

Categories of Design for Sustainability: A Wearer's Perspective of Classic Design

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family:

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## **Abstract**

This research examined classic design through the three interrelated aspects of the aesthetic response—form, viewer, and context. Classic is a term applied to clothing, regularly, but can reference a variety meanings, including a signature example of a particular artist, style or period; a designed object that has attained iconic status; and objects that are timeless, long lasting, and with universal appeal. Classic is considered timeless in its fashionability; its basic formal attributes and meanings have changed very little. Therefore, the investigation into classic design included how the aesthetic response to the form, results in associated expressive and symbolic attributes and how those impact and inform classic design's role in the fashion system.

To explore a potential common understanding and aesthetic experience of the formal attributes, viewer's experience, and the cultural context of classic design two pilot studies were conducted. The results of these pilot studies indicated that the interpretation of formal attributes determined how classic design was applied within personal and cultural contexts. Based on these findings, surveys and interviews were used in the final study and included both personal and standard (to all participants) garments as stimuli. Survey and interview participants were undergraduate students, with fashion involvement, enrolled in a Fashion: Trends and Communication course at the University of Minnesota.

Data analysis focused on the framework of formal, expressive, and symbolic attributes described as part of and associated with classic design (DeLong, 1998). Participants discussed many aspects related to the formal attributes in their evaluation of

classic design. However, the results gave no indication of a universal set of formal attributes, or form, essential for classic design because according to the findings, classic design exists primarily in the viewer and context portions of the aesthetic response. The form is important as the physical object for the aesthetic experience but classic design is not the form itself but rather it is the viewer's personal and cultural interpretation of that form. Therefore, the form of classic design often varies, but personal interpretations and applications of any given classic design varied significantly less.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Shedroff (2009) believes that sustainability is essential for the future of design and as such designers must be aware of and taught how to achieve sustainability in their work and their products. *Design is the Problem* (2009) discusses many ways to design for sustainability but of particular interest is the suggestion of designing for durability; creating a product that a consumer will enjoy and keep for a long time. While durability includes such things as considering serviceability and maintenance, of particular interest in the area of fashion is creating classic designs; designs that maintain their appeal and function because of choices related to the form. As such, classic design is one potential way to increase sustainability in a design industry that currently relies heavily on the process of planned obsolescence through rapidly changing trends (Shedroff, 2009). According to Schor and Taylor (2002) planned obsolescence is most clearly seen in “fast fashion” which encourages rapid merchandise turnover and relies on consumers’ insatiable desire for the new and innovative. The resulting emphasis on staying up-to-date with fashion trends calls into question the place of classic design in the modern consumer’s experience, who is increasingly and exponentially exposed to rapidly changing trends through the internet and fast fashion chains, like H&M and Zara.

One possible answer is the slow fashion movement. This movement has roots in the slow food movement, which focuses on knowing where and how food is produced and prepared, thus increasing enjoyment through quality rather than quantity in consumption. In a similar manner, the slow fashion movement has focused much of its

attention in changing how consumers perceive or conceive the consumption process, and more importantly, how they relate to the apparel product, the design (Clark, 2008; Fuad-Luke, 2009). The goal of the slow fashion movement, much like the slow food movement, is that an article of clothing be enjoyed and savored for more than a few days or weeks; it “focuses greater attention on valuing and knowing the object, and demands design that generates significant experiences” (Clark, 2008, p.440). Slow fashion then includes a call for a more sustained aesthetic experience of or response to design. Watson and Yan (2013) found that the fast fashion consumer experienced hedonic enjoyment through the process of shopping, of continually searching for something new, while the slow fashion consumer experienced hedonic enjoyment in the design of the garment. In that study, the slow fashion consumer equated design with art and as such felt that the aesthetic response was paramount to their experiences with clothing design (Watson & Yan, 2013). It is therefore essential to understand how the various components of the aesthetic response intersect within objects identified as classic design.

DeLong (1998) defines the aesthetic response as a person’s “involvement in looking and [their] resulting experiences stimulated by looking, such as pleasure or satisfaction” (p. 2). Furthermore, the aesthetic response is individual and collective, a personal response and a response that is influenced by cultural norms and social interactions (DeLong, 1998). Thus the aesthetic response to classic design, is influenced by personal desire as well as collective knowledge of cultural context as might be seen in an object that has achieved iconic status, such as a Chanel jacket. The aesthetic response occurs on one or both levels for every viewer in their encounters with any designed

object, every article of clothing or ensemble. Therefore, within the current fashion system it is important to understand how this response differs for classic design as opposed to articles intended to be less long lasting such as clothing produced in accord with the fast fashion business model. This complexity of relationship is one of the challenges of classic design and its connection to the aesthetic response.

DeLong (1998) discusses the aesthetic response or experience of dress and describes three interrelated parts that influence the aesthetic response to clothing: form, viewer, and context. Form includes the details of an article of clothing, such as line, fabric, shape as well as the body and how the body interacts with a piece of clothing. Additionally, a particular combination or relation of such formal traits can be called a style. The viewer is the observer of the design and can be either the wearer, viewing themselves, or another person. The viewer brings individual knowledge and personal context to their experience of themselves or others. Finally, the viewer relates to the design through the lens of context. Context is both the immediate physical surroundings the viewer perceives as well as a cultural context that contributes to their interpretation. All of these parts impact and relate to each other in the final aesthetic response. So then, when focusing on apparel or clothing in particular, it is essential to examine the complexity of how classic design is expressed, responded to and functions in the world through its form, context, and relationship with the viewer, all within a fashion system predicated on cyclical or even continual change.

