she did not feel like the individual items were remarkable and could not recall a specific experience where this had happened.

S: Yeah, people definitely have. But they were random things that I wouldn't have thought about.

On one particular day, Sara wanted to add some trendy pieces, in an effort to try to move away from the neutral colors of black, gray and khaki that she generally wears. The change was, she writes, greeted positively by co-workers and she was complimented for her attempt.

S (journal): Today I wore this wonderful bright green cardigan over a white shirt with khaki pants. As soon as I got to work, the compliments started. Everyone loved the green with my complexion. This outfit was still comfortable to work in and was a nice change from my usual "neutral" colors. I have been trying to incorporate more bright colors into my wardrobe to "spice it up" a little and maybe gradually add some trend to my professional outfits. I think that if I do this gradually I will be more comfortable with the changes. I really love dressing up more and am looking forward to the future.

In her journal, she writes about another day when she was trying to work with older pieces. Since she had lost weight recently, she felt that her pants did not fit properly, which affected her confidence.

S (journal): I am back at work. I wore light gray pants with a black tank top, a dark gray "swingy" top and black flats. I felt good wearing this outfit because I felt professional yet a little trendy. The other girls

in the office will often throw on some trendy pieces while still looking appropriate for the office. One issue I have had is that I have lost some weight recently and my pants are much looser. Usually not a bad thing, but I have not had time or money to purchase new clothes yet and sometimes I think my pants look a little too baggy on me. I did feel a little bit awkward today wearing these pants. On the other hand, I had a lot of compliments on my “swingy” top that is cut to be on the loose end.

In contrast, Sara recounts an experience in her journal where she felt that she was not put together. Even though no one commented on her clothes, this experience clearly affected her confidence and made her feel uncomfortable.

S: At work today, I wore “brownish” khaki pants with a lime green sweater and brown flats with some silver detail. I really loved finding this sweater because the color seems so unexpected for this season. I felt very polished in this outfit, but there was hardly anyone in the office to see! It may be weird, but I always want to look good when I know that there will be people around to notice. Later in the day, I noticed that the hem fell out of a pant leg and it had been dragging. I immediately felt self-conscious about it and had to pin it until I could sew it at home. This kind of took away from the outfit in my mind because I couldn’t stop thinking if someone would notice I pinned it. I felt that it may have looked sloppy because of this.

On graduation day, Sara remembered feeling confident and comfortable with what she was wearing. In part due to her dress, she felt that graduation marked a major milestone in her life and was a significant, meaningful experience. She described the dress choices made this day in her journal.

S (journal): Today was graduation day. I wanted to wear something cute and trendy, but I decided to go with something that would not make me trip across the stage. I wore a black shirt dress with black tights and black flats with some silver hardware on them. Even though no one could see what you were wearing, it was all about the shoes for most girls there.

At first, I had almost wished that I wore heels, but I am glad I played it safe. Later on that day, we just hung out around the house until my graduation party later that night. It was at my parent's house and I wanted to dress for the occasion. I wore a brown beaded dress with brown tights and my brown boots. I felt wonderful in this dress and like a million bucks. I love wearing dresses! I knew that family was coming that I had not seen in a very long time and I would have those pictures to look back on for years. I felt beautiful and hip. I think it was meaningful because it was a very important day for me and it marked a milestone in my life. The "outfit" I was wearing helped in the way I was feeling and was very meaningful. I recently wore the dress again, it reminded me of that day that was so important to me.

Interestingly, the clothes that she chose to wear related both to the activities that she would do and the impression that she could make on others. She wanted to provide a lasting impression for herself and her family indicating how she had achieved the milestone of college graduation. The dress she chose helped to communicate how she felt on the inside and serves as a lasting reminder of the meaning of her accomplishment.

Shoes are one item that consistently surfaced in Sara's journal. She has often been complimented on her shoes, which makes her feel more comfortable in them. Although she often wears flats, there are occasions where Sara chooses to wear heels. She described a day when she wore shoes with heels. She mentions that while she likes the pair of linen pants that she paired with these shoes, they tend to wrinkle and this made her feel self-conscious.

S (journal): I am back at work for the morning. I am wearing my khaki linen pants with a brown and white shirt and brown "croc" heels. If I do wear heels at work, I make sure they are low, due to all the walking and moving around I do. I love these pants because they are extremely comfortable and loose, but they tend to wrinkle easily which can make me feel funny. It always wrinkles in the seat and thigh areas, and it can make me feel a little self-conscious, thinking that people in the office

may notice. I do love wearing those particular heels because I have gotten many compliments on them. The shirt has a high neck and makes me feel more professional and put together.

In this example from Sara's journal, she discusses both the importance of *what* she wears and *how* her clothes look. When her pants become wrinkled, she feels uncomfortable because of the impression that Sara feels she is making on others. As part of the lasting impression that she considers to be of importance, wrinkled clothes do not give the perception of her as a professional that she is hoping for.

Overall, workday activities and impressions of co-workers are Sara's primary consideration when dressing for work. As she further explains,

S: When dressing for work, I always think about what I'll be doing that day. I don't always know, but much of my week is planned out so I will know if I'll be in meetings, putting away samples, or sitting for most of the day. On Mondays, we have meetings with some executives, so I always try to look polished on a Monday. Otherwise, I want to wear clothes that are tailored and a cute pair of shoes always helps!

The standing Monday staff meeting with her manager and the rest of the departmental team is a day when she puts forth more effort to wear professional dress.

S: Every Monday, we have a staff meeting. That's when my manager is there. He's always with us, but definitely on Mondays, I try to look a little bit better. Right now, Monday is my best day for clothing. I want everyday to be that.

As she describes in her journal, Mondays are a time for dressing the part of who she wants to be. Sara hopes that putting forth the additional effort to look nice on Mondays,

when important people in the company are present, will communicate her desire to be a professional and a full-time employee.

S (journal): Today was Monday, which means working during the day. I chose to wear my dark jeans with a kimono-sleeved black top that ties in the back. I paired this with gray flats and a pretty necklace. I always try to “dress up” or look put together a little more on Mondays because (the department) has a weekly meeting on this day. Our whole team will be at these meetings including our GM, Joe, that oversees everything. I try not to wear jeans that often, although it is allowed in the office. Basically, I want to look as good or better than the other people in the office so I will look like a good fit for the company.

Sara believes that her style is changing now that she is just working and no longer a student. Consequently, she believes that she portrays a different image, one that is more in line with that of a professional.

S: I have better taste now. Just from looking at people at work and see this new wardrobe that I am acquiring and want to acquire. I am wanting better things, better fabrics. Nicer things in general. My standards are changing. In the past I would want to take \$100 and get as much as I could. Now, I'd rather have something that looks great on me, that fits me. That's quality, that's tailored. That will last a little bit longer. And honestly, you can tell if something's quality. So I mean if somebody sees you wearing one quality shirt rather than one that is not well constructed, it's gonna reflect on you. If I feel like I look good, then I'm sure my whole personality changes. I project more self-confidence. I'm more willing to give my ideas (at work), and put myself out there.

Sara described an instance where she felt that her dress conveyed to her supervisors that she was a professional, and so she was noticed in a positive way.

S (journal): I knew that we would have some “higher-ups” around the office today, so I wanted to look a little more polished. I wore black

pants with black heels and a purple turtleneck. The look was almost conservative with the fun pop of color. I felt great wearing this and I definitely got noticed (in a good way) with positive comments. I did actually meet a few of these people and I know that I made a good impression. When I feel confident with what I'm wearing it makes a difference in my day. I carry myself with confidence and am not constantly fidgeting with my clothes.

The acknowledgement and compliments from others affected Sara's perception of herself. She felt that the impression she made was positive, and in fact, altered her behavior. Because she felt confident about herself, she was not "constantly fidgeting," or worried about her clothing, which is important to her to maintain a "professional" focus.

Sara has begun taking such style changes into account when shopping for clothing. In her journal, she talks about how her new role is reflected in her shopping behavior.

S (journal): When shopping for work clothes, I usually veer towards collared shirts that have a feminine flair. For me, you really can't go wrong with the collared look, because it always looks professional. I can never have enough tailored pants-because I can dress them up or down. Other blouses and tops, I pay attention to necklines to make sure nothing is too revealing. My shoes should not be too tall because some days I must be on my feet for a long time. I love The Limited because most of their clothes are geared for the working woman. I also love Banana (Republic), but right now, I can only afford the clearance! These days I find myself only shopping for work clothes, but then end up picking up a few things for weekend wear. I do this about twice a month, but I primarily shop for work wear.

Additionally, she mentions some brands that personify the image and identity that she wants to portray. The Limited carries the dress pants and collared shirts that Sara believes embodies a professional image. Likewise, Banana Republic has similar items at

a higher price point. Being able to afford the items from this store, for her, signals a level of financial success and professional independence.

During the times when Sara is not working, such as on weekends or holidays, she chooses clothes that are quite different from those that she wears to work. However, her activities along with the setting where the activities occur often still dictate the clothing choices that she makes.

S (journal): My weekend dress is much more relaxed and comfy than my work wear. I love to wear jeans with a comfy sweater and a cute pair of flats. At work, I wear a lot of low heels with tailored pants and structured shirts. I love to look a little more trendy on the weekends and definitely take more chances as well. I think when I'm in my work clothes that I do feel differently—the clothes portray me as a professional and I don't feel the need to fit an image on the weekends—in my own time.

She feels that portraying a certain image and communicating her role in various settings requires her to dress differently, and chooses clothing which will help to make her feel comfortable in each instance.

In another particular instance, Sara was preparing to welcome family from New Jersey for her graduation. In the following excerpt, she expands on the importance of the setting, but also on the importance of the impression that she is making on the family that she has not seen in quite a while.

S (journal): Some of my family is in town from New Jersey and we are gathering for my graduation. I went with my parents to pick them up from the airport and wanted to look nice since I had not seen them in almost two years. I wore a pair of dark jeans with a brown beaded cardigan, layered over a bronze tank with brown heels. Again, I always try to portray a certain image when I know I'll be places like shopping,

out to dinner or an airport-especially when I haven't seen my family in a while. I felt confident all day in this outfit. I felt very polished and chic. I like layering things a lot to add some depth and interest.

On another day, she describes how she dressed to go shopping. Because she feels that her age is a factor in the way that she is treated by salespeople, her goal in dressing for this shopping excursion was to be taken seriously, as a professional, even though she was not at work.

S (journal): I am off from VF. I decided to do a little Christmas shopping, particularly in upscale shopping centers, I try to put on my best. I feel like I will get better service or portray a certain image by dressing in a more professional manner. Today I wore black pants with a gray cowl neck sweater and black pointed heels. When I go shopping, I see many other women in sweats, but I feel that because I look young, people will not take me as seriously as these women. I also noticed that I do feel better about myself when I'm confident about what I'm wearing and it is probably projected in the way I carry myself.

Because Sara feels it is important to be confident enough not worry about her clothes, she purchased some items when she began her internship, buying some staple pieces such as collared shirts. At this time, however, she does not feel that she has all of the items needed to embody her role as a professional.

S: I feel like my wardrobe is not at all where I want it to be right now. I'm still working with some old pieces and trying to spruce them up. It's kind of a cycle. I need to work to get the money to do it. You know, I think I need to revamp my whole wardrobe and just get rid of things that don't look absolutely fabulous on me. If they're not something that I just absolutely love, then I don't want it.

So, in order feel like she is a professional, Sara has made plans to shop for new items that will be appropriate for work.

S: I plan to use my graduation money to buy clothes. I want to totally redo my wardrobe. If for nothing else, then I want something crisp and new. I also want to buy a lot of shoes. I think the shoes say a lot about everything and you can really make a statement. They say a lot about you. In the future, I envision myself in expensive shoes and designer pieces. I would have the money to buy these pieces that make me feel like “I made it.”

Sara’s focus has clearly shifted from the jeans and t-shirts associated with being a student to looking for more formal pieces for her professional wardrobe. Instead of just buying clothes, she now plans to make an investment in better quality pieces. In the future, acquiring such items will signify her success.

Sara considers both the impression that she makes on others and the impressions that others make on her when making her clothing choices. In both the journal and interview, she discussed role models and people whose style she admires. One person who has provided inspiration for Sara is Ashley Olsen, a popular young actress. While the actress tends to dress much differently than Sara, she admires the actress and believes she embodies something that Sara does not.

S (journal): Ashley Olsen has been an inspiration to me with regards to dress. She always looks so chic and put together with a mix of classic and edgy. She can change up her look every day, but she also makes it look effortless. She seems like a very strong woman who is aware of what she wants and is not afraid to take chances. She is my #1 girl to look to. Because I don’t take too many chances in my own dress, I admire that she can, and always look so put together.

Although Ashley Olsen's style may not necessarily influence Sara's professional dress, there are others from whom she gets inspiration. Fellow students in the Consumer, Apparel and Retail Studies department at UNCG, and one friend in particular whom she has known for some time, are among the inspirations that Sara recognizes.

S: I would say some girls at school (are her greatest influences for professional dress). There's been a couple of people in my department that look like they work. But I admire my friend Megan. She just seems to know what to put together. She's really good with accessories. She could look in my closet and put together ten outfits that I never knew existed. I guess I just like the way she can put things together. I think she just may have a knack for that.

While these individuals have styles that she looks up to, Sara has her own perspective on dressing for success. As mentioned earlier, Sara feels there is one type of dress that really signals success: shoes. Given that wearing comfortable shoes is a requirement for her work related activities, Sara emphasized the importance of wearing proper shoes throughout her journal and interview. However, being able to purchase designer shoes is a goal that she clearly strives for, once she has progressed in her career.

S: I would love to own designer shoes... like Manolo's. My mom always said that "It's all about the shoes." You can have a great pair of shoes that spruces up the whole outfit or use them to make a statement. I feel like I would feel like "I made it" if I owned some designer shoes. This is something I only decided on after starting my job. Eventually I will become more serious with this desire, but it will be expensive! It's one of those things that even if others do not notice my shoes, I will be aware and know the importance this has to me.

Sara's perspective on her role transition highlights the ways that her professional identity is continuing to develop. She describes how dressing for work affects her sense of self.

S: I have become a lot more aware of what I wear since I graduated. Before, I would throw on anything because my "role" was a student. To me, it didn't matter what I had on because it was "understood" by my peers and teachers that I was living the "college life." This usually meant just throwing on something comfy—jeans and a t-shirt kind of thing. Now I know that my clothing represents me to my employers and future employers and connections I may meet along the way. I don't think that I knew I was ready for this change, but I think I was. Graduating was an important milestone for me and changing my dress allowed me to physically see this change. The unexpected change has been how my new wardrobe has made me feel. At first, I almost felt like that little girl playing dress up—I think I had gone from wearing the "college clothes" to this grown-up version of myself. The challenge has been not having a huge work wardrobe starting off. I had only a few pieces to work with and have had to add pieces gradually. I wanted to start with this wonderful work wardrobe, but had to still use some mix and match pieces from my old "style." So, not having all of those clothes I wanted was a big confidence issue for me. As I gain more work clothes, I feel my confidence grow.

Sara has become increasingly aware of the impact of her choices on her self-concept in the role of professional. To some extent, this awareness has caused her turmoil: she wants to buy new clothes, but is constrained by her finances. Therefore, she has had to think of her clothes from college in new terms and new combinations that say that she is a professional. Now that she has graduated, she acknowledges that a developing confidence has resulted from wearing the proper items that she sees as "grown-up." In her journal, she describes feeling anxious about moving into this new role and how she has coped with the transition through dress.

S (journal): When I first started my job, I was dressing in a professional way that did make me feel like I was “fooling someone.” I felt like I was throwing myself in there and hoping I fit in. I remember feeling good in my new role, but also feeling a little awkward. I was starting a new path so the whole process was a little awkward. I think I fit in with my colleagues—I watched what everyone was wearing and made sure that I was always on their level or above.

On one particular day, Sara describes the clothes that she wore for a final exam in contrast to how she is experiencing the current transition to professional.

S (journal): Basically I just wanted to wear something that was comfortable and warm. I had gray cotton pants, black ballet flats, and a UNCG sweatshirt. I never really cared about my appearance at school, even though many other girls in my major did. In school, everyone is around the same age and I think it is definitely acceptable for students to be “dressed down” in comfy clothes. I am now trying to find the next stage of dress for me in this new professional world. I want to have clothes that say something about me in the workplace while still expressing my style. I used to think that you would have to give up your personal style when you landed a “real” job. Now I am searching for that balance.

Sara acknowledges that the transition happens in stages and that these stages are reflected in the consequent dress choices that she makes. When she was in college, she did not care about what she wore to class, as evidenced by the above excerpt. In contrast, now Sara feels that at this point in her life there is more at stake with regards to her professional image and her dress choices. She wants to fit in with her colleagues at work, just as she fit in and wore “acceptable” dress for her role as a student.