While all three components play an interrelated role in understanding the aesthetic response to classic design, it is the form over which the designer has the greatest

influence. It is the designer who is responsible for creating the final form of a designed object, though this does not imply that the wearer/viewer does not re-create the form to function within his/her personal context. However, it is the nature of classic design to be adaptable to various contexts presented by potential wearers. The word classic is frequently used to designate designed objects that are timeless, long lasting, and with universal appeal (Smith, 2003). The various definitions of classic design imply that an object can not only be sustainable in its appeal thus enjoyed and used for many years, but also an object that may eventually become part of a cultural collective consciousness or aesthetic experience, so much so that it maintains a rather stable context for a range of viewers. In fact, the concept of classic's adaptability over time, persons, and contexts was prominent in the various traits chosen by participants in several pilot studies conducted regarding the nature of classic design. Conversely, the definition of fashion is change, within the prevailing style, so then determining how classic design indeed works within a system that relies and consciously promotes consumers' need to stay up-to-date, is a pertinent and timely question. This is especially true as discussions about the sustainability of the current apparel industry and fashion system continue to escalate in significance and imperative. Furthermore, by first examining the form's role and its concrete attributes, as part of the aesthetic response to classic design, before examining the expressive and symbolic attributes that result, a clearer picture can be obtained about how to create a classic design that has the potential to become slow fashion, (something long lasting) within a system currently focused on rapid change and planned obsolescence as exemplified by fast fashion.



This research is focused on examining classic design through the aesthetic response. All aspects of the aesthetic response—form, viewer, and context—are essential and certainly relevant as well as interrelated, however from a design standpoint the form is the foundation upon which the other aspects are built. It is to the form that the viewer reacts and responds based upon personal, cultural and possibly universal contexts. Further, the viewer often categorizes the style of a design based on his/her interpretation of form. Designers do not generally manipulate context but rather through knowledge of viewers' contexts create designs that match personal inspiration and goals, potential viewers' needs and desires, and meet any constraints that impact the success of their design to do so. Thus, as a starting point to answering questions about how classic design might be created and subsequently influence viewer behaviors and contexts within the fashion system, the form of classic design will be investigated through the viewer's aesthetic response. The investigation will also include how the aesthetic response to the form, results in associated expressive and symbolic attributes and how those impact and inform classic design's role in the fashion system.

This research will address the following questions:

1. What are the formal attributes of classic design? What aspects of structuring within the form—layout, surface, and light and shadow—are most relevant to creating classic design and to consumers categorizing a design as classic?
2. How does the form, from the viewer's perspective, impact the longevity of design or its potential for continued contextual relevance, emotional

attachment and positive aesthetic response? And what role do these characteristics have in a design's categorization as classic?

3. How do various contexts, personal, cultural and/or historical shape a design's interpretation or application as classic in the fashion system and in individual usage?

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Definitions of Classic

The term classic is defined in multiple ways in the literature. However, these various definitions are incorporated into multiple concepts and influences simultaneously. The application of the term ‘classic’ to objects as diverse as furniture, literature, industrial design, and clothing has grown in prominence and often evokes a sense of prestige for both the designer and the object. While most people do not wish to acquire only items categorized as ‘classic’, owning at least a few ‘classic’ pieces has become foundational advice for decorating a room or having an exceptional collection of books, or building a functional wardrobe. In fact though, classic has multiple common uses and definitions. Classic can refer to a signature example of a particular artist, style or period, such as a ‘classic’, late 1950s, wool, tweed Chanel suit. As well, classic can indicate a designed object that has attained iconic status (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 1985). This designation does not primarily refer to any inherent, identifiable physical features of the object but rather references the object’s original context, for example the enduring, black leather jacket and its identification with the youth culture of the 1950s and 60s (DeLong, Gage, Park, & Sklar, 2011). Often items consistently regarded as classic possess a deep level of enculturation involving consumer’s knowledge surrounding their original contexts as well as identifiable formal design features, such as line and color. Additionally, while the word classic is frequently used in these ways it is more frequently

used in design, especially fashion design, to designate objects that are timeless, long lasting, and with universal appeal (Smith, 2003).

Finally, the term classic is often used in fashion literature to categorize designed objects. This application of classic is similar to how artworks are categorized, even among a variety of artists, because they reflect similar choices in color, line, use of space, and technique. This definition of classic implies that the product, in this case, the garment, categorized as classic design should share similar formal properties across contexts and designers and that these properties should remain relatively stable. However, if classic design is not also considered fashionable then its relevance within the fashion system is questionable.

## **The Fashion System**

### **Definition of fashion**

Therefore, for classic design to be effective and appealing it must exist and function within, not outside of fashion. Fashion can be defined in two primary ways: 1) as a systematic pattern of continual style changes that can be applied to a variety of goods, services, and behaviors and 2) as dress linked to changes in prevailing appearance and clothing styles and behaviors (Aspers & Godart, 2013; Espisito, 2011; Gronow, 2009; Kawamura, 2005). Fashion as change has emerged into current scholarship with a solid if varied foundation of theories that seek to explain the phenomena and its moving parts. Lynch and Strauss (2007) and Aspers and Godart (2013) locate the impetus of fashion within a variety of human behaviors that fall under the aegis of fields of study as diverse as psychology, art history and anthropology. In particular, recent scholarship has

focused on promoting the benefits of studying fashion through an interdisciplinary lens that sees fashion in more than clothing (Kawamura, 2005). Therefore, if fashion's literal existence is based upon its commitment to continual change, newness, and innovation then on some level a successful classic design must have the ability to maintain a certain stability while allowing for some fashionable changes. So then, a particular classic design potentially exists in multifarious manifestations and as a result of various personal motivations.

### **Fashion as individual and collective behavior**

The specific motivations that influence people's involvement in fashion's continual cycle of change and newness are both individual and collective. Fashion as individual expression, especially in the modern world, is driven by the desire to distinguish oneself from others (Lynch & Strauss, 2007). Several theories, based on Freudian psychoanalytic theories, revolve around distinguishing oneself sexually, through the tension between modesty and display and the communication of one's sexuality through clothing (Lynch & Strauss, 2007; Steele, 1985). Another set of theories focused on individual motivations is connected to the consumer culture that has predominated since the early twentieth century. Consumption driven theories primarily understand that fashion purchases are made in order to feel better about oneself and to create or buy a desired lifestyle or personality (Lynch & Strauss, 2007).

However, presenting or expressing the self through fashion, in this case apparel, can also be about collective motivations. According to Lynch and Strauss (2007) "sociological explanations of fashion change, [function] both to mark us as members of a

social group and to define us as individuals...” and as a result integrate many individual motivations within collective motivations (p. 59). Early theorists (Spencer, Simmel and Veblen) believed collective motivations for fashion change were based either on one group emulating another more desirable group or as a tangible (and highly visible) means of establishing and declaring social status (Carter, 2003).

More recently, Blumer (1969) theorized that the adoption of particular fashions help people cope with a rapidly changing world by allowing them express their membership or belonging to particular groups. He also believed that individual motivations for fashion adoption are subject to collective ones; there is a desire to be unique but not too unique (Blumer, 1969). Similarly, Davis (1992) argued that the unstable relationship between self and collective identity in modern society resulted in fashion change. He believed that people were continually attempting to accurately express their identity but external factors, like “shifting perceptions of gender, status, and/or sexuality” make identity a moving target (Lynch & Strauss, 2007, p.74). The never-ending cycle of new fashions allow people to collectively respond to this type of identity ambivalence (Davis, 1992).

### **Fashion involvement and gender**

Though fashion functions as a means of expressing collective and individual identity, not every group participates in this means of self-expression equally. There are definitive differences in the levels of fashion involvement among consumers groups. Fashion involvement means the degree with which consumers incorporate fashion into their lives. The greater the fashion involvement the more likely someone is to expend

time and effort in acquiring not only fashion products but also knowledge (Evrard & Aurier, 1996; Hourigan & Bougure, 2012; Martin, 1998).

One of the most significant differences is between men's and women's fashion involvement. According to O'Cass (2001) women's fashion involvement is greater than men's both with the product and in purchase decisions. Additionally, she found that the motivations for fashion involvement vary between men and women. Women's fashion involvement, in contrast to men's, was significantly motivated by "desires for social approval via image maintenance" as well as the pleasure they experienced through the sensory aspects of fashion (O'Cass, 2001, p.11). Pentecost and Andrews (2010) also found that women experience more pleasure and enthusiasm for fashion and as a result were more likely to engage in impulse buying and to spend more money on fashion goods. Gitimu, Workman, and Robinson (2013) studied consumer garment quality evaluation based on the following cues: 1) extrinsic (brand name, cost), 2) intrinsic (construction, fabric, notions), 3) appearance (color, design features, hand, and style in relation to the figure), and 4) performance (care, durability, textile properties). They found that women's greater fashion knowledge and enthusiasm impacted the number of cues they used to evaluate clothing before purchasing; women consistently used all of the cues (Gitimu, Workman, & Robinson, 2013). Overall, then women have more interest and greater social impetus for fashion and as a result are willing to invest more thought, time, and money into the purchase and use of the continuous new and innovative offerings of the fashion system.

## **Classic Design and the Fashion System**

Loschek (2009) explored what innovation and creativity mean within the fashion system, and how the terms new, creative, and innovative can be applied to particular types of ‘fashionable’ styles. For instance, she postulates that revival or retro styles are not necessarily innovation. She contends, rather, that retro styles are continually negotiated within contemporary views about their original context that then inform a particular aesthetic response (Loschek, 2009). Regardless, they can often be considered new in their interpretations through combinations with other retro styles as well as more current fashions (Loschek, 2009; MacKinney-Valentin, 2010). Thus some retro or revival styles might also be considered classic design, which Loschek (2009) defines as new to the viewer but not as innovation; classic is merely a reinvention or redecoration of a past design. It is this reinterpretation without altering the underlying form for which the viewer maintains certain cultural contextual knowledge that Loschek (2009) attributes to classic design.

Simmel (Carter, 2003) also described classic design’s seeming double-standard and speculated that some form of continued positive aesthetic response or experience was occurring that allowed for its longevity or continued acceptance in the fashion system. In other words, classic design can be adjusted or embellished so that it has enough newness or novelty to induce a positive cognitive reassessment or aesthetic response but enough familiarity that its form and contexts are still readily understood by the viewer. This according to Bianchi (2002) is the formula that produces pleasure in viewing designed artifacts and for clothing pleasure in wearing as well. An example is the black leather



jacket, whose form expresses a cultural context that still resonates and allows various contemporary manifestations as long as stability in its main formal attributes, such as material and color are maintained. Over the years, designers have added or changed (and possibly subtracted) design elements from the basic formal attributes of the black leather jacket to create a design that continues to be adopted as a fashionable style among a wide range of consumers.

Paul Nystrom (1928) first looked at how clothing styles are adopted across groups or populations. He tracked three curves that occur over time: a fad, a normal fashion curve, and a classic curve (Figure 1). Nystrom's (1928) normal fashion curve is very similar to Rogers' (1995) theory of the diffusion of innovations' curve. The diffusion of innovations' curve (Figure 2) is often used to explain the lifecycles of trends in the fashion industry (Lynch & Strauss, 2007). The diffusion of innovations curve is divided based on the percentage of adopters of an innovation at a particular time (Rogers, 1995). Generally, at first new innovations are slowly adopted by those who are trendsetters. According to Rogers' (1995) theory as time passes the percentage of new adopters for an innovation increases steadily along a bell curve until reaching a peak after which it declines as the number of new adopters decreases significantly. Additionally, those who were early adopters typically drop the now passé style in favor of a newer trend. However, the diffusion of innovations' curve does not explain what happens when an innovation or style does not decrease in numbers of new adopters or lose its original adopters, such as a classic design that continues to have reinventions (Loschek, 2009; Simmel qtd. in Carter, 2003). In contrast, Nystrom (1928) charted a design or style

phenomenon that, though it demonstrates a slight dip, levels off and never loses its acceptance as a desirable fashion.