Sara readily acknowledges that she is still transitioning to the role of professional, developing her identity in the workplace as well as in social settings, and creating a new self as a result. As Sara continues to work full-time, she is looking forward to the variety

of changes that she will face in her career. While her future plans are not necessarily specific as to a particular job title, she does know that she wants to continue working in the apparel industry. She is also considering going to graduate school in order to work toward her goal of being in upper management someday.

S: I see myself in a “high” position working for an apparel company. I am considering going back to school for my MBA, so I definitely see myself in a powerful job. In turn, I would be making money.

For her, dress is one aspect that she sees as linked to these changes and is aware of the role that dress plays in her life. While keeping the dress journal, she felt she had the opportunity to reflect on and thus become more cognizant of her feelings and the dress choices that she makes. When asked about her experience with keeping the journal, she responded that the experience was positive.

S: It’s been kind of neat because maybe before I wouldn’t have really thought about making these choices. It took me writing about it to realize why I do it (wear certain items). I mean, yeah, definitely the choices I make. You learn a little bit about yourself. I feel like I’ve been incorporating things more. I’ve been picking out my clothes the night before. I can feel myself thinking about it more: Why am I making these choices? Maybe that’s from writing about it the night before and the next morning. I can feel myself writing the narrative when I get dressed.

Similarly, Sara has become aware of where she is professionally and recognizes that she is transitioning. When asked about her movement from student to professional and how she feels that she is managing the transition, she responded that,

S: I’m still a work in progress. I feel like I’m ready. I’m in the right frame of mind.

When asked what would complete the transition for her, she emphasized the necessity of having proper clothes.

S: I feel like dress has a lot to do with it. Just putting on those clothes, it makes me feel good. It makes you look within yourself. Now I'm just determined to go out and get the wardrobe.

Clearly, Sara recognizes the place of dress within her own personal role transition and the importance of wearing more professional items of dress to communicate this transition to herself and others. Her professional dress choices have begun to change her self-concept in a positive way. In order to fully articulate this transforming self, she plans to continue to purchase clothes that are consistent with her new role as a professional.

Amy Harris

Amy Harris was born in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1982, where she attended elementary and high school. She then attended college in both Providence, Rhode Island and Miami, Florida. After she received her Bachelor's degree, she returned to Wilmington in order to be near her family and live with her fiancé, Peter. The first of four girls, Amy's sisters, Jamie, Marlee, Kristen and her parents, Jeanne and Mark, all currently live in the Wilmington area as well.

Amy began working in apparel retailing when she was in high school. She continued working with apparel at a variety of retailers throughout high school and college. Currently, she is an Assistant Manager at the Gap, where she began working in 2003. While still in college, in 2005 she was promoted from Sales Associate to Assistant

Manager. After she graduated in 2006, she transferred from the Gap in Miami, Florida to the Wilmington, North Carolina store where she currently works.

As an assistant manager, some of Amy's main responsibilities are human resource-related, such as the hiring process and orientation of prospective and new employees. For her, working with people is the most rewarding part of the job.

Conversely, the aspect that Amy likes the least is the frequently changing schedule.

Amy: I do scheduling, hiring, payroll, budgeting. That's part of what I do, the hiring, the orientation. I love finding people who are passionate about what I am. Whenever we do hire, we hire quality people. I do try to find someone who is passionate and will stick with it. I don't like the inconsistency of schedule. It's not a Monday through Friday, 8:00 to 5:00 job. You know, you never have consistent days off.

As for what drew her to retailing, she credits her involvement with Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) in high school as well as her work experience during that same time. This early start helped her to determine the areas of study that would be of interest to her in the future.

A: It would be when I was in high school, we actually had courses in small business management, entrepreneurship and hotel management. I had a teacher and he was very passionate about it and he was very involved with DECA. Well we're a small school, so you know, I ran for office as Vice President of our DECA chapter. It was really cool because we got to do a competition in Greensboro. We didn't win anything, but it was okay because we were all new at it. So that's probably where my passion for management came from. Then I started retail when I was sixteen. And I started at Belk and I was there for six or seven years. I like it, retail kind of became it (what she liked). It was a good fit because I was good at it. I was, you know, I was never a big personality in high school. I was always the quiet one. But when it came to work, I could talk to anyone. I worked in lingerie at Belk, so you have to be able to get personal.

Interestingly, Amy even enjoys the difficult customers and considers dealing with them to be a valuable part of her work experience as a professional challenge.

A: There's the challenging customers. You know, I guess, yeah, that would make it not so fun to work. Usually, in the end, it's a learning experience. And sometimes you can turn the challenging customer into the best customer. It's interesting to kind of find out. You have to speak differently to different people. So it's interesting, like using body language. You could be really nice to someone and they'd be offended. Or I could be more bold and out there and they'll (the customer) get the point. It's like psychology.

Like many retailers, the Gap has a dress code. As Amy explains, because the Gap has shifted their target demographic to appeal to an older market, the dress code has become, in her opinion, more sophisticated.

A: You have to wear jeans that either are Gap or you can't tell what they are. You can wear heels. You can't wear open toes. You can wear fashion sneakers, Pumas or Sketchers. You can't wear a basic t-shirt unless it's layered. It can't be graphic, even if it's Gap. It used to be that you could but it's changed. We're trying to be more Banana-esque. We're really trying to identify with that twenty-five to thirty-five market. Our target is right out of college. You're going to a place where you can get the khakis, the wovens. But at the same time, you can get that cute top and jeans for going out on the weekends. You can wear polos, nothing sleeveless. Skirts have to be no more than two inches above the knees. You can wear leggings with a long top, as long as it hits mid thigh, nothing too revealing. No wild make-up or wild jewelry. No shorts, no Bermudas. You can wear capris. It sounds like you can't wear a lot of stuff, but it is also very general. They still want you to be yourself. So it's just a guideline of what you can wear.

Because Amy is an assistant manager, she sees the importance of adhering to the dress code. She believes that she sets an example for the sales associates and also wants to maintain the appropriate image of the Gap for the customers.

A: I always want to maintain the dress code. They're going to follow what you wear. I always think, if an employee wore this, would I tell them they have to go home? That's always in the back of your head. A lot is circumstances, as for how I dress, like, if it's a Monday morning, I'm not a morning person. I wait until the last minute to wake up. My decision is really quick: what's clean? What's there? What's going to match? As opposed to if I go to work at 12:30, I'm up and I have a little time to think about it. I tend to dress a little differently. Not cuter, but a little more stylishly and with a little more flair. It also depends on if I'm doing shipments. I'm going to be more comfortable. I'm going to wear my fashion sneakers and my comfortable jeans, instead of a knit or something. It all has to do with what I'm doing.

Some of the employees at Amy's store have not observed the dress code. She typically deals with such situations in a very direct way:

A: I had a guy who had a name brand sweater and it was like right there (across his chest). And I was like, "I can't have you working here." Like we just changed the dress code in like August. And people who were there before that and used to the dress code. And it was like a fine line of, you know, like when do we say "Stop this?" When do we abide by that? It should have been the first day. And then we have people who don't like to iron. And you have to be, at least, nicely pressed. We have a steamer in the back and we've had a couple of the guys that we've had to tell, "Go steam your shirt." It's like they know, but they're trying to get away with it.

A typical day's work clothes for Amy usually consists of jeans and some type of shirt. Her decisions about what to wear are affected by the people that she comes in contact with, including employees and customers. On days when she is working, she

wants to play the role of a manager, but to dress in keeping with her own style. She acknowledges the example that she is setting for the sales associates.

A: If more people are going to see me, my employees are going to see me, you know, I want to dress the part. I wear my heels. I wear my fashion jeans and fashion trousers or whatever. Not blouses, that's not my personality.

The most important items in Amy's closet are her fashion jeans. She also describes how she dresses differently in the summer. During this time, she wears dresses, as this is a time when she feels better about her body.

A: My jeans, fashion trousers. They're kind of a big thing. They're dressier without being overdressed. They're not black pants. I like nice sweaters and cardigan sets. It's really a go to. I'm all about the skirts in the summer. I'm pretty predictable, polo and jeans, and either a nice woven or knit. I'm always in jeans. In the summer, I love my dresses. I've got tons and tons of dresses for summer. In the summer, and I think it's typically when the female population feels good about themselves. You've got a tan going on and typically going to the gym. That's when I feel best about myself, cute little stuff.

Amy's daily activities help to determine what she will wear to work. For different settings and situations, different dress is required. Just as putting away shipments necessitates more casual dress, important meetings call for clothes that are more formal.

A: If it's a management meeting in store, I'll always try to dress a little nicer because, you know, we're all looking at each other and we're trying to present the store. Even though we are a fun environment, we still have that serious tone to it, and we want to make sure we're dressed up. And then I'll dress a little more sharper and things like that. Now if we're going away, sometimes we have to go out of city or out of state, then

that's when I go to a tee. It's all about first impressions. You know, I really want to stand out. I'm a manager, not just anyone. Usually, I buy something for that. It's nice to show and promote the company, to show that you're trying to help the company. I usually go to Gap. I always get a nice top and some nice pants. I take a little more time with the hair and the make-up and get really girly. So I go above and beyond. That's what I really want to do, you know, when I get more into business. But right now, I'm still casual. I still feel like I'm in college in the way I dress.

H: So are some meetings out of town? Where do you go?

A: Sometimes it's more of a meet and greet. You have to bond and fellowship with your peers that you talk to over the phone. You really interact and when you bond, you work better together. I, you know, we're over here (in Wilmington) and a lot of the stores are in Raleigh or Myrtle Beach. So it's kind of more of a meet and greet, go over business results. We go to Raleigh sometimes. Sometimes we might even go to South Carolina. I heard recently that we might even do it around our area, which would be nice.

Amy sees meeting her colleagues for the first time as an important part of her professional development. Not only are other assistant managers present at these meetings, but store managers and other corporate supervisors. As a conscientious employee who is hoping to further her career, standing out and making the proper first impression is paramount. Yet, for the most part, she also describes how her dress has not changed much from her college days. Therefore, she is still wearing dress that she considers to be casual, yet professional in the sense that Gap requires such styles.

When she describes her decision-making process for work, her priorities are personal in nature. In addition to the activities that she will do each day, she also thinks about weather and time of day:

A: My decision process is based on weather, what's clean, and if it's morning. I don't think about it too much, but if it's a time where I go to work in the afternoon, I put more consideration into how I will look.

In her journal, she wrote about one day where she did shipments. While she is mostly working in the back of the store, she still chooses to wear clothes that are “presentable.”

A (journal): I have to do shipments at work. So I will wear my most comfortable, presentable jeans with a polo and sneakers.

Amy’s clothes may differ somewhat depending on the activities of the day. For example, on Wednesdays, when she makes the store’s schedule, she says, “I sit down for three hours. I usually wear heels.”

A (journal): I worked 9:30 to 6:30. We had a management meeting and I was doing schedules. So I wore my fashion trousers, white-t-shirt, vest, and heels. I wanted to be professional looking.

On another day, Amy wrote about looking like a manager for an orientation with a new employee and the dress choices that she made, accordingly.

A (journal): I’m giving an orientation today. So I want to look like a manager. So I will wear my khakis, navy blue woven, and flats.

In general, Amy does not plan what she is going to wear the next day. While she mentions that she tried to do this in college, it is not something that she continues to do now that she is working.

A: I tried in college. I don’t know. I’m the biggest procrastinator. I tried, like I can’t do the whole picking out thing. Now I do think about it in bed, “Oh I can wear that tomorrow.”

We discussed the similarities and differences between what she wears now and what she wore in college. Amy explained why she feels that her style of dress has not changed all that much. While attending college in Miami, she was required to wear a uniform to class each day. Because she worked at the Gap during most of her college career, she does not see a big difference between work clothes and college clothes.

A: I generally wear the same things (in college) that I do now because our school in Miami, we had uniforms because we were all about professionalism. It (the uniform) was like a white woven and blue slacks and a scarf-like thing. We had to be like very professional at all times. If I wasn't at school doing that, then I was at Gap. Gap is laid back, so it was not very, not overly dressy. But the only thing that might have changed is how I dress. I might not be as slack. Now I have a bit of authority. I might dress in some trousers once in a while, a woven or a nice sweater.

Amy does see an evolution in terms of her dress now as compared to high school. She talked about an embarrassing outfit she wore in high school and how that made her look. She believes that she has come to understand her body better and now dresses in a more body conscious and trendy way.

A: In high school, I wish I knew what I knew now. You start learning more about products and cut and how it's supposed to fit. I look at myself and I was thinking, "did I really wear the high-waisted jeans with the t-shirt?" That made me look flabby although I wasn't. Now I know more about my body and layering. I used to think that it was the silliest thing in the world. Now I think that would be cute under this (when layering different tops).

I asked Amy about the impact her clothes have on customers and what her dress says about her as a professional. As she explains, though her clothes might make the

customer feel comfortable with her, the casual type of dress might also be a detriment to communicating her authoritative role as a manager.

A: I think I'm the most approachable of the managers, more comfortable. However, that could also be a fault too. Sometimes when they (customers) think they're not getting what they want, they'll ask for a manager. And I'll say that "You are speaking to one." But I kind of present that as a positive, you know, to be sure that I'm telling everything in a different manner, an authoritative tone in my voice.

Although casual dress is appropriate, there are types of dress she feels are inappropriate for work at the Gap as well as the workplace in general. The items that she felt were truly inappropriate were items that are too revealing or distracting.

A: I guess anything that makes people notice what you're wearing in a negative way. Like you know, if it's too short, things like that. Maybe even the type of hose that ladies wear. I guess more of the design... fishnets, if they're more like that. Even shoes, like if you have nine inch heels. I know it's a terrible and sexist thing to say, but can you concentrate and do work in nine inch heels? So I think anything like that.

When I asked if there is a difference between appropriate dress for men versus women, Amy said that there is, at least where she works. In other industries, she feels that things might be different, though she was quick to admit that impressions are still important.

H: Do you think there's a double standard for men and women?

A: Yes, um, if a guy comes in wearing, well, let's just say if he's in casual wear, guys who wear their shirts and his boxers hanging out. They bend down and you can see them. If a girl does that and her thong hangs out, she's reprimanded in some way. And they, the guys, laugh it off, "What color are your boxers today?" And then it's almost acceptable for guys. Oh, it's ok. For girls, it's not the same. I don't really know. I don't see there would be too much of a double standard at a higher level.

H: Do you think it's different in retail than, say, banking or some other field?

A: I think there always is. It's what makes the world go around. Until you know someone, you never know what might offend them.

Amy has had experiences at work where others have positively commented on what she is wearing. During our interview, she expanded on a journal entry describing a sweater she wore on a day when she was not feeling particularly good about herself. On that day she made an extra effort to put together an especially professional outfit. This selection of dress items helped her to feel better and highlights how others pay attention to what she wears.

A (journal): I just bought a new pink sweater. So I will wear it along with my fashion trousers and heels. I will be working the night shift, 12:30 to 10:00.

A: Saturday, one of my associates said something. I had had a really bad morning and I had wanted to feel pretty. So I actually had bought a sweater. It was pink, really pale pink. I was like, I'm going to get dressed up and look really pretty. I had bought a necklace at Banana Republic and I'm not a big jewelry person either. I got up, got dressed, got my fashion trousers on, my heels, my sweater, did my hair and did make up. And one of the associates said, "You look really nice today. Not that you don't every day, but you look especially nice today." And I was like, "Thank you." You know, it's nice that they notice. Does that mean that I need to dress up a little bit more? It makes me want to do a little extra everyday to separate myself.

When asked if she felt different when she dressed in a more professional way, she replied that she not only felt different, but was more confident overall.

A: Oh yeah, I walk different. I talk different. I act different.

H: All affected by your clothes?

R: Oh yeah. It's almost like a shield. Nothing can break this. I feel good. I feel confident. I can go up to a difficult customer and say what I need to say without being nervous. Whereas if I was in my jeans and a polo, and I'm going up to that same customer, I might be a little hesitant or drawn back and they kind of sniff that fear out of me. So yeah.

In contrast, Amy also described how she felt when dressed inappropriately for work. In fact, she shared two experiences where she was reprimanded for what she was wearing. The first experience happened at a former job at JC Penney when she worked in the jewelry department. In her journal, she briefly explains this experience. While the clothes she wore were not too revealing, her manager felt that she was underdressed.

A (journal): I had just started a new job with a jewelry department and they never went into specifics about the dress code. So I wore khakis and a pinstripe pink woven. Apparently I was underdressed. I felt mortified because I never get in trouble. Other employees must have thought, "What was she thinking?"