There is limited scholarly research regarding what the formal attributes of classic design are and how they allow a significant number of wearers to present a fashionable appearance over a long period of acceptance as seen in Nystrom's (1928) fashion curve. However, regarding women's wardrobes, at least until around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, considerable advice exists defining the role of a classic design within the fashion system (Feldon, 1982). In her 1938 book *Fashion is Spinach* Elizabeth Hawes posits that fashion is the enemy of style. It is fashion that says "last winter's coat may be in perfect physical condition, but you can't wear it. You can't wear it because it has a belt and this year '[fashion is] not showing belts'" (p.6). She further states that fashion persuades women that good lines are not as important as owning the very latest in Parisian fashions without which they would "be ostracized" (Hawes, 1938, p. 6-7). In fact, the entire first chapter of the book is dedicated to espousing the wasteful excess of fashion and its insistence on enticing women to buy new garments continuously and for a variety of supposed unmet needs. She states in a manner reminiscent of current discussions of sustainability that there are many people who don't like fashion but accept "as inevitable, throwing away perfectly good old clothes and buying new ones every year" according to the latest styles to come from Paris (Hawes, 1938, p. 7). Though in 1938, fashions changed seasonally much more consistently and rigidly than they do today and Paris was still the epicenter of the fashion world (Kawamura, 2010). Later in the book Hawes (1938) decries the cheap copies of high fashion worn by many in the United

States for lack of any other acceptable options in terms of quality and originality of design. She foresaw a future where women would consider quality and versatility as the height of elegance and glamour.

In another early book, *Art in Clothing Selection*, Harriet McJimsey (1963) proposes two ways of thinking about classic design in clothing. The first refers to the wearer as having a personality type indicative of the style of clothing she should wear (McJimsey, 1963). Classic is merely one type among several including gamin, ingénue, dramatic, athletic, and romantic. The “classic type’s” wardrobe includes items that are “simple...dignified but never severe” (McJimsey, 1963, p. 89). The classic type steers clear of the excesses of fashion in order to adopt its simpler versions. In terms of color she wears beige, navy and white as neutrals and accents with soft blues and or blue reds (McJimsey, 1963). This definition seems rather limiting but in fact the intent was limited; classic was only one of seven personality types and suggested wardrobe styles meant to provide women with prescriptive fashion advice based on self-perception.

The other definition, which is more relevant here, defines classic as one of four types of design options that are available to women in the selection of clothing: distinctive, classic, ordinary, and poor. Classic is defined as “versatile in its use, general wearability and becomingness,” and since it forms the basis of an effective wardrobe it must also exhibit quality in “cut, fit, and fabric” (McJimsey, 1963, p. 199). Furthermore, a garment might have some unique aspect, such as “individuality in fabric...[or] subtle detailing” present as long as it does not overpower the essential elements of classic such as quality cut or versatility, thus creating “distinctive classics” (p.199). From this it can

be concluded that even if one formal attribute of a garment does not fit within traditional classic design this (sometimes) does not preclude its final designation as a classic design. This reflects the concept of classic design as something that allows for reinventions through shifts in a limited number of the formal properties while others remain constant (Loschek, 2009).

A 1949 consumer study investigating how women chose a winter coat provides insight into which formal properties that must be present in a design for it to be considered classic. Over 1500 women participated in the survey and revealed that quality of fabric, both outside and inside the coat was of primary importance. Coats should ideally “retain their color and...new appearance” (Whitlock & Hensley, 1949, p. 83). Next in importance was quality construction, followed by size and fit and then design details. In terms of design details, some traits listed were “conservative, simple designs...full length coats...and fashions that do not change too often” (Whitlock & Hensley, 1949, p.85). Harriet and Vetta Goldstein (1954) would agree; they wrote that the choice of a winter coat should be planned with care in terms of color and design, especially if selecting an expensive, quality coat /intended to last physically as well as stylistically. While none of the consumers in the study used the term classic the traits they listed provide a group of formal attributes reflective of fashion advice, (Harriet and Vetta Goldstein and Elizabeth Hawes) from contemporaries, required for classic design. Additionally, since these attributes are rather abstract, they allow freedom for the reinvention of color, cut, fabric, line and shape in the design, broadening classic style’s range of potential appearances. This concept of potential nonnegotiable formal attributes

posits the existence of a foundation on which a classic style can be determined or categorized.

### **The concept of style**

Before attempting to investigate classic design in clothing as a particular style within the fashion system, it is important to understand the concept of style itself. There are many theoretical discussions of style and its implications for understanding and organizing the designed world in the field of art history. These discussions focus on different ways to classify style: by technique, historical period, cultural and artistic constraints, artist and provenance. However, the concept of style generally provides a framework for analyzing objects in relation to one another so that decisions can be made regarding their inclusion within a particular category.

Ernst Gombrich (1968) defines style as the actions performed on or in the creation of the artifact. He understands the expression of style both as what is and is not chosen by the artist. He writes that one method of considering the idea of style “is to observe the limitations within which the artist or craftsman works” (Gombrich, 1968, p.360). These limitations often influence the range of available options and ultimate choices made by the designer or artist. Others, like Meyer Schapiro (1961) believe that form and content are both important to the perception of style. The viewer needs to assess not only how something is created but also the meaning it conveys to properly determine style (Walton, 1987). Leonard Meyer (1987) identifies the goal of style in terms of its ability, through classification, to provide a means of assessing the formal and expressive characteristics of designed objects. Applying that idea, James Ackerman (1963) states that, style by

“defining relationships,” amongst groups of artifacts creates a sense of order that more readily allows this type of analysis. Thus by providing a list of traits or properties of a style, then educated and objective decisions can be made for a designs inclusion in one category over another.

Jules David Prown, (1980 & 1995) a pioneer in the field of material culture, takes the idea of style further than mere analysis as means of categorization of similar artifacts common to art history; he uses it to evaluate a variety of artifacts types and their relationships to one another as well as to a shared historical or cultural context. He states, “objects... embody unconscious attitudes and values—beliefs—that prevailed in the time and place of their making. These are not expressed in what is made or said, but rather in the way things are made or said—that is, in their style. The formal language of objects that constitutes style...provides evidence of unconscious belief, of culture” (Prown, 1995, p. 3). From the belief that objects speak about past context in relation to their physical or formal properties, Prown (1980) developed a method of studying artifacts that seeks to discover this information. (Prown’s (1980) method includes a detailed and in-depth investigation into the material object as an entrance point for understanding the culture of its time of creation and lifespan.) Therefore, using such a method to investigate the formal properties of objects categorized as classic design should provide evidence of cultural beliefs about the nature and function of these garments within the larger fashion system.

In terms of clothing, DeLong (1998) defines style as “the characteristic manner of expression, the distinguishing way in which the parts are put together” which can then

be applied to a single form or a group of forms (p.13). So then, clothing like any other artifact within the entirety of its physical form, or “arrangement of colors, textures, lines and shapes,” allows categorization based upon style that is the interaction of how the details contribute to the whole (DeLong, 1998, p. 13). So then the organization and selection of the formal properties in a garment and how the garment then relates to the body are one way to determine if classic design has the traits of consistent and categorical style.

However DeLong (1998) further indicates that cultural messages impact both the creation and understanding of a style, or the aesthetic experience of an artifact. Clothing as with any artifact gives evidence through its form, both of the cultural and historical context of its creation, as well as its current existence. The notion of two types of context has implications for the concept of a classic style category. If a designed object, in this case, an article of clothing is created and consumed as part of unique cultural or historical moment then studying how people understood and related to the object in its original context should illuminate its initial meanings. However, if the underlying formal properties of a specific design remain constant across time or cultural contexts this raises the question of how much or little its formal properties can be altered and still allow wearers to reference the appropriate context for the design to be continually considered a classic ‘style’. Therefore, if a particular classic design, i.e. a little, black dress can indeed be considered ‘timeless’ it should potentially give evidence of shared meanings and contexts, both historical and current through its maintenance of a certain consistency of formal properties.

### **The aesthetic experience**

This relationship of form, viewer, and context is the essence of the aesthetic experience (DeLong, 1998). In other words, the aesthetic experience is the viewer's (or wearer's) impressions; their emotional and cognitive reactions to a designed object. The experience always involves the viewer's context, the combination of culture, personal experience and beliefs, through which they decide what is communicated by the formal attributes (DeLong, 1998). The aesthetic response has become a prominent part of the consumption process and as such is a focus in creating designed objects in recent years; what a toaster looks like is almost as important as how it functions in today's world (Featherstone, 1992; Postrel, 2003). This is not a new idea to clothing (as it is for many other designed objects) where appearance and function have a longstanding, albeit tempestuous relationship. It is the visual qualities or formal attributes, however, to which viewers initially respond and judge when looking at clothing and not necessarily functional aspects (DeLong, 1998). These aesthetic evaluations are related to "...what is valued as an ideal and how people desire to look according to the dominant images..." (DeLong, 1998, p. 5). In terms of classic design then, the formal attributes are evaluated aesthetically to determine where such a garment fits within the cultural and personal context of the viewer and its usefulness within what is fashionable.

### **Classic Design and the Aesthetic Experience**

While the formal attributes help identify classic style in clothing it is the aesthetic evaluation that results in more than categorization, based upon color or form; it conveys context or cultural significance to the wearer. McCracken's theory of meaning transfer



(Figure 3) attempts to explain the movement that occurs that imbues material objects, such as clothing, with meaning or significance as well as the method of that transfer. McCracken (1988) defines the ‘culturally constructed world’ as the locus of original meaning or context which then moves to, for the purposes of this study, clothing, and finally to the individual. This viewpoint is grounded in a large body of scholarly research by, among others, Baudrillard (1968, 1970), Douglas and Isherwood (1979), and Prown (1982) regarding the ability of consumer objects to communicate cultural meaning (Woodward, 2007). McCracken’s (1988) theory demonstrates that the meaning carried by goods has “a mobile quality” and is “constantly in transit” (p. 71). That cultural meanings rather than existing as fixed entities, shift and change, in their movement among locations in the social world.

McCracken (1988) states that, “goods have a significance that goes beyond their utilitarian character and commercial value” (p. 71). As a result this theory provides insight into how people use clothing to organize and define themselves and their lives (Woodward, 2007). In this sense, it is useful for investigating the fashion system and why certain styles, such as classic design, become popular as people attempt to internalize different cultural meanings through clothing (Lynch & Strauss, 2007). Grounded in this concept, examining classic design through the lens of the theory of meaning transfer helps clarify the viewer-form relationship that occurs within the aesthetic evaluation of classic design. A model developed by Ward (2011), attempts to explain the process of the aesthetic evaluation of product design through which the

aesthetic aspects of classic design, from the culturally constructed world to the processes that transfer the meaning to the object, may be deciphered.

In Ward's (2011) model (Figure 4), the aesthetic response is considered a complex process involving "thoughts, emotions, activities, and values" in which the viewer is inseparable "from the cultural context of everyday discourses, and consumption practices" (p. 147). (This model fits within DeLong's (1998) model of the aesthetic experience which includes, form, viewer, and context.) Even more importantly, aesthetic codes are entrenched within the socio-historical context, or using McCracken's (1988) vocabulary, the culturally constructed world, of different social groups. (Figure 5) According to McCracken (1988) the culturally constituted world is a combination of cultural categories and cultural principles. Cultural categories are the "basic distinctions with which a culture divides up the phenomenal world" and include things like time, people, space, and nature (McCracken, 1988, p. 73). One of the ways that these cultural categories are substantiated is through goods; they are "an opportunity to make culture material" (McCracken, 1988, p. 75). Cultural principles are the ideas or values with which cultural categories are evaluated and organized. These principles find expression not only in social life, but in goods, too. Therefore, goods—clothing—are both the creator and creation of the culturally constituted world.

This is where, according to Ward (2011), "the influence of social agents...and opinion leaders, are influential in setting the standards by which other consumers negotiate their own aesthetic preferences" (p.150). In the first part of Ward's (2011) model the formal attributes of an object exist within the larger structure of this socio-

historical context, where it is affected by such things as design goals and constraints as well as organizational and product aesthetics. Ultimately though, both the designer and viewer/wearer contribute to the cultural, aesthetic value of an object.