She described this experience in more detail during our interview:

A: I started at JC Penney and I've never quit any job before. I walked out. It was in the jewelry department. They were very greedy. They wouldn't even help me. They were commission. The manager was really nice. She wasn't even the manager for the department. It was my first or second day and I had on a pair of khakis and a button up woven shirt. Apparently for jewelry, it was too underdressed. Like they wanted it to be blazers and nobody ever told me that. I didn't know. The way the manager said it was very uncomfortable and mortifying. Well and there was a lot of people around. And he was like, "That's not appropriate for the work here today." He used the word "appropriate." And his tone and he's a big guy. And he was the big boss of the whole store and I was mortified. And I felt like the girl who gets caught by the principal and gets sent home for wearing something bad. I felt so uncomfortable the whole day and I went home and I was like, "I hate it." I was like, "I wore the wrong

thing.” And my fiancé was like, “You look nice.” And I was like, “Apparently not.” You know, it wasn’t totally inappropriate, but it just wasn’t as overdressed as they wanted it to be. It was a mortifying experience.

The second experience she described happened at her current job at Gap. In this case, she was wearing a skirt that was too short, according to the newly established dress code for store employees.

A: I was wearing this wool skirt from Gap and I was wearing tights and it came up three inches above the knees. This is when the dress code was changing. And I thought leggings and tights would be about the same thing. And I had worn this outfit before and then the head of store was like, “You can’t wear that.” And I was measuring it and I have long legs. And it was like two-and-a-half inches above the knee. I probably should have known better. Leggings are completely different than tights. I know that now. I felt very out of sorts the whole day. Somebody called me out.

Amy generally shops at Gap for both work and casual clothes, mainly because for her it is a place that offers clothing for any occasion. She did not cite other brands that she either admires or purchases. Interestingly, she mentioned that in the future, she might begin to wear clothes from smaller stores or boutiques.

A: I have this philosophy that I wear whatever I like, what’s comfortable. I don’t necessarily go for how much it is or who makes it or whatever it is or what’s in or anything like that. Now as far as in today’s world, wherever I work is where I buy clothes. I rarely shop anywhere else. Gap does everything for me. I can wear these clothes for work and I can wear these clothes out. If I had my dream job and some money and I could spend it where I wanted, I think maybe I’d be a little more boutique-y. They’re a little pricey. They’re nice but sophisticated.

H: But no real designers?

A: No. I mean I like certain things. It all depends on my mood of the

day and what I like.

However, Amy does describe a branded item that she would most like to have now: an expensive pair of jeans. Because she works at the Gap, this item is something that she could wear now, if she could afford them.

A: I guess it would have to be jeans because jeans are such a phenomenon right now. And they can really look good on anybody, as long as you get the right fit. So I would have to say, if I had the money, I would get jeans that were tailor-fit for me. Whether it's True Religion or Seven, or a really good brand, you think those, you think quality. But you know, if they're tailor fit for me, they fit nice, they're not hoochy-mama, if I could spend \$200, it would be on a good pair of jeans.

Amy admires the style of popular culture icon, Lauren Conrad, from MTV's reality show, "The Hills." Lauren is a designer and works for People's Republic in Los Angeles, California. Amy admires her style for a variety of reasons and believes her clothes are wearable by different body types.

A: I think her taste is impeccable. I think it's very professional, yet fashion. Perfect for what she's in, but something I could see myself in. It's perfect for day-to-day. Or even when she's a little bit dressed up. It's sophisticated, yet young. But youthful and professional without showing skin. Like it's always really well put together and the fabric's really nice. I really like her style.

H: Do you think she's trendy?

A: She has her own style. You would say, "That's a Lauren look." Whether it's the leggings or the headbands. Just being a celebrity, I guess you automatically set trends. She's got her own fashion line. I really adore her clothes. I think they're adorable, very girly, very form fitted. They're body conscious. Nothing extremely overboard. There's a nice skirt and a tube top and it's something that you would wear to a Hollywood party or a night party. It has a nice balance of sexy and professional. It's just cute stuff.

While she admires Lauren Conrad's style, Amy believes that popular culture and movies with professional female characters have also influenced her perception of what is proper and appropriate for the workplace. That is, in her opinion, movies and television portray women in suits with briefcases as the stereotypical professional.

A: In the fancy movie world and TV, business ladies are in their suits and briefcases. It kind of exudes business. And I think that it comes from entertainment. A lot of it has to do with the entertainment world and what they personify as business and what you're supposed to look like. It's not bad; it's just the way that it is. I know it sounds silly. But I think so. I guess it's just a funny process of when you get dressed in the mornings: It becomes more of who you are and how you're trying to do things.

In addition to the celebrity and media influence, Amy also considers her fiancé to be an influence on her. According to Amy, Peter has his own style and does not follow trends, which is something she admires.

A: I met him in college and that's when I really paid attention to what I was wearing. And he's very independent and doesn't care what anyone thinks. I met him when he was in a gothic phase and then he transformed into a punk phase. Then he was in a reggae phase and how he's kind of preppy. He doesn't care what people are doing around him. And he's comfortable with what he likes. He never goes with a trend. He's exploring. But he never cares what others think. He's a chef, so he has more leeway. And he's very headstrong. He's very confident in himself.

I asked Amy about her future plans and how she could ultimately get to the point where she shopped at boutiques, higher priced stores, and was able to wear clothes like Lauren Conrad's. She is considering going to graduate school to pursue further education

in business and marketing. Her hope is to start the MBA program at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington (UNCW) within the next two years.

A: I was first interested in doing the whole master's thing, when I'd just left Johnson & Wales. I have to take the GMAT. They (UNCW) said I could wait and get five years work experience. They said I need more experience and that would be better because a lot of people at UNCW are young professionals. I know it's true, but I just wanted to jump right into it. But you know, now I know more things, more experience, you know, so I can talk in the business jargon and talk in it a lot more... So I'm hoping to either apply for the fall or next

fall because I'm paying back student loans. That's the only thing really stopping me is the financial thing.

As for once she is finished with the Master's degree, she hopes to take one of two professional paths. She would like to either work as a consultant or to find a job in marketing.

A: I hoping to either: (a)-work with a consultant firm or a consultant job of some form. If I have to do it independently or you know, through a firm. Or in marketing. I'm very interested in the writing part of it. I really like, again, it's all about the customer. I'm very passionate about retail. And I'm always going into places and I'm like you know if they did this, they could be so much better, whether it's service or the layout or whatever. You know I'm always thinking how do I get into that? You know to really get in, and people would think of me as young. And I'm still kind of like that new girl. I kind of want to, I don't want to get comfortable because I'll always say, "What if?"

Although she has been working in the apparel side of retailing, she has also considered other options, such as food service. Still, as she describes, she feels that her strengths lie in apparel retailing.

A: I'd kind of like to explore other things like in restaurants because I love to eat out. A little branched out, maybe. But if I stay in management, it's probably more than likely that I'll stay with retail. It's not just because I like clothes and I was a "fashionista." I was never into fashion shows or anything like that. It's just because it's what I know and what I'm comfortable with. And I know what looks good on people and I can make them feel good about themselves.

As she moves towards her future career goals, Amy has plans to wear different clothes to communicate her changing roles. For instance, she hopes to be wearing more business attire, such as suits. As she explains, this would be a good fit for her, as her peers have always thought of her as a business person. During high school, she was poked fun at for wearing "put together" outfits, rather than the casual clothing more typical of a high school student.

H: As you become that consultant, what are you going to be wearing?

A: Hopefully, the cute, little, snazzy suits that I always thought I would be wearing.

H: Is that the picture in your mind.

A: Yeah, like a little briefcase, trendy suits, cute heels. You can still wear the nice little open toes and still be nice and trim. I was always made fun of in high school because I was the "business girl." And they're like, "You're going to your little conference meeting, wearing your suit, your little briefcase." So that's always been in my head. Yeah, that's fine. That's me.

Amy's work experience in the apparel industry up to this point has formed her belief that what she wears is important to her career development and to communicating her identity to others. As she explains, dress can be used to express what she, herself, may not be able to articulate.

A: You know, in business, networking is a huge thing. And you

know, it's something that I still struggle with 'cause I'm not the greatest at going up as my personal self. At work, I'm all there. It's so weird, like, how it's almost like a different personality when you're at work and outside of work. And even at school, I was the quiet one. I ended up with a group that was very outspoken. They were always the bright kids and I learned so much. But I kind of wish, at the same time, I wish I was more social with them. Like, teachers are great contacts to make and with networking and everything, and I know *some* of them, and I know that if I talked to them, they would remember me. But, you know, I never had that good connection that I probably should have had. So dressing and being conscious, you go out and you're always presentable. I'm always very conscious of what I put on because I'm just thinking, who would I meet today that might change my life. You never know.

Amy is presently aware that her dress choices have an impact on what those around her think about her. Keeping the journal allowed her to consider the important role that dress played in developing an understanding of herself. When I asked Amy about the experience of keeping the journal, she admitted that she took more time with choosing her outfits for work, given that she knew I would be reading her journal at the end of the fourteen days.

A: It was interesting to see what I wore, and when I woke up determined what I was going to wear.

H: What didn't you like about keeping the journal?

A: I'm not much of a writer, 'cause I'm thinking so fast I forget.

H: Did it change the way you thought about what you wear to work?

A: Yeah, I took a little more time. Someone was going to be knowing what I was going to wear. And it made me more self-conscious, since you're a peer of mine. It's all about impression and I wanted to make sure that I'm not going to be a slacker.

Amy talked about whether she thought she was a professional at this point in her life and career, or if she still felt like a student. Her responses point to a level of

ambiguity in regards to her roles: still somewhat a “student” and somewhat a “professional.” While she has been working for Gap for five years, she feels like there is more that she wants to do and may not stay at Gap throughout her career.

A: I’m in-between. I thought that in five years, I want to be in at least an entry level position. And I feel like I am. I’ve gotten my job and I really love it. And that’s a big thing for me too. I love my job, and the bottom line is, I’m always happy and passionate about it. Yes, I’m a manager. Yes, I’m in charge of things. But there are some days when I’m like, “When am I going to move on?” I know I’m going to move on. I’m not going to stay forever. This is kind of my stepping stone.

Amy is happy with her current job as an assistant manager. She realizes, however, that while she is content, she still has other aspirations and hopes to move on in the future. Her job at the Gap serves as a valuable stepping stone. While she has embarked on the road to becoming a full-fledged professional, she knows that she will continue to change and transition, as will her dress. Just as Amy has goals for her career, she also has goals for the way that she will dress in the future. The tension that she experiences between the positive feelings that she has for her job and her goal to move up fuels her desire to gain more experience and understand what it means to be a professional both now and in the future.

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the first level of interpretation in the form of the five participants’ narratives. Each of the narratives was developed through consideration of the participant’s experiences as expressed in the interviews and journals. In the next chapter, I will present a thematic interpretation of this data, thereby developing the

second level of interpretation. This thematic interpretation elucidates the similarities and differences among the participants' experiences as they move through the transition from student to professional.

CHAPTER V

THEMATIC INTERPRETATION

Each participant in this study has her own unique experiences, whether stemming from her education, workplace, or professional career. Yet some of these experiences are shared, as each is a part of a larger whole. These shared experiences illuminate the dimensions inherent to the transition from the role of student to that of professional. In this chapter, I explore these dimensions through a thematic interpretation of participants' experiences as members of a group, considering the implications of similarities and differences among them for developing an overall understanding of role transition.

Through consideration of the women's narratives, three conceptual areas surface: transition, consumption and transformation. These three areas are used to explore and interpret the collective experience of the participants. *Transition* is defined as a shift in roles, whereby the participant's identity as a student develops into that of a professional. *Consumption* is the acquisition of goods which provide the participant the means to articulate this identity during the transition process. *Transformation* is defined as the final result of role transition as the participant leaves behind the role of student to fully occupy the role of professional.

Each of the three conceptual areas is used to structure themes that surfaced throughout the participant's narratives. These themes serve to connect an individual participant's experiences with those of the group. For example, such connections as

personal backgrounds, thoughts on the importance of appropriate work wear, and consideration of others' response to dress are critical issues the five women share during the process of becoming a professional. The second conceptual area, consumption, includes the participant's priorities for dressing professionally, inspiration for dressing in a particular way, or "style," and changes in purchasing and spending habits. Transformation, the final conceptual area, takes aim at exploring the participant's desires related to the ideal self, interpreting how this self is communicated through dress, and where the participant sees herself in the self-transformation process.

The conceptual areas are inter-related and each is dependent on the other to create a holistic understanding of the experience of becoming a professional. Each of the three areas function within the context of identity and self. Similarly, two main concepts connect the three conceptual areas: being and becoming. Being, within the framework of role transition and transformation of self, refers to the self that the women currently experience. On the other hand, becoming is what propels the role transition process. All are in the process of becoming professionals. Once role transition has occurred, the self can be transformed, and hence returns to being. At that time, the women's identities express their professional role and their new selves reflect a completed transformation. As the interpretation presented here will illustrate, this process follows a similar trajectory for each participant, and all are currently experiencing the process of becoming.

Transition

As revealed in the participant's narratives, there are several factors of experience which link the women together. The five women are all experiencing a transition in their social roles, but this transition is affected by their unique personal backgrounds and future goals. All five women have lived in North Carolina for the majority of their lives, attending primary and secondary schools in the state. All of the participants' parents currently live in North Carolina, and have for many years. The women are also close in age, as all are between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-six.

None of the participants are married or have children, but one is presently engaged. Four of the five participants are in long-term, monogamous relationships, live with their boyfriends and no other roommates. Four of the five participants attended college and graduated from a public university in the state, three with undergraduate degrees and one with a graduate degree. Each woman chose to work in the apparel industry because of personal interest, however, what these interests are differ among the five. Each of the five is pursuing her first full-time career.

Each participant's current position is considered entry level. None have been promoted since beginning full-time work. Each woman's job title and responsibilities differ, as do the size of her company and work environment. As work requires a major time commitment in the participants' lives, all five of the women work full-time schedules, often more than forty hours each week. Therefore, three of the five do not see any changes to their living situation, such as a move or marriage, to be plausible in the

near future. Sara, however, has recently purchased a house with her boyfriend and Jessica is getting married soon.

Two themes, identity change and the importance of appropriateness, are vital to understanding the role of dress in the transition process. Identity change is related to the characteristics and traits of the participants. Dressing appropriately for her particular work setting is an aspect that each hopes is reflected in her changing identity. The reflexive nature of these two themes facilitates the role transition, as becoming a professional is based largely on dressing the part.

Identity Change: Becoming a Professional

All of the women made the choice to work in apparel because of an interest in some aspect of the industry. Now at the beginning stage of their careers, the five women see themselves as transitioning to the role of professional and believe their identities to be changing accordingly. Each woman expressed that her identity is in some way confirmed by her job in apparel. Therefore, the motivation to pursue a career in apparel was an intrinsic one, not necessarily influenced by others, such as parents or friends. For all of the women, education provided a narrowing of potential career choices and a more focused path. Three of the five had experiences in high school that led them to consider working in the apparel industry. College courses further affected this choice for all of the participants, although none share exactly the same major or degree. Regardless of the intended career choice while in college, all of the participants are currently doing something different than what they had originally intended, thereby requiring them to be

flexible in planning their careers. For example, Sara explains that, to her own surprise, she decided to work in merchandising for a large apparel company.

S: I had no idea what I wanted to do. I just decided to stay with my major and I thought there was a good chance that I would not do anything with it. Eventually, I fell in love with my major and thought that I may be a buyer or a technical designer, but never a merchandiser.

Similarly, Marie was not planning to be an Assistant Manager, and thought that she would be doing something else when she graduated from college.

M (journal): When I was in college, I pictured myself in retail (especially Forever 21) as a part-time job, but never as my career. After I graduated, I didn't plan ahead as well as I should have. With graduation approaching, I needed to find a job fast, I never planned to stay this long. But as I got promoted, and then insurance, etc., I kept finding reasons to stay.

Alicia's experience was motivated primarily by her dislike for working in the field of graphic design, the career that she originally thought she would pursue as an undergraduate. Instead, she chose to embark on the path to becoming a buyer because she loved shopping.

A: I did an internship (in graphic design) the summer before my senior year and hated it...which I said, "Hmm...I won't be doing this the rest of my life. What would I like to do?" That's when I started researching the buyer role and got more into it and applied to grad school. I knew I didn't want to design because it's such a hard industry to break into. I love shopping so I wanted to couple the two: shopping and someone else's money.

After deciding to pursue a career in the apparel industry, each of the participants was faced with finding and securing a job. Only one participant, Amy, had any substantial formal experience working in apparel when she graduated from college. But even Amy's experience was only on a part-time basis. All of the participants described how they arrived at their current positions, often following training programs set forth by their companies, including formal programs and/or internships. Amy and Marie both learned more about career opportunities in their companies while being employed part-time. Alicia was selected to participate in the Corporate Merchandise Training program at TJX. Sara and Jessica both began working at the same company during college as interns, the position that they currently hold.