Ward's (2011) second step encompasses McCracken's theorized movement from the culturally constituted world through clothing to the viewer (the entire center of McCracken's model). (Figure 6) This is where knowledge about the cultural world and the interaction with mechanisms of meaning transfer combine to allow decisions about the appropriate aesthetic evaluation of clothing. An example given by McCracken (1988) that is certainly pertinent for clothing is advertising which he describes as "a conduit through which meaning is constantly poured in its movement from the culturally constituted world to consumer goods" (p.79).

Finally, consumers gain aesthetic value, or meaning, from the good as they acquire it through McCracken's four rituals: possession, exchange, grooming, and divestment. Ward (2011) includes various sources of aesthetic value that prompt these various methods of acquiring goods and thereby their meanings. These aesthetic meanings include the desire for socio-historical cultural capital transmitted through educational systems, "exigent" consumption or the need based consumption, conspicuous consumption and the purchase of objects purely for the pleasurable experience or a sense of "connoisseurship" (Ward, 2011, p. 153). These desires are often mediated by the emotional and cognitive processes humans use to evaluate the formal properties of the product itself. Norman (2004) divides these responses to products into three parts: visceral, or the gut reaction to a design, behavioral, or the relation of product design to its

function, and reflective, or the influence of the socio-historical context and meaning on a consumer's response to a design.

Ward's (2011) final section (Figure 6) encompasses the consumer and overlaps slightly into the four rituals outlined by McCracken (1988). He proposes that authenticity is part of the meaning or value that according to McCracken (1988) is transferred via these rituals from the good to the consumer. The perception of authenticity directly affects consumption patterns. Authenticity remains stable as long as consumers' perceptions are "relatively uninfluenced by changes in intertextualized cultural texts, fads, fashions...and so on" (Ward, 2011, p. 156). Hypothetically, goods that maintain a lengthy stable aesthetic authenticity and as a result continue to be worn are classic designs.

### **Sustainability in Fashion**

Sustainability, in the broadest sense, is defined as ensuring that development meets current needs without compromising the abilities of future generations to meet their needs (United Nations World Commission, 1987). The Brundtland Report (1987) further clarifies that such needs include the social, environmental and economic spheres, all of which are interconnected. According to Hethorn and Ulasewicz (2008) fashion has "a role to play" in sustainability because it is "a process, [it] is expressed and worn by people, and as a material object, has a direct link to the environment" and as such it involves all three spheres defined in the Brundtland report (p.xviii). In other words, fashion and the fashion industry includes people (designers, consumers and manufacturers), processes (production, economic and innovation), and the environment

(fabrics, fibers, dyes, notions, and the environmental impact of the use, reuse, and disposal of these in the creation and application of fashion) (DeLong, et al., 2012; Hethorn & Ulasewicz, 2008). Fashion, therefore, provides and creates multiple opportunities for the application of sustainable concepts and practices (Hethorn & Ulasewicz, 2008).

While many in the fashion community (designers, educators, business men/women, consumers, manufacturers, marketers and media) regard sustainability as an imperative for the future of the industry as well as for the planet, the means of reaching sustainability are often less clear and more varied (Aakko & Koskennurmi-Sivonen, 2013; Assouly et al., 2013; Black, 2012; Fletcher, 2008; Minney, 2011). This is due to the complex cultural and social roles of fashion and the vastness of the fashion industry. Black (2012) coined the phrase “fashion paradox” to express this complexity. She states that the phrase, “encapsulate[s] this complex web of contradictory perceptions and practices—comprising economics and employment, trade, design, and manufacturing, buying and marketing, and cultural identity that collectively make up the global fashion industry” (Black, 2012, p. 8). The fashion industry must then deal with sustainability on a variety of levels and with an interdisciplinary perspective that acknowledges the connections among many different stakeholders and participants require many possible solutions.

Still, the current state of the fashion industry with its emphasis on providing consumers with a wide selection of new garments produced within ever shortening cycles, or fast fashion, seems antithetical to the notion of sustainability. However, when

fashion consumption is acknowledged as not only about the act of purchasing but also how people think and use clothing to express and define themselves both individually and collectively then the issue can be more effectively addressed. For instance, the products of fast fashion are typically based on high cost, luxury items that reflect the average consumer's aspirational desires (Joy et al., 2012). Consumers' desire for these luxury fashion items contributes to the success of fast fashion because, even though quality is sacrificed, it allows such dreams to come true (Joy et al., 2012). In contemporary society, where the self is a process and identity is flexible, the ready availability of inexpensive garments also facilitates the formation of a series of consecutive and multiple identities (Beard, 2008; Niinimaki, 2010). This drive motivates consumers to invent and express relevant personal and collective identities through the never-ending purchase, use, and disposal of clothing.

Designers sometimes fault the consumer for a lack of interest in sustainable fashion; it is the consumer's fault for continuing to purchase clothing that is not sustainable or ethically produced (Palomo-Lovinski & Hahn, 2014). However, to place blame disproportionately on the consumer is as unrealistic as assuming that consumption will cease; humans have always created, produced and consumed (Chapman & Gant, 2007; Palomo-Lovinski & Hahn, 2014). According to Niinimaki (2010) consumers are perfectly willing to purchase sustainable or eco-clothing as long it meets their aesthetic and emotional needs. Therefore, it behooves designers to consider how and what they design and how their products can meet the needs of the consumers *in spite* of being sustainable.