S: I feel lucky to have the merchandising position because they wanted a design person for it. They only called me because I put some Illustrator on my resume. Honestly, I haven't ever used it. It's funny they wanted it.

J: I got the YMA scholarship. They had like a thing you filled out and they would help place you if you wanted an internship... I no sooner got back to my apartment and she called me. That happened in less than a week.

For each of the participants, choice of employer was motivated by convenience and availability. Unpleasant aspects of the job that surfaced were quickly followed by a desire to be promoted. These two issues actually work in tandem, with the unpleasant aspects of the job providing the motivation to seek promotion to another position. As the participants begin to define their professional identities relative to the positions that they hold, the need for promotion and career movement has become more salient.

While all participants mentioned some part of their job that they did not like, the negative aspects were, of course, specific to the individual. For example, Jessica had hoped to shift from intern to full-time employee after graduation. Alicia, whose job responsibilities involve making major shipments from distribution centers to retail stores, says she “isn’t crazy about shipping. [Because] It can be monotonous.” Similarly, Marie and Amy, both retail managers, are often frustrated by customers who get angry and prove to be “challenging.”

Fulfillment is one idea that all of the participants mentioned as a priority for any career that they pursue. That is, it is important that they be satisfied with their job and what it entails. Yet, though she was ready to move on, each also had something positive to say about her current job. As Sara explains, both what she is doing now and what she could be doing in the future are reasons to stay where she is:

S: Once you’ve been a position for six months, you can apply to anything else... Working at my company, I’ve gotten into color theory. Consumer research also sounds like a fun area. I would like to stay at the jeans company doing that (consumer research)... I love it there.

Amy enjoys her responsibilities related to human resources because, for her, working with people is a favorite part of her job. She states, “I love finding people who are passionate about what I am [passionate about].” Jessica enjoys the people that she works with in the Merchandising Department. In contrast, Alicia’s motivation for staying at TJX has much to do with the fact that she hopes to become a buyer. For her, the

experience that she is gaining is invaluable. She says, “I think the potential for growth [is what I like most]. Being that it can actually happen, becoming a buyer.”

For each of the participants, present identity is tied closely to professional role. Because all five have spent the majority of their post-graduation time at their jobs, the women now consider their careers as the defining aspect of who they are becoming. Similarly, each woman is motivated by the potential for fully being a professional in the future. All five see the transition from student to professional as occurring in stages. Therefore, as the women are becoming professionals, they are defining their identities relative to the workplace roles that they currently hold and that they hope to hold in the future.

Dressing the Part

Each of the women discussed her thoughts on dress that was most appropriate for work. Emphasizing the importance of dress within the present role transition process, all of the women agreed that there were items that were not appropriate. Flip-flops, tube-tops, short skirts, tight fitting clothes, and extremely high heels were some of the items mentioned as inappropriate to wear to work.

While all of the participants said that they normally stay away from this type of dress, four of the five described instances where they were dressed inappropriately. Three of the four women had this experience while at work. In each woman’s experience, she was not making a conscious effort to stand out, be noticed, or break the established rules. For instance, Alicia talked about a time when she wore a dress that felt too short to her, which made her feel uncomfortable throughout the day.

A: I have this khaki dress, like $\frac{3}{4}$ length and it has a hood on the back. The last time I wore it, it came to my knees. And when I put it on, I felt kind of like, is this too short? Nothing's hanging out, but is it appropriate for work? I wore it, although I was uncomfortable. And as the day wore on, I got more and more uncomfortable.

Sara had a similar experience where she felt uncomfortable and thought that her choice was too casual.

S: I definitely have felt uncomfortable... I may have thrown on jeans and a t-shirt. I have nothing to wear and I know that no one (at work) would think bad. But for me, I'm trying to meet that standard. And I feel like that's just affected my performance.

Amy, too, has had an experience like this at work. But in contrast to Alicia and Sara's examples, a supervisor actually commented on what she was wearing.

A: I was wearing this wool skirt from Gap and I was wearing tights and it came up three inches above the knees... And I had worn this outfit before and then the head of store was like, "You can't wear that." And I was measuring it and I have long legs. And it was like two-and-a-half inches above the knee. I probably should have known better. I felt out of sorts all day.

Conversely, the participants have all had experiences where they have been dressed appropriately and others have noticed. Each participant gave examples where someone positively commented on what she wore. For each, this recognition from others made her feel good and bolstered her sense of self. When her self-concept was positively reinforced by such comments, each saw herself as successfully playing the role of a "professional." Each of the participants therefore highlights how others are important to defining her new identity and affirming the progress she has made in becoming a

professional. Jessica emphasized the impact of compliments on striving to achieve a professional look.

J: Everybody's always talking, "Oh, I love that top." You want to look nice so that you get compliments. And you're respected more if you look nice every day.

Amy echoes this idea, when she describes a time when one of her employees noticed what she was wearing and it impacted her desire to "look the part."

A: One of the associates said, "You look really nice today. Not that you don't everyday, but you look especially nice today." And I was like, "Thank you." You know, it's nice that they notice. Does that mean that I need to dress up a little bit more? It makes me want to do a little extra everyday to separate myself.

Similarly, Sara describes the positive implications that others' comments have for her confidence level.

S: I wore black pants with black heels and a purple turtleneck. The look was almost conservative with the fun pop of color. I felt great wearing this and I definitely got noticed (in a good way) with positive comments... I know that I made a good impression. When I feel confident with what I'm wearing it makes a difference in my day. I carry myself with confidence.

As a process, transition involves the need for each woman to understand herself as a professional, and consequently, prove that she is no longer a student. Dress is a vehicle for doing both. Because each is new to her career, she has initiated changes in dress choices to comply with both dress codes and concerns about appropriateness in her

career. In the next section, I will examine how these choices are reflected in changes in consumption behavior among the five women.

Consumption

All of the women viewed shopping, and particularly apparel consumption, as important to the transition. Purchasing new dress items is an integral part of the process of becoming the apparel industry professionals they want to be. As her role changes from student to professional, each individual has noticed a concomitant change in her shopping patterns. Where she once shopped for a certain type of dress appropriate for attending class, she must now consider what professional dress means for her. The women take many issues into account when purchasing professional dress. For example, each woman is cognizant of how her professional self will be influenced and confirmed, in part, by others. Future purchases are seen as a means to signal the transformation into a full-fledged professional.

Inspiration from Others

The narratives highlight the importance of co-worker and supervisor opinion regarding work wear choices. As such, the participants often look to others for inspiration and guidance. All of the women named someone whose style they, at least in part, aspire to model their own professional dress after. Two of the five participants credit their mothers with having the greatest influence on their professional dress. As Alicia describes, her mother's dress provided a template for professionalism that has stayed with her into adulthood.

A: She would take me to school on her way to work. I had this vision of a well-dressed, professional woman going to the workplace. And this is what you're supposed to look like: slacks, blazer, heels, nice coat, all put together. She didn't instill that in me, but that stuck with me. Even some days I go to work, and I'll think, "Oh my goodness! I look like my mom."

In Marie's opinion, because her mother has leeway to dress creatively in her career, she has inspired Marie to sometimes dress rather unconventionally.

M: My mom is, well, she's always kind of dressed, not differently. She's an art teacher so she's, like, always worn kind of funky jewelry, so that's part of it. Part of it is just wearing what I want. It's really creative.

In contrast to each of the participant's professional dress role models are those individuals whose personal style stands out. Four of the five participants named a celebrity they admired who is not immediately recognized for wearing "professional" dress, per se. Although Jessica did not cite a specific celebrity, she did describe how the media and celebrities in general influence her purchasing decisions.

J: If there is anyone that I look to for clothing inspirations, it would be celebrities. However, there is not one celebrity that would be my role model because there are always fashion statements that I do not like of each celebrity.

Although Alicia mentioned that there were some buyers at work whose style she liked, the celebrities that she named were musicians, as opposed to actors or models.

A: At work, we have five buyers in my department, two of them are my age. And the two of them that are my age dress so cute. It's trendy and it's cute. Outside of work, there are celebrities that dress well.

Beyonce always looks fabulous. Gwen Stefani, she has her own style. It's ever changing, but it's always cute. If it's cute for you, then do it. Mary J. Blige. I think as she has aged and she has come into her womanhood, her dress has done the same. It's not trashy. It's very sophisticated. It's trendy. Just cute.

Sara also named a celebrity. In her journal, she wrote of Ashley Olsen, a popular actress whose style she admires.

S (journal): Ashley Olsen has been an inspiration to me with regards to dress. She always looks so chic and put together with a mix of classic and edgy. She can change up her look every day, but she also makes it look effortless. She seems like a very strong woman who is aware of what she wants and is not afraid to take chances. She is my #1 girl to look to. Because I don't take too many chances in my own dress, I admire that she can, and always look so put together.

Amy also discussed a celebrity, Lauren Conrad, a reality show star from MTV's *The Hills*. Having gained initial celebrity from this television program, she has recently become an apparel industry professional, launching a clothing line of her own and designing many of its pieces. Amy explains that both the style of the garments themselves and their quality is what makes Lauren's style stand out.

A: I think her taste is impeccable. I think it's very professional, yet "fashion." Perfect for what's she's in, but something I could see myself in. It's perfect for day-to-day. Or even when she's a little bit dressed up. It's sophisticated, yet young. But youthful and professional without showing skin. Like it's always really well put together and the fabric's really nice. I really like her style.

Articulating Change: Planning for Professional Dress

Each of the participants agreed that her dress and shopping habits have changed since graduating from college. This change is partly influenced by company dress codes in that each has some type of guideline that she must follow. Dress codes range from the very specific and somewhat prohibitive, such as Gap and Forever 21, to more informal, such as that of TJX. Both retail stores allow their employees to wear jeans, but prohibit any blatant advertisement of brands, including their own. Different departments at the jeans company allow employees to establish their own dress codes. TJX's expectations are more relaxed during the summer months and more conservative during the rest of the year.

Participants have experienced varying levels of change as a result of the mandates of these dress codes. Some changes are more drastic than others. Dressing exactly the same as in college is not an option for any of the participants, though each currently finds herself at a different point along this dress transition continuum. Four of the five participants are allowed to wear jeans to work at any time. Amy, who currently works in a Gap store, has faced the least amount of change since graduating from college because her university required students to wear uniforms. She also worked at Gap while in college. Likewise, Jessica worked as an intern at the jeans company during her last year and a half of college and therefore has not experienced a great deal of change since graduation. While Marie's change is more pronounced than Amy's, she is still able to wear many of the same items she wore in college, but in different ways, saying, "I probably dress down less." Sara has experienced a greater degree of change, but still

combines some of the items that she wore as a student with new pieces that she bought specifically for the job. She explains,

S: I'm still working with some old pieces and trying to spruce them up. It's kind of a cycle. I need to work to get the money to do it.

Alicia has experienced the greatest change from what she wore in college. Unlike the others, she can only wear jeans on Fridays. Formerly a staple of her student wardrobe, she now wears slacks and sometimes even suits.

A: I've gravitated more to wool slacks. When I was in school, I didn't care. I could throw on jeans... So yeah, I think things have changed. I didn't think about those things before. I didn't have to.

All of the participants expressed a need to plan what they would wear to work to look more "put together" than they did in college. Interestingly, the participants whose dress changed the most were also the ones who planned the most. Planning, for the participants, ranged from deciding what to wear a few days in advance to thinking about which items were clean while in bed the night before. For all, the planning process was often affected by the activities that they would be doing at work, but also by other considerations, such as weather and comfort. Four of the five participants currently live and work in North Carolina, a far milder climate than that of Boston, where Alicia works. But for all of the women, being comfortable while fulfilling their daily responsibilities was a primary concern. Interestingly, wearing shoes that were comfortable for the duration of a shift surfaced as an important concern for each of the participants. Some of the responsibilities requiring comfortable shoes include physical labor, such as opening

boxes, working on the sales floor, and putting away shipments. Indeed, throughout the participants' journals, feelings about footwear were a frequent topic. Marie explains:

M (journal): When I get dressed for work, I think a lot about comfort. "Will I be able to wear this for eight hours?" is definitely a question I ask. I think about it, as far as heels, responsibilities are a big part of it.

Concern about comfort is echoed by Amy in her journal:

A (journal): I have to do shipments at work. So I will wear my most comfortable, presentable jeans with a polo and sneakers.

Because all of the participants agreed that both *what* they wear and what others *think* of what they wear is important to assuming the role of professional, they see their dress choices as critical to a successful transition. Each wants to be viewed as a professional, and consequently, has become more conscientious of her daily dress choices. Throughout each participant's journal, activities and interactions with others surface as primary deciding factors in selecting dress. For example, all of the participants talked about the impact of attending a meeting on their choice of dress for the day. Sara, who has a staff meeting every Monday, reserves her "best" items for this day because supervisors will be present. Likewise, as Amy explains, "If it's a management meeting in store, I'll always try to dress a little nicer because we're all looking at each other and we're trying to present the store."

While the presence of supervisors plays into the participants' dress choices, so does that of their colleagues and co-workers. The participants who work in supervisory

positions felt that the responses of the sales associates they supervise also play a role.

That is, as supervisors they need to set an example for the employees and for the store.

As Amy describes,

A: I always want to maintain the dress code. They're (sales associates) going to follow what you wear. I always think, "If an employee wore this, would I tell them they have to go home?" That's always in the back of your head.

Each believes that professional dress gives her some amount of confidence, which in turn affects her identity and sense of self. By dressing for the role of a professional, the women feel that they are more comfortable with what they are doing and can focus on their jobs. Sara exemplifies this idea in a journal excerpt:

S (journal): When I feel confident with what I'm wearing it makes a difference in my day. I carry myself with confidence and am not constantly fidgeting with my clothes.

Amy also acknowledges the importance of this notion and particularly so when dealing with difficult customers. As she puts it, wearing clothes that make her feel like a manager, help her to "Walk different...talk different...act different." The confidence that the participants gain by wearing appropriate dress affects their perceptions of themselves and their behavior.

The five women agree that their clothing helps them to achieve the professionalism they seek, and want their dress choices to communicate the picture of a consummate apparel industry professional. Likewise, the participants agree that their dress communicates something about them as individuals. As the role of professional is

new for all of them, their dress choices help them, as well as those around them, to leave the student role behind. As Sara points out,

S: I think it (your clothes) definitely says a lot. And it says that I care also. You know that I want to work there and they can see me working there. I'm trying to get them to look at me and say, "Oh yeah, I can totally see her working here."

Marie sees the relationship between her new role and her dress in a similar way. She sums up how dress is a vehicle for role transition:

M: I've never had a job where I was a manager before. So the whole thing is kind of a transition. When I dress more professionally, I feel more in charge of things or respected. Like my style is pretty much the same, but I try more.

All of the participants believe that a professional is something that they are in the process of becoming. Each believes that her current dress choices communicate this evolving identity. However, it is interesting to note that each participant's conception of the self has yet to fully embrace this identity. That is, though a degree of transition has occurred, much of the journey toward being a professional is still ahead. Participants look to a time when they will feel, look, and act like the professional they are currently becoming. As each participant envisioned this future self, dress was an integral means to its achievement.

Purchasing Change

Purchasing the right items of dress is important for all five of the women. In addition to considering job activities, climate, and comfort, all of the participants have

changed both what and how they purchase, as well as why they make specific dress purchases. Namely, the desire to fit into the new role has most influenced purchasing decisions. For example, Alicia has begun to wear slacks, like many others in her company, as a means to fit in and define her professional identity.

A: It's (my clothes) definitely changed from school to now. I did a lot of jeans in school. And I can't do jeans now. I think that was the biggest thing: finding slacks. I think slacks are aging. That's how I felt. I don't want to wear slacks. I'll look like an old lady. I'll look like my mom. But now I feel that if they fit the way I want them to fit (it's ok). If they're not tight, but not slouching. Now, I'm in a situation where I have to put them on. I don't want to feel uncomfortable and out of place.

While Sara is not focused on a specific item, like slacks, she has started looking for better quality garments. Better quality and proper fit make her feel and act differently.

S: I have better taste now. Just from looking at people at work and see this new wardrobe that I am acquiring and want to acquire. I am wanting better things, better fabrics. Nicer things in general. My standards are changing. In the past I would want to take \$100 and get as much as I could. Now, I'd rather have something that looks great on me, that fits me. That's quality, that's tailored. That will last a little bit longer. And honestly, you can tell if something's quality. So I mean if somebody sees you wearing a quality shirt rather than one that is not well constructed, it's gonna reflect on you. If I feel like I look good, then I'm sure my whole personality changes. I project more self-confidence. I'm more willing to give my ideas (at work), and put myself out there.