Fashion designers have taken sustainability into consideration in a variety of ways. Aakko and Koskennurmi-Sivonen (2013) developed a theoretical model that addresses the principles and processes that designers have considered and implemented in relation to sustainable fashion design. The center of their model contains three key concepts around which a host of specific behaviors and design solutions are integrated: cradle-to-cradle, functional design and slow fashion. Of the three, slow fashion most directly addresses many of the issues inherent in the current (fast) fashion system and the challenges of designing products that are durable. While slow fashion is against fast fashion it is not the opposite but rather an alternative approach for both consumers and designers to engage with fashion (Aakko & Koskennurmi-Sivonen, 2013; Fletcher & Grose, 2012). Slow fashion much like the slow food movement encourages consumers to know and value local resources, understand the connections between production and consumption, and the creation of quality products. According to slow fashion, an article of clothing is enjoyed and savored for more than a few days or weeks; it “focuses... attention on valuing and knowing the object, and demands design that generates significant experiences” (Clark, 2008, p.440). Slow fashion then includes a call for a more sustained aesthetic experience of or response to design.

According to Fletcher and Grose (2012) a product that produces this type of positive response is durable—emotionally, physically, and stylistically. Yusef (2012) examines the phenomenon of emotionally durable fashion in Sandy Black’s (2012) *The Sustainable Fashion Handbook*. He did this by exploring the evolution or history of articles of clothing that people identified as their favorites. Often the pieces his

participants chose as favorites had a personal and historical contexts for the wearer that remained relevant. However, while the stories of acquisition, of wearing the garment over the years, and many times, of compliments on the owners' appearance while wearing said garment built emotional durability, it was typically founded upon the garment's physical and stylistic durability. The physical durability came from the thoughtful and careful selection of quality materials that allowed the garments to have a long history in the first place. Stylistic durability was the result of the formal attributes of the design. For instance, one participant mentioned the nice, narrow sleeves on the denim jacket that was his favorite. He attributed the construction and fit of the sleeves to the stylistic longevity of the jacket. Another participant explained that because a 1980s dress was made from quality material and designed very simply with a fitted silhouette and subtle but flattering details in the cut that it remained relevant today; it wasn't "too fashion-fluffy" (Yusef, 2012, p.229).

This three-fold durability identified by Fletcher and Grose (2008) is at the heart of classic design much like it is the heart of many favorite garments. Classic design seeks to provide physical durability through quality materials but more importantly it seeks to provide stylistic durability through the formal attributes of garment. Hypothetically then, the careful selection of formal attributes, primarily layout and surface structuring, can be used to create a garment that consumers associate with timelessness, versatility and simplicity which are key cultural concepts associated with classic design. To do this with intentionality is to design for emotional durability—to design for extended use. In this then, classic design is one way to design with sustainability in mind.



## **Sustainability, Aesthetics and Classic Design**

Shedroff (2009) in his book *Design is the Problem* discusses the concept of sustainability as one that requires a systems perspective; that a broad view needs to be taken of the problem or issue. One of the most important and foundational areas to affect in an effort to impact or impart sustainability in design is to “design for use.” Shedroff (2009) interprets “designing for use” as including usability, accessibility, and meaning. These ideas are applicable to what Norman (2004) presents as the role of emotions in effective user-centered design. The three levels of emotion that Norman (2004) describes, visceral, behavioral, and reflective, are as important to how people think and respond to design as are the parts of a design that require cognitive responses. These categories of emotional responses can also be linked to the three parts of the aesthetic response—form, viewer, and context—in relation to classic design (DeLong, 1998).

Visceral design is where appearance matters. It is about the initial impact of the product. Design is frequently focused on the initial reaction of the consumer and can be equated with an aesthetic response to the formal properties of the object (Postrel, 2003). It is about the visual and tactile experience that is often the level at which viewers/wearers make clothing purchase decisions (De Klerk & Lubbe, 2006).

Behavioral design is about use, about experience with a product, and can include function, performance, and usability. This is about what design is meant to do, so in terms of apparel behavioral design should meet the general requirements of modesty and the particular requirements for its intended occasion. For instance, a formal gown would then be comprised of materials deemed suitable for such an occasion like satin and

potentially show more skin than a garment intended for a funeral. If a design does this well than it produces a warm, satisfied feeling for the wearer.

Norman's third level is reflective, where the highest levels of feeling, emotion and cognition reside. Norman (2004) explains that this level is not an immediate reaction or experience of a product. Rather, it is where the full aspects of both emotions and cognition can be experienced. At the other two levels there is affect but without interpretation and deep thought. It is in the reflective level that the aesthetic experience or reaction of the other levels is interpreted and meaning is assigned via cultural systems typical to clothing. This level can also override and in fact influence the others. It is unusual for a design to only resonate at a single level and successful apparel design functions at all the levels though it is on the reflective level that the fashion system relies most heavily. Fashion consumers are looking for design that is reflective in order to express a unique look, something that speaks to them at a deeper level. For example, participants in the Reiley and DeLong (2011) study experienced reflective design through the purchase of garments with a history or from unusual sources and then combining them in unique ways. Therefore in clothing design the emotional or aesthetic response to the formal properties must be important; wearers' must be able to interact or think about design in a way that expresses their personality or appearance needs.

Belk (1988) theorized that objects play a significant role in expressing the extended self or who people perceive themselves to be or want others to perceive. They do this on a variety of levels: individual, family, community, and group. Since as Entwistle (2000) notes dress "is both the intimate experience of our body and a public

presentation of it... the interface between individual and the social world, the meeting place of public and private,” the supposition could be made that clothing extends the self across all the levels proposed by Belk (1988). Therefore it also impacts all the levels proposed by Norman as foundational for why people love and (hate) everyday things. So then, from Shedroff’s (2009) list of ways to design for use, the term meaning can potentially be the most important in apparel, as this is what an emotional response, according to Norman, imparts to objects. This emotional response and how dress is seen by individuals to provide self-identity and expression presents a great challenge to apparel designers in general but an even greater challenge for those attempting to design clothing for sustainability.