Acquiring the things that the participants want has proven to be somewhat difficult right now. Because all are living independently of their parents' financial support for the first time, being able to afford the new styles that they want has proved to

be the biggest challenge. All five of the participants mentioned that their finances kept them from being able to purchase what they want and need for their new roles. Because they are now responsible for their housing, utilities, and other debts, purchasing a lot of new dress is something that they expect will have to wait until a later time, such as after a raise or promotion. Therefore, shopping at discount stores, buying a few items at a time, and using their store discounts were ways that the participants got around a lack of money. Three of the four participants think that shopping where they work is the best option. As Amy explains, "I usually go to Gap. I always get a nice top and some nice pants." Likewise, Marie shops at Forever 21, where she works.

M: I don't normally make a special trip to buy work clothes. Mostly I buy from where I work. I'll see something when we get it in and know whether I want it or not.

Although Alicia does not work in the retail side of TJX, she still shops there because of the variety and discount prices.

A: I go to TJ Maxx and Marshall's because there is a variety of designers and cuts all in one place. So I can pick up ten different pairs by ten different people, try them on, and pick them up, all in one shopping event. And they're reasonably priced.

Consumption is an important part of the lives of the five women. Each has already made changes in the ways that she consumes as compared to when she was a student. Similarly, each plans to make even more changes in the future. Just as transition is a process which occurs in stages, consumption patterns also change in stages.

Transformation, the final conceptual area, brings together changes in roles and

consumption through the ultimate outcome, which is the fully transformed self. This self is the end result of the role transition process and is established by consumption choices that allow the participants to fully embody and therefore become the professionals that they want to be.

Transformation

When the participants were asked to predict what the future holds, each talked about her ideal job and what she envisions her life will be like. In relation to these plans, the women also discussed the changes that they anticipate making to their wardrobes. Additionally, each described either an item, or a series of items that she would like to purchase, once she achieves her ideal job. As the participants see it, such purchases would signal the successful transformation of the self on a personal and social level.

Ideal Job, Ideal Self, Ideal Dress

All five women have professional goals for the future and have thought about how dress will help them to achieve these goals. Each participant is currently in an entry-level position. Four of the five hope to move to a higher ranking position within the next ten years, though none are sure that they will stay with their present company. Unlike the others, Jessica plans to work for only a few years before starting a family and staying at home. Marie is considering the possibility of going into another field altogether, while the other four participants anticipate remaining in the apparel industry. Sara is contemplating graduate school to help her achieve a higher ranking position. While happy with her job at the jeans company, she is not sure of the title she will hold. She

does, however, believe that in time she will have progressed beyond an entry level-position.

S: I see myself in a “high” position working for an apparel company. I am considering going back to school for my MBA, so I definitely see myself in a powerful job. In turn, I would be making money.

More sure of her future, Alicia has plans to work for Saks Fifth Avenue one day, but then again, may stay at TJX.

A: I definitely want to be a buyer. For what company? I’m not sure. Maybe TJX, maybe not. My dream employer, at this point, would be Saks. But definitely with a high end department store or an independent designer.

Similar to Alicia, Amy has spent a great deal of time planning her future career.

A: I am hoping to either: A-work with a consultant firm or [B] a consultant job of some form. If I have to do it independently or you know, through a firm. Or in marketing. I’m very interested in the writing part of it. I really like, again, it’s all about the customer. I’m very passionate about retail.

When the women talked about their future jobs, all believed that their dress would also change. As all experienced changes resulting from the transition from student to professional, they felt that their dress choices will continue to change with future transitions to higher ranking positions. The participants described their dress changing in specific ways. These changes may take the form of buying different types of items or shopping for different brands and at different stores. Moreover, as the women dress differently in the future, they believe that what their clothing communicates will also

change. Acquiring and wearing certain items such as nice slacks or expensive shoes allows the participant to negotiate the tension of liminality she feels being in-between who she was as a student and who she is becoming as a professional. As Alicia points out, it also communicates to others that the ultimate transformation of the self has occurred.

A: I want them to see that she's (Alicia's) on top of it. She's dressing for the title. Or dressing for what she wants to be. I'm working towards this, and that's how I want to be perceived.

Marie also talked about another role that might bring on change: motherhood. Because she would like to have children, she anticipates wearing, "more sweats if I have a family." Similarly, Jessica plans to stay home with her children, but to have her own styling business as well. Therefore, even though she would work from home, she sees her dress becoming more professional and including high quality items.

J: I think I might have to dress a little more professional than I do for work now, so that people take me seriously. I guess it would depend on as the times change.

Each of the women believe that being able to shop at higher-end stores and acquire better garments will provide more self-confidence, but will also communicate her success to others. Success, for the women, is defined by a feeling of confidence and the potential career opportunities that could transpire as a result. Sara, for example, plans to take her graduation money to buy new work clothes, but also talked about one day being able to purchase higher end pieces.

S: If for nothing else, than I want something crisp and new. I also want to buy a lot of shoes. I think the shoes say a lot about everything and you can really make a statement. They say a lot about you. In the future, I envision myself in expensive shoes and designer pieces.

For her, being able to buy more expensive items will showcase her professional success or, that “I would have the money to buy these pieces that make me feel like I made it.”

Likewise, Amy points out the career opportunities that wearing the “right” dress might provide.

A: So (with) dressing and being conscious (about what you wear), you go out and you’re always presentable... I’m always very conscious of what I put on because I’m just thinking, “Who would I meet today that might change my life?”

Ideal Purchases

All of the participants mentioned specific items of dress that they would like to purchase that will communicate their achievements to themselves and to others. Yet, in addition to signifying the role of the professional, each hopes that her ideal purchases will also express her individuality and unique personality. Alicia is currently looking to purchase a nice coat which, for her, says that she is a professional who is also fashionable.

A (journal): I recently have decided that I would like to have a cream/off-white knee length wool coat. I think that the color creates a very sharp and distinguished look. If and when I do find the perfect style, I think that it will say that I am a fashionable, sharp, professional, young woman.

Like Alicia, instead of wearing the jeans, fashion trousers, and woven shirts that Amy currently wears at the Gap store, she hopes that in her future job she will wear, “trendy suits, cute heels.” To add such variety to her wardrobe, Amy plans to shop at different places, such as smaller stores with more personal service.

A: If I had my dream job and some money and I could spend it where I wanted, I think maybe I’d be a little more boutique-y. They’re a little pricey. They’re nice but sophisticated.

Marie envisions acquiring more expensive, quality items in the future:

M: I’ll probably have more money to go out and buy nice things. I’ll probably have more nice expensive staples in my wardrobe, you know, instead, like nice slacks.

In addition to better quality items, four participants named specific designer items that they intend to purchase in the future. While none of the participants exhibited brand loyalty in regards to their current dress, the items that they hope to someday own were well-known luxury brands and designers. For Amy, designer jeans signal quality, which she would not mind paying for.

A: So I would have to say, if I had the money, I would get jeans that were tailor-fit for me. Whether it’s True Religion or Seven, or a really good brand, you think those, you think quality..., if I could spend \$200, it would be on a good pair of jeans.

Both Jessica and Sara want the same brand of designer shoes. Sara believes that these shoes will be important to her role as a professional, even if no one else notices them:

S: I would love to own designer shoes...Manolo's [Blahnik]. My mom always said that "It's all about the shoes." You can have a great pair of shoes that spruces up the whole outfit or use them to make a statement. I feel like I would feel like "I made it" if I owned some designer shoes. Eventually I will become more serious with this desire, but it will be expensive! It's one of those things that even if others do not notice my shoes, I will be aware and know the importance this has to me.

Jessica shares a similar perspective:

J: I would love to have a pair of Manolo Blahniks. I saw "Sex and the City," and I never knew about them before that. And they're such a big deal. And a status symbol and I mean I love shoes. I would feel different. I think it says "Successful." Whenever I wear a purse or shoes or whatever I've paid a lot for, I just feel better about myself because this is really nice. And you know, if somebody did notice, they just scream status and fashion.

Not There Yet: Progress on the Path to Transformation

As all of the participants are now working full-time in the apparel industry, they acknowledge that their current identity is different than when they were students. Therefore, progress towards the transformation of the self is being made. Yet, none feel they are fully there. All see themselves at a different point along the path leading through liminality, thereby occupying various stages between student and professional. Participants acknowledged that their role transition is a process and does not happen overnight. Instead, it is the steps along the way that ultimately lead to transformation. This transformation requires more than just confidence in one's job, but a high degree of comfort with one's self. For Alicia, the key to transformation is time, allowing her to eventually be more confident in her role as a professional.

A: I think that I am a professional, because how else would I label myself? I'm not a student. I'm not a mom. I go to work. I think there are different levels. There's the first job, first career job. I've learned so much: how to interact with others, how to put my pride aside and ask a question. And now I see that experience is so, so, so very important. I think there are levels of professionalism over the years. It builds.

Like Alicia, Amy sees the achievement of professionalism as a series of stages and believes that right now she is just beginning:

A: I'm in-between.... I've gotten my job and I really love it. And that's a big thing for me, too. I love my job, and bottom line is, I'm always happy and passionate about it. Yes, I'm a manager. Yes, I'm in charge of things. But there are some days when I'm like, "When am I going to move on?" I know I'm going to move on. I'm not going to stay forever. This is kind of my stepping stone.

Marie sums up her personal journey thus far by saying:

M: I definitely feel like I'm somewhere in-between. You know, when I graduated, I didn't see myself working in retail for years. It's definitely hard for me to figure out my place, what I want to do. It's definitely the in-between. I'm trying to find the balance.

The notion of transformation raises issues about how one's future career and future self are linked through dress. None of the women believe that they have fully transformed in their careers, and see being a professional as something they have yet to achieve. In a similar way, they do not yet have the dress that they believe is critical to being "true" professionals, but are working toward that goal by purchasing certain items that will ensure it is achieved. For now, they must balance the present self with the self

they are becoming, while making progress towards the end result. They are, at present, works in progress.

As each continues to transition from student to professional, she believes that the full transformation of self is the ultimate outcome. Consumption is the key to this process, as it allows the participants to see the transition, to experience their changing selves, and serves as a reminder that they are on the road to transformation. Therefore, dress acts as an axis, linking the individual in transition to her ultimate transformation. In essence, it allows these five women to bridge who they are now with who they hope to be in the future.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented a thematic interpretation of the five women's experiences based on their individual narratives. Three conceptual areas—*transition*, *consumption*, and *transformation*—were used to structure the interpretation and frame the themes which surfaced throughout the narratives. In the next chapter, the third level of interpretation, I will theorize about dress within the role transition process and with respect to the concomitant transformation of the self.

CHAPTER VI

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND FURTHER DISCUSSION

Through the interpretation of the five women's experiences, an examination of the process involved in developing a professional identity is possible. Understanding the women's collective experience of becoming apparel industry professionals reveals the meaning of these changes within their daily lives. In order to further explore the significance of the changes, interpreting their experiences relative to the literature on role transition and the transformation of the self is necessary. Doing so provides a theoretical framework for defining and explaining how these five women's experiences shed light on and deepen our understanding of role transition and transformation of the self, and the significance of dress to both concepts.

In this chapter, I explore what it means to become an apparel industry professional, and based on the first two levels of interpretation, how the five women use dress relative to this process of "becoming." The goal of this chapter is to elucidate role transition as part of the self transformation process and to explore how dress is central to this process. To accomplish this goal, this chapter is divided into two parts: (a) dress as a tool for transition, and (b) dress as a means for performing transformation. As the third level of interpretation, this chapter connects the experiences of the five women to the broader issues that were identified within the literature review.

In the first section of this chapter, I begin with an overview of the central aspects linking role transition and self transformation through dress, as found within each of the five women's narratives. These aspects include the inter-relationship of roles and identity to the self, dress within the socio-cultural framework of rituals, and consumption as an axis for role transition. In this section, I also identify specific rites of passage that are integral to the transition process.

In the second part of this chapter, I discuss the use of dress to communicate the transformation of the self. That is, I explore how dress ushers the individual into her new role and communicates that the transformation from student self to professional self has occurred. I begin by considering dress as it relates to the concept of transformation and to the self via lived experience. I then look at liminal space, or the space between the roles of student and professional, and how this space provides an opportunity for the individual to perform various identities and ultimately create the new self. Finally, I explore the intersection between dress and liminal space as experienced and expressed in social contexts or *communitas*.

Dress as a Tool for Transition

The role of women in the United States workplace in nearly every industry has changed greatly over the past one hundred years (Leopold, 1992). The apparel industry is once such industry, in that women now hold management and executive level positions at many apparel companies. In preparation for these careers, women regularly graduate from college. Therefore, college graduation has become a common rite of passage or ritual among contemporary women. Turner (1982) asserts that a rite of passage affects

the creation of one's identity by either elevating one's status or by a continual reification of one's present status. For the women in this study, acquiring a college or graduate degree is meant to elevate status.

Objects signal that a rite of passage is underway and can, in turn, communicate various aspects about this rite of passage, such as who one is or who one is becoming. Inherent in the use of objects is consumption, whereby the individual acquires objects, and in this case, objects of dress. This consumption helps to communicate a concomitant change in identity. For instance, each of the five women of this study has left her student role behind and is moving into a professional one. The women of this study are becoming professionals, and therefore have started incorporating this future role into their current identities. As a result, each is trying to leave her student identity behind and shape a new professional one. To understand this role transition, they must consider characteristics unique to the role of student and how these characteristics differ from those unique to the role of professional. Because this transition is communicated to others through the individual's dress, each must also use dress during this rite of passage to announce to others that an identity change is occurring.

Identity and Dress

Identity is concerned with more than just the simple characteristics of one's personality. Identity, according to Stone (1995), is organized through an individual's qualities, such as gender, an individual's name, his or her title or role, as well as his or her relationship to others. Therefore, identity reflects internal and external qualities about an individual; both who the individual believes they are and who others believe them to

be. When a new identity emerges via the result of a rite of passage, the individual performs this identity for three main purposes: categorization, identification, and comparison (Goffman, 1959). For the five women, categorization is important because they view their co-workers as members of a specific group, that of “professional.” Because the women hope to become members of this group, adjusting their performances, especially through dress, helps the women themselves and other individuals, to become and be identified as members. Once they belong to the group, they constantly compare their evolving identities with others in the group, as well as individuals in different groups. As the women repeatedly perform the role of professional, they eventually see themselves as established members of this group. This perspective, or outcome, establishes to themselves and others that the transition has occurred.

According to Goffman (1959), when an individual identifies with a particular group, he or she seeks to make an impression on other individuals who are already members, and to take into account the setting where the group exists. For instance, Sara attended a work-related bowling party. Prior to this event, she did not feel that she was a fully accepted member of her department. But after attending the event and engaging in the activities with the group members, she felt that she had become more a part of her merchandising department. For her, this was an important milestone, as her participation in the party allowed her co-workers to consider her a part of the department’s culture.

While the five women share similar characteristics, such as a college degree or careers in the apparel industry, it is their relationships with others that shed the greatest

light on their transitioning identities. Because dress conveys meaning in a given situation (Enninger, 1992), each woman uses dress to give meaning to her role transition. Sara, for example, explains how one of her main goals at work is to be seen as someone who belongs at her job, and to achieve this goal, intentionally tries to dress like her colleagues. She, like the other four women, understands the significance of dress as a means of identification. Because the five women are relatively new to their careers, they use constant comparison with others as a means to guide their transition into the role of a professional. That is, their social interactions at work are used to negotiate and construct their own identities and to thus achieve the goal of “fitting in” (Bauman, 1984).

All of the women described how they use dress to negotiate and express their evolving work identities. They deliberately use dress to define their workplace roles, and to exercise their power to do so, knowing that it will be read by others—whether coworkers, managers, or customers. In wearing clothing that differs from what they wore as students, they use dress to both separate from the student role and embrace the role of professional, or in other words, to facilitate the transition.

Identity and Rites of Passage

Identity is a tool for self reflection while an individual negotiates major life changes (Shaw, 1994). While there are many life changes that occur, certain changes are more meaningful than others as rites of passage, and particularly when they affect one’s identity, social role, and development of the self. Each of the five women identified meaningful experiences related to her present role transition that are seen as rites of passage, such as graduation from college, the first day of work, or an important business

meeting. For example, Alicia described in detail what she wore on the first day of work and why. While all five discussed the personal nature of such events, each also understood the event as a step in the whole process of her role transition. For the women, such experiences allowed for self-reflection regarding their changing social roles. Sara, for example, discussed the importance of her college graduation and her family's participation in this rite of passage. For her, graduation meant leaving behind the role of student in a manner that marked it as a celebration.

According to van Gennep (1960), rites of passage occur in social settings as a result of social dramas, where the individuals involved share common interests, goals, or values. The five women not only share a common goal of career success, but also a common interest in fully transitioning to the role of professional, something that is critical to achieve their goal. All of the women have graduated and are now working full-time, having completed two important rites of passage. The four phases that are part of the social dramas (van Gennep, 1960) associated with rites of passage—breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration—have therefore taken place. Upon graduation, the women left their former social group of students (breach) and have joined a new group (reintegration), that of full-time employees in the apparel industry. The five women have considered their options (crisis) for future actions and have decided that becoming a professional is the appropriate action for them and have therefore secured jobs in the industry (redress).

As the five women's social roles transition, their dress changes accordingly. Indeed, for each of the women, dress is a significant part of becoming a professional. As

Alicia described, when selecting what she would wear for her first day of work at TJX, she chose a dress that she felt was both sophisticated and appropriate for a young professional. The dress was not something that she would have chosen to wear when she was a student. Likewise, Jessica described the major changes she has made to her dress since graduating from college. She feels that she has to dress nicely each day at work, and can no longer wear the t-shirts and lounge pants she wore while still in school.

Each of the five women described how she uses dress to establish her new identity as distinct from the old. All of the women believe that the choices they make now are more important than those made to attend their college classes. In sum, they believe that their identities as students hinged less on wearing appropriate dress than do their identities as professionals. As students, the women felt that the stakes for dressing were not very high. For example, Sara recalls wearing jeans and t-shirts to class. In the social setting of the classroom and the college campus, she understood her role as a student and dressed accordingly. Dressing in a way that she feels is appropriate for her workplace, such as wearing nicer pants and a collared shirt, helps to confirm her identity within this setting and is more appropriate to her new professional role.

The concept of appropriateness shifts with the setting in which the women “display” their identities. The importance of understanding what is necessary to “fit in” to one’s environment is not lost on the participants. Fitting in requires making judgments about what constitutes appropriate dress. While the women talked about wearing many of the same items that they owned as students, most now consider how to combine these items in new ways. They also think more deeply about what they should wear to work

than they did as students. They are aware enough of the implications of their choices that they often plan what they will wear throughout the week. Decision-making while shopping has also become a bigger issue, and they described how their preferences have changed to accommodate the new identities they are creating in hopes of appearing appropriate for their new roles.

Consumption and Changing Identities

The five women use consumption to help them through their role transitions. Because they acknowledge how the transition necessitates specific items of dress, the women have all begun to shop differently, thinking more deeply about their purchases and how these goods will communicate the identity that they want to express. Similarly, as the women become more comfortable in their new roles, their new identities begin to guide future purchasing decisions. The reflexive relationship between their new identities and new purchasing habits helps them to use dress to their advantage and thereby negotiate the tensions that surface during the transition. When they are in need of dress to establish their new roles, they describe purchasing items that will be consistent with the identity that they want to present. For example, each spoke of dress that made her “feel” like a professional. Moreover, in dressing to communicate role transition, the women create stories based on their own experiences with this transition, and thus their experiences with dress shape their “identity narratives” (Rubenstein, 1995). As Thompson and Haytko (1997) found, individuals use dress to create self narratives, and the five women of this study are no different, as they seek to find items of dress that communicate their “selves” as professional.

The women purchase dress that alleviates the disparity between the student identity and the professional one. As a form of compensatory consumption (Yurchisin, et al, 2008), to some degree, the women have already begun using items of dress to make them feel more like professionals, such as when Alicia began purchasing slacks, or when Amy began buying items other than jeans for work at the Gap. Still, the women are looking towards future purchases, indicating a time when they believe themselves to have become full-fledged professionals. At that time, the women hope to be able to shop at different stores and buy more expensive brands. Jessica hopes to shop at Ann Taylor, J. Crew, and Banana Republic rather than Old Navy when she is hired as a full-time employee. Sara believes that being able to afford a specific brand of shoe, Manolo Blahnik, will communicate her success to others. It is important to note that the retailers and garments that signal professional success are all brand names. All five women felt that the brands were monikers of success as professionals. Although the women did not see brands as playing a role in their collegiate success, the prestige that comes from acquiring these brands will serve as symbols of their future professional success.

Decision-making among the five women can also be explained by symbolic consumption (Noble & Walker, 1997), whereby the women purchased items of dress that they felt fit both the identities that they wanted to present and the identities that they believed were expected of them. The women use their purchases to communicate this “major life change” to others. Although they believe that they are not full-fledged professionals yet, they have already made purchases that make them feel as though they are. It is also important to note that they all emphasized maintaining their own style

while adhering to the company's dress code. Thus, the women purchased dress that they felt was appropriate given the rules *and* expressed who they are as individuals. By making these purchases, the women could symbolically communicate their role transition and their own personal style.

To some extent, dress also communicates non-verbally what the women would not necessarily verbally communicate to their supervisors, colleagues or others around them. For example, Sara felt uncomfortable and "awkward" when she began dressing professionally for her new job. In order to communicate her competence, she wore clothes that were nicer than what other individuals in her department wore. Similarly, Jessica feels that an unwritten "rule" of working in the apparel industry is remaining trendy. While this rule is never explicitly stated, she discussed how this was a priority for her, as she believes that others will notice what she was wearing. She and the other women use dress not just to speak about how they belong in their jobs, but that they belong in this particular industry.

Dress as a Means for Performing Transformation

Transformation and the Self

The multiple selves that an individual possesses exist as a composite of one's identities (Rubenstein, 1995). As different identities emerge, certain facets of each self are displayed depending on the situation or environment (Goffman, 1959). The workplace is one location where identities fuse together to convey the public self. The public self is shaped through social interactions and reflects the individual's role in society. Other types of selves, such as the private self, the ideal self, and the undesired

self may be displayed depending on the situation and setting. Ultimately, the various types of selves blend together and create a cohesive whole for each individual.

Transformation of the self is often the result of the role transition process. A transformed self emerges once an individual's role in society has changed. In order for the self to transform, the self-concept must embrace the new role. That is, how the five women see the self in relation to their new role is paramount to their continued progress through transition and to eventual transformation. All five feel that the transition is in process, but that the full transformation has yet to occur. Each believes that her self still embodies at least some portion of her identity as a student. Moreover, each felt that her dress did not yet express the professional that she hoped to be. Each hoped that as she fully transitioned into her new role (i.e., gaining more responsibilities and success in her career) her dress would reflect a complete transition and ultimate transformation. Therefore, for the five women of this study, transformation is the end result of their current transition efforts.

Communitas, Dress, and Performance in the Liminal Space

How does the process of transition lead to transformation of the self, and what role does dress play in this process? Transition and transformation both occur in social settings where a group of individuals are present and often take part in creating meanings of the social transactions as they take place. These transactions contribute to *communitas*, defined as the essence or spirit of community (Turner, 1969). Turner identifies three types of *communitas*—ideological, existential, and normative. In some ways, the workplace can be considered all three types. It is an ideological *communitas*, to

the extent that all members have specific roles and depend on other members for the setting to operate properly. The interplay between normative and ideological *communitas* facilitates identity change through transition, and a new self develops in the form of a transformation. As a normative *communitas*, the workplace structures the participants' experiences because it provides a social setting wherein they perform their new roles. The participants internalize their experiences with this performance (existential *communitas*), and ultimately the performance facilitates the transformation of the self. With this transformation, they become full members of the existential *communitas* of the workplace as their experiences as members establish the transformation. It is when they feel that they are full members of their work community that the transition is complete and the transformation of self has taken place.

Stone's (1995) concept of program and review is present in these *communitas*, and is a critical tool for establishing identity. Each woman performs her changing identity as her "program" meant for her colleagues and supervisors to view and judge. Their judgment and/or feedback, or "review," allows for her identity to be confirmed as either (a) appropriate or (b) somehow lacking and requiring change. Program and review in the woman's workplace *communitas* sets the stage for her ultimate transformation. Each described times when she felt that her program was appropriate and times when it was not. For example, Amy mentioned a time when one of her employees paid her a compliment on a pair of pants and a pink sweater that she had purchased. Through this feedback, she felt more confident and comfortable with herself as a professional.

For the five women, their experiences at work have, to a great extent, structured the transformation process. Because of interaction with co-workers, each of the five revealed that she is learning what it means to dress like, and therefore be, a professional. Dress, as a signal system (Enninger, 1992), allows the women to engage in a dialogue as they create a professional identity. As part of this dialogic process, the feedback that each receives allows her to assess the effectiveness of this identity. All of the women have received compliments from others in the workplace and have garnered confidence from these compliments, thereby helping them feel more comfortable with their burgeoning professional selves.

There are times, however, when each of the women has felt uncomfortable with her dress choices. According to Lennon, Rudd, Sloan and Kim (1999), when satisfaction is not achieved through one's appearance and dress during a given situation, different items of dress, worn at a later occasion, can rectify the transgression as a means to establish the self that they hope to present. As expressed by the five women, inappropriate dress choices were often deemed so as a result of negative feedback from others or simply based on their own judgment. Interestingly, when such experiences have happened, the women felt wholly uncomfortable about themselves, not just their dress. For example, Sara discussed wearing linen pants that wrinkled easily, which affected her confidence at work. This interplay between the individual's dress and its impact on her perceived abilities to accomplish work related tasks indicates the importance of being comfortable in the workplace role. As the women transition further

into their roles as professionals, they feel more and more comfortable with performing as professionals while striving to ensure that others believe in their competence.

According to Fine and Speer (1992), performance takes into account an individual's knowledge, judgment, and experience with the world. Two concepts are at the core of performance: presentation and representation. The women present the image that they believe is expected of them. Consequently, this is their representation of the performances that they have seen from others, including colleagues, family members, or celebrities. When the women dress to perform their workplace roles, they are making a statement about what they believe to be appropriate, as well as what they believe is necessary to be accepted by those viewing the performance. Alicia exemplifies this notion when she discusses her rationale in dressing for work. Alicia is aware of the dress code requirements at TJX, and therefore presents herself as a professional by wearing the appropriate dress choices, such as suits or slacks (presentation). Her inspiration for dressing this way has been influenced by the performances that she sees from her colleagues and from her mother while growing up. Because she believes that such performances by other individuals were successful, she tries to emulate them through her own presentation (representation).

As previously stated, none of the women feel that they have fully left their student roles behind. Each believes that she is somewhere between the two roles, both because of her dress and her daily activities. This "in-between" constitutes liminal space, where the individual has already experienced some transition and yet is preparing for future change. In the liminal space, one still possesses aspects of her former identity, which are

incorporated with parts of the new identity that she is acquiring. The liminal space is a necessary step in the rite of passage process. As van Gennep (1960) describes, a rite of passage requires an individual separate from his or her former social group (separation), prepare for the new role (liminality), and make the final change to incorporate new identities which form a new self (incorporation). By completing these three phases, the individual is considered to be transformed, and shows this transformation to others through his or her performance in a given social setting, such as the workplace. As discussed earlier, all five women have enacted several rites of passage thus far in the transition process. Each has graduated from college and thereby *separated* from her former social setting at her university. Sara discussed the importance of her college graduation in making her feel like she was on the road to becoming a professional. Alicia wrote about the importance of moving to another state post-graduation. Because she separated from her friends and family in North Carolina, moving to Massachusetts led to the first day of work, which served as another critical rite of passage. Presently in the liminality phase, the women have begun to incorporate their professional roles into their self-concept. All acknowledge that they do not yet label themselves as “professionals,” a point at which the incorporation phase of the rite of passage would occur and thus signal the end of the transition. For instance, Marie and Amy say that they feel “in-between” and are neither student nor professional. It is important to note that the transition from student to professional can itself be seen as a rite of passage, comprised of several smaller rites of passage.

The five women use dress reflexively to communicate to others that their roles are transitioning. Paramount to initiating and completing this process is the social setting (i.e., the workplace). In the workplace, the individual interacts with others, performing the identity that she hopes will be accepted. Performing this identity appropriately means it can be incorporated into one's self and become part of who one is. Occupying the liminal space between student and professional means that the women are currently neither one nor the other. The liminal space serves as the key to their transformation because it is where the conflict between the former self as a student and the new one as a professional is resolved. Ultimately, it is the individual's performance in the liminal space that can lead to transformation of the self.

As part of the rite of passage process, Goffman (1959) identifies three areas where individuals can perform or present the self to others. Each of the three relates to the five women's experiences. First, the onstage region, is the area where the women present the public self and dress accordingly. Often, the stakes are high in the onstage region, such as in weekly staff meetings. Each woman talked about experiences wherein she was dressed in a particular way that brought about compliments from others. By receiving compliments, she felt that her performance in this region was appropriate, and therefore incorporated it into her repertoire. That is, because she wore dress deemed appropriate by her co-workers, she will know how to dress for similar onstage activities in the future.

The second area, the backstage region, is a place where the individual's performance is less critical than the front stage region, yet still important. In the backstage region, the women still interact with their colleagues, but feel that their

performance is not being judged as stringently as the front stage. This allows them to play with elements of their identities to some extent while still maintaining a sense of what it means to be a professional. The women believe that the long term impact of dress mistakes is not as great in the backstage region and therefore feel more comfortable displaying the transition as a process and the self as emerging. For instance, each discussed days when she completed daily activities and responsibilities while wearing clothes that she felt were not necessarily “special” in any way. While each talked about what she wore and what she did, the impact of her backstage choices was not considered nor evaluated to the same extent as those in the onstage region. At the same time, even though the dress was not “special,” it was nevertheless appropriate to the workplace.

Goffman’s third and final area, the outer region, refers to the space where the women are removed from their workplace environment altogether. Expectations for the women to perform in a certain way, such as that of a professional, do not guide their behavior. All five discussed their dress choices for outside of the workplace. These particular choices signal, for them, opportunities to embody facets of a self other than “professional.” On the weekends, going out to dinner or to night clubs are instances wherein they do not have to perform in the role of a professional and can highlight their other identities. For example, Alicia described differences in her work and casual dress, by saying that she has strictly “going out” clothes, which are more casual, and are never worn to work. In fact, she separates the two types of dress in different areas of her closet. Because all of the women are still completing the transformation process, this outer region is a space where they wear many of the same items that they wore in college.

Understanding this space as a place where the woman presents a more private, and perhaps even former self, confirms that their experiences within the liminal space often involve consideration of their student identities.

What happens when the proper choices are not made, and especially relative to the front stage region? The women alluded to times when they were dressed inappropriately and described the effect that this “poor” performance had on their self-concepts. When this “mis-dressing” happened, the women did not want to be seen by others and tried to call as little attention to the self as possible. Given that they are just starting their careers, they believe that much of their success depends on a proper onstage performance. Poor performance requires that they try harder on future occasions (Lennon, Rudd, Sloan, & Kim, 1999).

When each woman performs her identity in the liminal space, she enters a world of possibilities for developing a new self. Since liminal space is transient and fluid, she is free to construct a concomitant identity. Each talked about how her student identity affects her emerging professional one. For example, Marie wears many of the same items that she did in college, but puts them together in different ways. The liminal space allows the developing self to engage in a dialogue with both old and new identities, thereby bringing together such disparate aspects of one’s changing self into the performance. This bricolage of old and new merges to facilitate the transition process from student to professional, and reflection on past and present identities and selves. This reflection requires the women regularly contrast their lives as students with their lives as apparel industry professionals. This back and forth understanding of who one is,

who one is not, and who one is becoming creates a point of reference for the women, and ultimately serves to create the self that they hope to one day be.

Summary

In this chapter, I developed a third level of interpretation by theorizing about issues of experience that surfaced in and across the personal narratives of the five women. I began with a discussion of why the women's experiences with role transition are important to consider within a context of rites of passage and relative to consumption. I also discussed how these experiences are explicated through dress and identity. I then explored how role transition leads to a transformation of the self and how dress is a performance which accomplishes this process, and particularly in the liminal space. Finally, I considered how dress in social settings provides the vehicle for the individual self to transform. In the next chapter, I reflect on the research process, discuss the contributions of this study, and suggest avenues for future research.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The two-fold goal of this study was to explore the experiences of five women as they transition from student to professional and to understand how dress is used throughout this transition process. This study focuses on women who have recently graduated from college and are now working in the apparel industry. More specifically, the research focuses on how their dress has changed since beginning their careers. That is, this study examined how dress can be used as the vehicle to facilitate role transition and the means of communicating this transition to others. As a result, this study explored how the changing self is and can be articulated through dress in the context of role transition.

Defining and distinguishing between transition and transformation is an important part of this study. Transition refers to a process which results in varying degrees of social role change. Transformation signifies the end result of the transition process, typically the revelation of a new self. A better understanding of these two separate, but inter-related, processes is important to interpreting the experiences of females in the contemporary workplace. In this dissertation, I examined the use of dress in the socio-cultural experience of becoming an apparel industry professional. Transition and transformation were in some ways found to be unique to each individual's experience, but in others, indicated common ground among group members. Prior to this study, the

notion of dress as it relates to role transition had not yet been studied in a comprehensive way. Types of dress, such as that of a student or a professional, are typically defined as end result objects, rather than parts within a subjective process. Consequently, the implications of how dress can communicate role transition had been overlooked within the literature.

In this study, I sought to understand what it is like to be a woman transitioning from the role of student to professional and how this process is experienced through dress. In particular, I explored the use of dress as a performance of rites of passage relative to this transition. Likewise, I sought to understand the factors influencing the experience of role transition and transformation of self, and how these factors can contribute to a more holistic understanding of liminality, or the space in-between two roles. In this chapter, I reflect on the process used to achieve this understanding.

This chapter is comprised of three main parts: *considering perspectives*, *constructing knowledge through experience*, and *reflection*. Considering perspectives involves a discussion of my goals for the research and how these goals shaped the ultimate outcome through my relationship with the participants. In the second part of this chapter, constructing knowledge, I consider the research process, specifically focusing on the development of the women's narratives and the thematic interpretation. In the third part of this chapter, reflection, I address the overall findings and implications of this research, and discuss possible directions for the continued study of dress in role transition and transformation. Throughout the chapter, I address the primary research objectives identified at the beginning of the dissertation.

Considering Perspectives

In this study, I used interpretive methods to develop a framework to explore dress as a means of understanding the experience of role transition and transformation. In doing so, the five participants' perspectives and experiences emerged in their own voices. Therefore, I found that an effective means of studying dress in role transition and transformation of the self is to begin with the lives of those making the change.

Both transition and transformation are processes where the end result is often difficult to define and inherently subjective. More specifically, the nebulous nature of these concepts allows the participant to subjectively determine the point where she is no longer a student and has become a professional. Because the process of transformation is also broadly defined, understanding concrete aspects of the participants' experiences, and particularly those pertaining to dress, became the framework I used to situate their perspectives about their location within the liminal or in-between space.

Personal narratives of the participants were created based on the data. These narratives served as a starting point for interpretation of the participants' experiences and perceptions, as well as a basis for the second and third levels of interpretation. Participant voices were thus central to the entire interpretation process. That is, I sought to build each level of interpretation on the participants' experiences. At the same time, however, I remained cognizant of my own role in shaping the ways their voices were heard. Because this study was designed with specific goals and objectives in mind, it must be acknowledged that my expectations as researcher had an impact on the outcome. Specifically, the topics that I intended to cover and the interview questions that I prepared

in advance influenced the nature of the data that was collected. Yet, an interpretive methodology was purposefully chosen in order to explore the participant's unique experiences and to do so in her own words as much as possible.

Throughout the data collection and interpretation stages of this study, each participant's perspective presented unique challenges, necessitating a level of flexibility on my part. For example, Jessica felt comfortable sharing details about her personal life, such as her upcoming wedding and her plans to have children in the future, even though they were not part of the interview schedule. Trust became the key to establishing a relationship between the participants and myself. Because I had not established a relationship with Amy and Marie prior to this research, I had to gain their trust before they would open up to me. I wanted to create an atmosphere where they would feel comfortable with me. So I shared details about my own life and experiences with becoming a professional. By sharing this sort of personal information with them, I hoped that they would, in turn, see that their own experiences were in some ways similar, thereby encouraging them to open up to me.

Just as I was constantly aware of my position relative to the project, the five women were aware of theirs'. As a result, some interview questions were asked in different ways, rearranged from the initial interview schedule, or required clarification. Each participant wrote in her journal for some period before the interview which helped to orient her to the nature of questions and topics that would be covered. Yet the participants still had difficulty answering some of the interview questions, as the answers

sometimes required reflecting on uncomfortable experiences or remembering specific details of past dress choices.

A two-week time period for making daily entries in the journal was appropriate for achieving the goals associated with this dissertation. Two weeks was enough time for each to provide insight into her dress choices without being too great of a time commitment. By the end of the two weeks, the participants began wearing some of the same items that they had written about at the early stages of the journal, not only repeating specific items, but their personal feelings and experiences as well. I found that by the end of two weeks of entries, the journals had reached the point of saturation. While the women wrote in the journals daily for a two week period, they were asked to keep the journals for a total of four weeks. Having the participants keep the journal for the additional two weeks gave them time to fully reflect on what they wrote.

During the data collection process, I kept in regular contact with each of the participants through email, telephone, and face-to-face visits. Because of both the amount of contact and the openness I maintained, the participants felt comfortable talking to me about the progress of their journal entries. This allowed me to address potential problems quickly. As mentioned previously, the participants were asked to write in their journals for fourteen days, but to have possession of them for four weeks. Because I talked with the participants throughout the four week period and encouraged their progress in the journal writing, all spent time reflecting and adding to their journals after the required fourteen days. This freedom to reflect was important, as it allowed the participants to further develop their thoughts in a more objective way, given their

temporal distance from the original entry. All of the participants remarked that keeping the journal required a stronger commitment on their part than they had originally assumed. Moreover, each felt that keeping the journal affected the way that she dressed and the dress choices she made.

The three methods used to collect data enriched the totality of the interpretation. While the journals provided a personal glimpse into the women's dress and work experiences, the questionnaire addressed basic demographic information that was not included in the journals. In order to create a cohesive understanding of the individual's experiences and background, the third method, the interview, was used to bridge the gap between the personal nature of the journals and the objectivity of the questionnaire. Interviews allowed the participants to reflect on why they wrote what they wrote in their journals and added depth to the demographic information.

To ensure that I had arrived at an interpretation close to the data, I relied on the process of participant confirmation. I obtained participant confirmation by maintaining contact with the participants throughout the interpretation process in a variety of ways. First, I communicated often via email. Second, each was mailed a copy of her narrative and provided a list of the themes that emerged from the second level of interpretation in Chapter Five, where I considered the women's experiences as a group. The responses to these materials depended on the individual participant and her level of comfort with her narrative. Four of the five women found no problems with their narratives or the themes created in Chapter Five, and asked to keep a copy of the narrative and the list of themes. However, Jessica had concerns about her narrative. She felt that, at times, she sounded

“unprofessional” when she used phrases such as “like” and “um.” She asked me to remove them from the final interview excerpts. While such changes would not greatly impact the overall outcome, they were very important to her. Therefore, in those instances where such extraneous words could be eliminated without compromising the meaning, they were removed.

Another concern Jessica had pertained to confidentiality. While she is content in her job, she would soon like to be hired as a full time employee instead of an intern. Therefore, she did not want to risk someone at her company reading a narrative that identified both her position and the company. Thus, to maintain confidentiality, and because it was not particularly crucial to the overall interpretation, the company name was removed from her narrative.

As the researcher, my relationship with Jessica and the other four participants bears mentioning, as it is possible that it played a role in their involvement with the interpretation process. I had no previous relationship with two of the participants, Amy and Marie, but I had known the other three, Alicia, Sara, and Jessica, for quite some time. Throughout the research process, these three women stayed in more frequent contact with me, inquiring about the progress of the research, and thereby becoming more invested in its outcome. I believe this is likely the reason why Jessica felt comfortable asking me to make the word changes and to remove her company’s name. She believed that she was an important part of the process, and wanted to be accurately represented.

The participants were also concerned with “doing the right thing” throughout the research process, often asking, “Is that (the answer) what you’re looking for?” or

something similar. Likewise, it is important to note that the participants were hesitant to reveal any truly negative feelings about their jobs, their careers, or their college experiences. For example, when Amy was asked about the least favorite part of her job, she mentioned the “challenging customers,” but quickly followed with an explanation of how these kinds of customers also provide learning opportunities for her. Given the volume and depth of the data collected with each participant, these issues were resolved in part through my contact with them throughout the interpretation process. In so doing, I achieved an in-depth understanding of the complexities involved in communicating an accurate representation of their lived experiences.

Constructing Knowledge of Experience

The personal narratives elucidated each participant’s individuality and uniqueness. Yet each participant’s use of dress within role transition and transformation of self are also meaningful when considered as parts within a larger whole. Therefore, I considered the similarities across the five narratives related to the concept of role transition, and asked the question: In what ways do the five women share experiences with transition and transformation? Because the dress changes required of someone who is transitioning from student to professional occur in public, she engages in a dialogue with others in her social setting regarding what is appropriate for her new role as professional. As discussed in Chapter Five, each woman soon realized the importance of her dress when she began her career. Similarly, her interaction with others, as well as feedback from colleagues, helped to reinforce this notion.

The participants perceive themselves to be in transition from student to professional, even though they have graduated. Their progress towards transformation is a daily performance done for others in the workplace. Through their use of dress, the women communicate and negotiate the conflict between who they were as students, who they are now as individuals in transition, and who they will be as full-fledged professionals. The opportunity to use dress to communicate the changing self provides the individual with a basis from which to define what it means to be a professional and to dress like one. Each believes that what she wears matters to her career success and to others' perceptions of her. In fact, for the five participants, the impact of the two is interrelated. When each woman dresses appropriately, she feels more capable and confident in her job, which, in turn, affects her colleagues' and supervisors' perceptions of her as a professional.

In this study, I discussed issues related to gender and dress in the workplace, specifically as they relate to expectations of women in the apparel industry. Two different, yet related, ideas came into play as a result of this discussion. The participants feel that there are different expectations for men than for women in the workplace. For example, the women deem a mini-skirt as inappropriate for the workplace, but obviously point out that this is not a concern for men in similar positions. Because of this, they believe that women have many more choices available for professional dress, making the decision-making process more complicated. This complexity illustrates the challenges facing female apparel industry professionals as they learn to maneuver through the expectations of the contemporary workplace.

Through the thematic interpretation of the narratives, I discussed the ways that consumption bridges the gap between who one is becoming, (i.e., transition), and who one will be in the future, (i.e., transformation). The self that the individual is becoming refers to the role change that each woman is presently engaged in and the shift that is involved in such a process. But, transformation, or the person that the individual will be in the future, refers to the new self that develops as a result of role transition. As a primary research objective, I aimed to consider how role transition leads to transformation of the self. Identifying consumption as an important part of the development of self allowed the relationship between role transition and transformation to be clearly understood.

By considering the themes that emerged from the personal narratives, I was able to understand the ways that all of the women use dress to make sense of their experiences. This thematic interpretation, based on the individual experiences of the five women, provides a “big picture” view of role transition and thus a foundation for further study. I also considered the concepts of personal and professional fulfillment with one’s job by understanding each woman’s future career goals, and the ways that the desire to achieve these goals motivates the individual’s self to continue evolving and changing until it is fully transformed. The relationship between fulfillment and the transformation of self is an area of much needed research, about which this study only scratched the surface.

Reflection

This research aimed to interpret the experiences of women making role transitions and transforming the self and highlights the ways that dress, identity, and the self intersect. The five women have unique experiences with role transition, but all use dress to perform their place within it. In this research, I found that the notion of fulfillment once the women achieved transformation was important to them. In order to be fulfilled, the women want to be successful in their careers, and part of being successful includes using dress to communicate this success. All five women wear dress that will help usher them through the liminal space, beginning when they left their student roles and ending at their professional ones, a place where they believe they will be fulfilled. Similarly, the presence of others greatly contributes to their feelings of fulfillment. The women rely on other individuals, mostly at work, but in other places as well, to provide an indication of success. When others respond positively to her performance of professional identity, her professional self is bolstered. Similarly, the opposite is true, as negative feedback damages her confidence and diminishes the professional self.

In this research, I found the consumption and use of dress to be the crucial vehicle for the mediation and development of the self. When the women purchase and wear dress that they believe is professional, they fuse different characteristics of their identities, such as education, experience, position, and dress, together to create the new self. Although this new self is still emerging, the women use dress to move from the student self to the professional one. In other words, the consumption of dress acts as a bridge connecting one self to the other and thus supporting the transition itself.

In this study, I focused on the use of dress in shaping the selves of new apparel industry professionals. By understanding dress as both a means for expression and a vehicle for change, I sought to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of role transition and transformation of the self, thereby avoiding assumptions and stereotypes about what it means to be a professional, (professional = business suit). In order to combat such stereotypes, I did not assume that any specific items of dress were classified as “professional” and others “unprofessional.” Instead, each woman identified and discussed items that fit the role change as she experienced it. Similarly, I situated the role change experience, whether in the context of the woman’s daily experiences on the job or at home, relative to her relationships with others. Understanding how the women express the transforming self through dress, one of the main objectives of this dissertation, was therefore achieved.

All of the women in this study share the experience of being employed in some aspect of the apparel industry. The unique nature of the industry in general, and the participant’s specific job in particular, has implications for the findings of this research. Constant exposure to dress, for the participants, creates a heightened awareness of its importance, prompting daily reflection on its significance in the workplace. Further research into apparel industry employees and their dress is needed to better understand the significance of the industry for expectations of dress. Exploring the experiences of individuals employed in other industries might provide contrast in terms of how dress is used to express identity and the self. Moreover, because the companies and departments where the participants in this study work are dominated by women, considering men’s

experiences with the student to professional role transition would provide a different perspective on meanings of dress within the apparel industry workplace.

In this study, I have explored the use of dress by women currently experiencing role transition. Exploring the use of and meanings associated with dress during this process was one of the primary research objectives of this study. As discussed in Chapter Two, I anticipated a focus on brands during the transition process. Surprisingly, the participants did not place strong emphasis on the importance of brands to their current selves. However, in discussion of their future professional selves, all mentioned the brand names that they see themselves wearing and associate with being successful. While this study identified the general importance of brand names, understanding the specific nature of the relationship between brands, role transition and transformation of the self requires further study. Likewise, popular media, dress role models, and celebrities were considered influential by the participants. According to the literature, the influence of these three factors is often important in the development of identity and formation of the self. However, the degree to which each of the three was important varied among the five women. Further exploration of the extent to which one or a combination of these factors enters into the use of dress during role transition would help to define the impact of external forces on transformation of the self.

The five women are seeking to leave their old selves behind in favor of creating new ones. In so doing, the women negotiate their personal preferences with the expectations of others through their dress choices. Similarly, they believe that the success of their future selves is rooted, to some extent, in the consumption choices they

plan to make in the future. More research that explores the use of symbolic consumption in the creation of a new self is needed, as it would shed light on the connection this study found between dressing as a professional and being a professional.

This research focuses on a specific time period in the lives of the five women. Each has recently graduated and now works in a full-time job for the first time in her life. The transition period between graduation and starting a career allows for experimentation with different kinds of dress. In the liminal space, the women experiment with dress to perform in their new role as professionals. In this study, becoming a professional emerged as an important rite of passage that allows for creation of a transformed self. Dress is the critical link between who one was as a student and who she is becoming as a professional. Examination of how dress changes during other kinds of role transition, such as that of motherhood or retirement, would provide further illustration of the ways individuals use dress to navigate the liminal space. Similarly, a longitudinal study that follows the progress of the five women in this study would add an additional dimension to the study of dress in the liminal space. Considering the women's experiences over a five year period would broaden our understanding of dress once the role transition process is complete and the women experience the transformed self.

In conclusion, transformation is the result of successful role transition. As illustrated by my interpretation of the five women's experiences, dress provides a unique location for understanding how individuals see themselves changing into working professionals. The women are experiencing simultaneous changes in their roles and their dress, something that they readily acknowledge. Therefore, studying dress in the context

of role transition further highlights its importance to the fabric of our social, cultural, and historical understandings of the human experience. As this study has shown, these five women are making daily dress choices that will help them mold their present selves into the selves they wish to become.

REFERENCES

- Aaker, J. L. (1997). Dimensions of brand personality. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34, 347-356.
- Anderson, J. A., & Schoening, G. T. (1996). The nature of the individual in communication research. In D. Grodin, & T. R. Lindlof (Eds.), *Constructing the Self in a Mediated World* (pp. 206-225). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Algesheimer, R., Dholokia, U. M., & Herrmann, A. (2005). The social influence of brand community: Evidence from European car clubs. *Journal of Marketing*, 69, 19-34.
- Ash, J., & Wilson, E. (1992). Introduction. In J. Ash, & E. Wilson (Eds.), *Chic thrills: A fashion reader* (pp. xi-xvii). Berkeley, CA: University of California.
- Austin, G. (1990). Feminist Theories: Paying attention to women. In G. Austin (Ed.), *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* (pp. 1-20). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan.
- Banim, M. & Guy, A. (2001). Dis/continued selves: Why do women keep clothes they no longer wear? In A. Guy, E. Green, & M. Banim (Eds), *Through the wardrobe: Women's relationships with their clothes* (pp. 203-220). New York: Berg.
- Barthes, R. (2004). *The language of fashion*. Oxford: Berg.
- Bauman, R. (1984). *Story, performance and event: Contextual studies in oral narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

- Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(2), 139-168.
- Bettis, P. J., & Adams, N. G. (2005). Landscapes of girlhood. In P. J. Bettis, & N. G. Adams (Eds.), *Geographies of girlhood: Identities in between* (pp. 1-18). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble*. New York: Routledge.
- Calefato, P. (2004). *The clothed body*. Oxford: Berg.
- Cantor, N., Norem, J. K., Niedenthal, P. M., Langston, C. A., & Brower, A. M. (1987). Life tasks, self-concept ideals, and cognitive strategies in a life transition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53(6), 1178-1191.
- Crane, D. (2000). *Fashion and its social agendas: Class, gender and identity in clothing*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Rochberg-Halton, E. (1981). *The meaning of things: Domestic symbols and the self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Damhorst, M. L. (2005). Dress as non-verbal communication. In M. L. Damhorst, K. A. Miller-Spillman, & S. O. Michelman (Eds.), *The meanings of dress* (2nd ed.), (pp. 67-80). New York: Fairchild.
- Damhorst, M. L. (2005). Introduction. In M. L. Damhorst, K. A. Miller-Spillman, & S. O. Michelman (Eds.), *The meanings of dress* (2nd ed.), (pp. 1-12). New York: Fairchild.
- Davis, F. (1992). *Fashion, culture, and identity*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.
- Derrida, J., & Ronnell, A. (1980). The law of genre. *Critical Inquiry*, 7(1), 55-80.

- Dittmar, H. (1992). *The social psychology of material possessions*. Hertfordshire, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Dolan, J. (1988). *The feminist spectator as critic*. Ann Arbor, MI: University Research.
- Eastburg, M., Johnson, W. B., & Woo, R. (1988). The real-ideal self-concept discrepancy and its relation to guilt. *Psychological Reports*, 63(3), 997.
- Edwards, R. & Ribbens, J. (1998). Living on the edges: Public knowledge, private lives, personal experience. In J. Ribbens & R. Edwards (Eds.), *Feminist dilemmas in qualitative research: Public knowledge and private lives* (pp. 1-23). London: Sage.
- Ellis, C., Kiesinger, C. E., & Tillmann-Healy, L. M. (1997). Interactive interviewing: Talking about emotional experience. In R. Hertz (Ed.), *Reflexivity and voice* (pp. 119-149). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Enninger, W. (1992). Clothing. In R. Bauman (Ed.), *Folklore, cultural performances and popular entertainments: A communications-centered handbook* (pp. 217-224). New York: Oxford University.
- Entwistle, J. (2000). *The fashioned body: Fashion, dress, and modern social theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Felski, R. (2000). *Doing time: Feminist theory and postmodern culture*. New York: New York University.
- Fine, E. C., & Speer, J. H. (Eds.). (1992). Introduction. *Performance, culture, and identity* (pp. 1-22). Westport, CT: Praeger.

- Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24, 343-373.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Green, E. (2001). Suiting ourselves: Women professors using clothes to signal authority, belonging and personal style. In M. Banim, E. Green, & A. Guy (Eds.), *Through the wardrobe: Women's relationships with their clothes* (pp. 97-116). New York: Berg.
- Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: The meaning of style*. London: Routledge.
- Hegland, J. E., & Nelson, N. J. (2002). Cross-dressers in cyberspace: Exploring the internet as a tool for expressing gendered identity. *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*, 7(2/3), 139-161.
- Hess, J., & Story, J. (2005). Trust-based commitment: Multidimensional consumer-brand relationships. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 22(6), 313-322.
- Hill, R. P. (1991). Homeless women, special possessions, and the meaning of "home": An ethnographic case study. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 18, 298-309.
- Holbrook, M. B. (1993). Nostalgia and consumption preferences: Some emerging patterns of consumer tastes. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20, 245-256.
- Hultgren, F. H. (1989). Being called by the stories of student teachers: Dialogical partners in the journey of teaching. In F. H. Hultgren, & D. Loomer (Eds.), *Alternative modes of inquiry in home economics research* (pp. 117-139). Peoria, IL: Glencoe.

- Husserl, E. (1965). *Phenomenology and the crisis of philosophy*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Kaiser, S. B. (1996). *The social psychology of clothing: Symbolic appearances in context* (2nd Rev. ed.). New York: Fairchild.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Inter-Views*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Larkin, M., Watts, S., & Clifton, E. (2006). Giving voice and making sense in interpretive phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 102-120.
- Lennon, S. J., Rudd, N. A., Sloan, B. & Kim, J. S. (1999). Attitudes toward gender roles, self-esteem, and body image: Application of a model. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 17(4), 191-202.
- Leopold, E. (1992). The manufacture of the fashion system. In J. Ash, & E. Wilson (Eds.), *Chic thrills: A fashion reader* (pp. 101-117). Berkeley, CA: University of California.
- McCracken, G. (1988). *The long interview*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- McCracken, G. (1989). Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(3), 310-321.
- Mead, G. H., & Miller, D. L. (1982). *The individual and the social self: Unpublished work of George Herbert Mead*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.
- Mehta, R., & Belk, R. W. (1991). Artifacts, identity, and transition: Favorite possessions of Indians and Indian immigrants to the United States. *Journal of Consumer*

- Research, 17*, 398-411.
- Mensch, J. R. (2001). *Postfoundational phenomenology: Husserlian reflections on presence and embodiment*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968). *The visible and the invisible*. Chicago, IL: Northwestern University.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research & case study applications*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, D. L. (1982). *The individual and the social self: Unpublished work of George Herbert Mead*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.
- Miller-Spillman, K. A. (2005). Dress in the workplace. In M. L. Damhorst, K. A. Miller-Spillman, & S. O. Michelman (Eds.), *The meanings of dress* (2nd ed.), (pp. 217-224). New York: Fairchild.
- Muniz, A. M., Jr., & O'Guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research, 27*, 412-432.
- Murray, J. B. (2002). The politics of consumption: A re-inquiry on Thompson and Haytko's (1997) "Speaking of Fashion." *Journal of Consumer Research, 29*(3), 427-440.
- Neisser, U. (1993). The self perceived. In U. Neisser (Ed.), *The perceived self* (pp. 3-24). Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Noble, C. H., & Walker, B. A. (1997). Exploring the relationships among liminal transitions, symbolic consumption, and the extended self. *Psychology &*

- Marketing*, 14(1), 29-47.
- Ogilvie, D. M. (1987). The undesired self: A neglected variable in personality research. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52(2), 379-385.
- Piacentini, M., & Mailer, G. (2004). Symbolic consumption in teenagers' clothing choices. *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, 3(3), 251-262.
- Reck, A. J. (Ed.). (1964). *Selected writings: George Herbert Mead*. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Roach-Higgins, M. E., & Eicher, J. B. (1992). Dress and identity. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 10(4), 1-8.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rubinstein, R. P. (1995). *Dress codes: Meanings and messages in American culture*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Sampson, E. E. (1989). The deconstruction of the self. In J. Shotter, & K. J. Gergen (Eds.), *Texts of identity* (pp. 1-19). London: Sage.
- Schouten, J. W. (1991). Selves in transition: Symbolic consumption in personal rites of passage and identity reconstruction. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17(4), 412-425.
- Shaw, T. A. (1994). The semiotic mediation of identity. *Ethos*, 22(1), 83-119.
- Singer, I. (1998). *Reality transformed: Film as meaning and technique*. Cambridge, MA: MIT.
- Sirgy, M. J. (1982). Self-concept in consumer behavior: A critical review. *Journal of*

- Consumer Research*, 9, 287-300.
- Sokolowski, R. (2000). *Introduction to phenomenology*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University.
- Solomon, M. R. (2004). *Consumer behavior: Buying, having, being*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Solomon, M. R., & Rabolt, N. J. (2004). *Consumer behavior in fashion*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Spender, D. (1985). *Man made language* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Sprague, J. (2005). *Feminist methodologies for critical researchers*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira.
- Stenstad, G. (2006). *Transformations: Thinking after Heidegger*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin.
- Stone, G. P. (1995). Appearance and the self. In M. Roach-Higgins, J. Eicher, & K. Johnson (Eds.), *Dress and identity* (pp. 216-243). New York: Fairchild.
- Sutherland, C. (2004). *Unzipping gender: Sex, cross-dressing and culture*. Oxford: Berg.
- Taminiaux, J. (1991). *Heidegger and the project of fundamental ontology*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Thompson, C. J., & Hirschman, E. C. (1995). Understanding the socialized body: A Poststructuralist Analysis of Consumers' Self-Conception, Body Images, and Self-Care Practices. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(2), 139-153.
- Thompson, C. J., & Haytko, D. L. (1997). Speaking of fashion: Consumers' uses of fashion discourses and the appropriation of countervailing cultural meanings.

Journal of Consumer Research, 24(1), 15-42

Thompson, C. J., Rindfleisch, A., & Arsel, Z. (2006). Emotional branding and the strategic value of the Doppelganger brand image. *Journal of Marketing*, 70, 50-64.

Thomson, I. D. (2005). *Heidegger on ontotheology*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University.

Tian, K., & Belk, R. W. (2005). Extended self and possessions in the workplace. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32, 297-310.

Tortora, P. G., & Eubank, K. (2005). *Survey of historic costume* (2nd ed.). New York: Fairchild.

Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Turner, V. (1982). *From ritual to theatre: The seriousness of play*. New York: Performing Arts Journal.

van Gennep, A. (1960). *The rites of passage*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.

van Manen, M. (1990). Turning to the nature of lived experience. In M. van Manen, (Ed.), *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (pp. 35-46). New York: State University of New York.

Wattanasuwan, K. (2005). The self and symbolic consumption. *The Journal of American Academy of Business*, 6(1), 179-184.

White, D. R., & Hellerich, G. R. (1998). *Labyrinths of the mind: The self in the postmodern age*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.

Wilson, E. (1992). Fashion and the postmodern body. In J. Ash, & E. Wilson (Eds.), *Chic thrills: A fashion reader* (pp. 3-16). Berkeley, CA: University of California.

Yurchisin, J., Yan, R. N, Watchravesringkan, K., & Chen, C. (2008). Investigating the role of life status changes and negative emotions in compensatory consumption among college students. *College Student Journal*, 42(3), 860-868.

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

1. Please describe your college education. When did you graduate? Where did you graduate from and what was your major?
2. What drew you to this major? This career? Why?
3. What is your job title? What are your daily responsibilities?
4. What do you like most about your career? Why?
5. What do you like least? Why?
6. How would describe your clothing choices now that you are working versus when you were in college?
7. What would a typical “work day’s” clothing choice consist of?
8. Do your daily work activities and responsibilities dictate what you wear? If so, how? If not, then what does?
9. Do you have a dress code at your job? Please describe it.
10. What do you think that your clothes say about you in your career?
11. What career do you see yourself in ten years from now?
12. Do you think your clothes will change as you pursue your career in the apparel industry? Please explain.
13. Are there any items that you really want to purchase right now? Why? What are your plans to acquire them?
14. Do you think what you wear is important to your career? If so, why? Please explain.

15. What do you think is inappropriate to wear to work? How about inappropriate in general? Please explain the difference.
16. Overall, how do you see your personal style changing as you continue to become a professional?
17. Has professional clothing helped you to feel like you are no longer a student and finally a professional? If so, why? If not, why not? Please explain any additional factors.
18. Please describe for me the experience of keeping a journal. Have you kept a journal before this project? What did you like about it? What didn't you like?
19. Did keeping a journal change the way you thought about your dress for work? Why or why not? Please explain.
20. Please share a day's activities from your journal and why that would be considered a typical day. How about an unusual day? Why is it unusual?
21. What are the most important items in your closet for work? Why? What do these say about you?
22. Have you ever had anyone positively comment about what you wear to work? Please explain the experience. How did that make you feel?
23. How about negatively? Please explain the experience and how it made you feel.
24. Have you ever felt that you were dressed inappropriately for work, but no one actually said anything? Please explain the experience and how you felt.
25. How about a social experience, whether at work or not? Have you ever felt over-dressed or under-dressed? Please explain.

26. Is there anyone that you look up to or whose style that you admire? Who? Why?
27. What is it about this person (people) that you like?
28. Where would you say that your greatest influence for professional dress has come from? Why?
29. Is there anything else that you would like to share about participating in this research experience?

Appendix B: Journal Prompts

INSTRUCTIONS: For the next two weeks (14 days), please use the provided journal to write down what you wear each day. Include in each day's entry the activities that you were engaged in, your thoughts and feelings on your dress selections in addition to the specific items of dress.

PLEASE COMPLETE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR JOURNAL:

1. When you were in college, did you picture yourself in the career that you are in now? Explain. Where do you see yourself in 10 years? What will you be wearing?
2. Who is your role model with regards to dress? Why is this person your role model? What are the qualities about them, as a person, that you most admire?
3. Please describe an experience when dress was meaningful. Why was it meaningful? How did you feel?
4. How does your weekend dress differ from your work clothes? Do you feel differently? How? Why?
5. How has your dress changed since you graduated from college? Were you ready for this change? What has been unexpected about the change in dress? What did you anticipate happening with your dress, but didn't? Did you have to buy a lot of clothes? If so, what and why? If not, what had you so prepared for your new career?

6. Explain a time when you were dressed inappropriately. Why was it inappropriate? How did you feel? How do you think others felt about you?
7. Describe a time when you were dressed appropriately, but also felt like you were “fooling” someone or “acting” like someone else. How did you feel? Did you think you were believable? If so, why? If not, why not?
8. Describe your decision making process when you get dressed for work. What do you think about? What influences your decisions?
9. What do you think about when you go shopping for work clothes? Please explain some considerations. Where do you usually shop? How often do you shop for work clothes? How about for other types of clothes?
10. What is one item of dress that you would like to have more than any other? Why? How did you decide on this? How long have you wanted it? Do you have plans to acquire it? What do you think this item says about the wearer, in this case, you?

APPENDIX C

Demographic Questionnaire*

Name: _____

Birth (Maiden) Name: _____

Current Address: _____

Phone/Email: _____

Birth Date: _____

Birth Place: _____

Residence Pattern:

Born in _____ until _____ big, medium, little, village, rural

Moved to _____ until _____ big, medium, little, village, rural

Moved to _____ until _____ big, medium, little, village, rural

Moved to _____ until _____ big, medium, little, village, rural

Birth Order (check one): 1st _____ 2nd _____ 3rd _____ 4th _____ 5th _____ other _____

Sisters:

First Name: _____ present age _____ now lives in _____

First Name: _____ present age _____ now lives in _____

First Name: _____ present age _____ now lives in _____

Brothers:

First Name: _____ present age _____ now lives in _____

First Name: _____ present age _____ now lives in _____

First Name: _____ present age _____ now lives in _____

Parents:

Mother's name: _____ present age _____ now lives in _____

Father's name: _____ present age _____ now lives in _____

Marital Status: _____

Mother's place of birth: _____

Father's place of birth: _____

Occupation of mother: _____

Occupation of father: _____

Occupation and Education:

Occupation: _____

Company: _____

Number of Employees: _____

How long employed: _____

Major duties: _____

Number of employees that you supervise: _____

Education: _____

Highest Level: _____

Institution Name: _____

Emphasis/Major _____

Marital Status and History:

Marital Status: _____

Children:

Name: _____ Age: _____ Gender: _____

Name: _____ Age: _____ Gender: _____

Name: _____ Age: _____ Gender: _____

Occupation of Spouse: _____

Religion:

Denomination: _____

How often do you worship?: _____

*Parts of this questionnaire are informed by McCracken, 1988, p. 67.

Appendix D: IRB Consent to Act as Human Participant Form

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM**

Project Title: This woman's work: An exploration women's experiences with role transition.

Project Director: Holly Lentz

Participant's Name: _____

DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES:

The goal of this study is to explore the role of dress in the transition from full time student to full time professional as experienced by women. To do this, interviews, journals, and demographic questionnaires with female graduates will be conducted.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be interviewed concerning your experiences that relate to making the change from college student to professional and the importance of your dress choices as they pertain to this experience. The interview will be audio-taped and will last between one-hundred twenty (120) and three-hundred (300) minutes.

You may terminate the interview or audio-taping at any time. You may ask any questions you may have about the interview or the study at any time. Full confidentiality of participation will be maintained. Actual names will not be used in written accounts of the research project, if you agree. Digital audio files will be saved on the investigator's computer and password protected. Any written transcriptions of the interviews will be kept in a locked cabinet in the investigator's office. Data will be disposed of via shredding and the digital audio files will be erased within ten years from the initial start date of data collection.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:

It is anticipated that there are no psychological, physical, or sociological risks involved in participating in this study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

As an extrinsic benefit, participants will receive a gift card in appreciation for their participation. Participants will benefit by having the opportunity to share experiences with moving from college student to professional and opinions, views, and attitudes as to the importance of dress. Also, society will benefit from the sharing of this information regarding the important role that dress plays in negotiating the transition in roles.

By signing this consent form, you agree that you understand the procedures and any risks and benefits involved in this research. You are free to refuse to participate or to

withdraw your consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice; your participation is entirely voluntary. Your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which insures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and this consent form. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions regarding the research itself will be answered by Holly Lentz by calling (910) 795-7782. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participation in the project.

By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate in the project described to you by Holly Lentz.

Participant's Signature*

Date