One suggestion Shedroff (2009) discusses for designing for sustainability that could be applied to apparel is to encourage the reuse or rather continued use of design. He addresses the emergence of planned obsolescence as a modern market strategy and how this has impacted sustainability; as frequently consumers discard old yet still functional items to purchase its newer form in order to follow trends. In fact, the history of planned obsolescence is marked by changes in formal properties rather than functional improvements. The fashion system in particular is predicated on continual changes in style, however incremental, rather than functional improvements, insofar as they function to protect the body from the elements or maintain modesty standards. These style changes and their availability to consumers through the fast fashion business model has encouraged a very deep consumer involvement with planned obsolescence in the fashion system. Objects are designed to be used but with very little effort or thought (Manzini,

2006). Furthermore, Fletcher (2007) diagnoses the modern fashion consumer as bored. Consumers are always on the lookout for something new in an effort to be unique or to stand out in a sea of sameness (Fletcher, 2007).

In recent years, consumers have attempted to establish uniqueness through a variety of alternative methods and sources (Reiley, 2008; Tepper, 1997). In the past, fashion experts advised building an ensemble from coordinating pieces, including accessories, typically from the same designer. Contemporary consumers, however, are encouraged to combine high and low-end pieces culled from the offerings of different designers and fashion retailers to create a look that is uniquely theirs (Postrel, 2003). Consumers' ability to achieve uniqueness in this way is due in part to designers who have moved from creating such ensembles to creating individual pieces, or separates, which allow for a mix and match sensibility even within their own collections. The breadth and speed of information available through the internet, via online retailers, fashion bloggers, and online fashion media sites, continually exposes consumers to new looks and designs which they can incorporate into their personal, and ideally unique, style (Lynch & Strauss, 2007). The interest in vintage fashion is another response to sameness. Reiley (2003) found that primary motivation for consumers wearing vintage clothing was to create a unique look. Vintage clothing offers the possibility of one-of-a-kind pieces that mass-market retailers cannot. Finally, the still growing interest in DIY represents another means of creating a unique experience. Clothing either already owned or purchased from retailers selling secondhand merchandise is altered and/or up-cycled to produce

something entirely different. Fashion DIY demonstrates not only personal creativity, but can provide a certain level of status and recognition among one's peers.

Related to this, Postrel (2003) observes that the 21st century has become the aesthetic century; one in which the aesthetic experience predominates. The apparel designer has often designed based on their personal aesthetic preferences but if designing for sustainability, then they need to create design with the appropriate formal properties that viewers can correctly interpret and place in context in a manner that will create a stable aesthetic authenticity, thus creating classic design and fostering extended use (Norman, 2004; Ulasewicz, 2008; Ward, 2011). In fact, creating classic design is one specific method Shedroff (2009) mentions among a number of practical ways properly conceived design can counteract (with consumer involvement) the trend of short-term use. However, in order to do so Norman's (2004) three levels of emotional design, visceral, behavioral, and reflective, as part of good user centered design must be considered as well. While it is at the level of emotion that objects can evoke memories, help people to present and express the self as well as reflect its own personality, it is through the formal properties of design that the reflective level is attained and the aesthetic experience is initiated.

## **Conclusion**

Classic design is defined as something that is timeless in its fashionability; its basic formal attributes and meanings have changed very little. Furthermore, the formal attributes of classic design, in a specific garment type, i.e. little, black dress, can be (and have been) adapted and shifted just enough to meet current fashion needs without

sacrificing collective contextual knowledge on the part of consumers. As a result, classic design retains its popularity when other fashions decline in acceptance. Many early 20<sup>th</sup> century fashion advice books discussed the merits of design that maintains its relevance and aesthetic appeal from one fashion season to the next. Recent trends, however, have created an atmosphere in which the new is available at ever increasing rates thus calling into question the actual existence of and desire for classic design. However, as concern regarding the sustainability of the fashion industry in all its parts continues to grow, classic design has a role to play. In particular, the idea of slow fashion, which promotes the valuing of design for longer than one or two fashion seasons, is relevant to classic design.

Creating classic designs is one potential method for a garment to maintain stylistic, emotional, and physical durability. As a result, it is also one method, for increasing the sustainability of clothing design. Though producing classic designs cannot singlehandedly solve the numerous challenges inherent in improving the sustainability of the apparel industry it certainly has the potential for encouraging sustained use and a more limited consumption of apparel products. This potential longevity is due in part to a positive aesthetic response grounded in well-designed formal attributes that refer to a known collective cultural context.

As noted, classic is defined in multiple ways in the literature. However, these various definitions are incorporated into multiple concepts and influences simultaneously, including a signature example of a particular artist, style or period, such as a ‘classic’, late 1950s, wool, tweed Chanel suit; a designed object that has attained iconic status and

in the consistency of its formal attributes references its original context, for example the enduring, black leather jacket and its identification with the youth culture of the 1950s and 60s (DeLong, Gage, Park, & Sklar, 2011); and to designate objects that are timeless, long lasting, and with universal appeal (Smith, 2003).

More significantly in terms of investigating the cultural application and understanding of classic design in terms of the aesthetic experience, classic is often applied in fashion literature to particular types of designed objects. This definition of classic implies that the product, in this case, the garment, categorized as classic design should share similar formal properties across contexts and designers and that these properties should remain relatively stable. It also implies that consumers or wearer/viewers should share similar and relatively consistent experiences and cultural understandings of designs identified as classic.

## Chapter 3

### Pilot Studies

#### Pilot Study #1

##### Method

##### *Data collection*

Classic is a term that is applied to designed objects quite regularly but can reference a variety meanings and specific applications, related to the exact garment in question, however, on what basis this happens remains relatively abstract and indistinct, e.g. why is one garment classic and another is not, and how do wearers perceive the expression of classic personally and culturally? In order to explore a potential common understanding and aesthetic experience of the formal attributes, viewer's experience and the cultural context of classic design within consumers' apparel and wardrobe behaviors a pilot study was conducted.

The pilot study involved in depth interviews with two women regarding their personal definition of classic and how and if they incorporated classic design in their wardrobe. Women were selected because seasonal fashion cycles are proportionally more focused on women's clothing as is the fast fashion system that results from these cycles. Participants over the age of 45 were chosen because they inherently have a longer history operating within the fashion system as they made clothing and wardrobe decisions over the years. As a result of the length of their relationship with clothing and fashion, they also could have more insight about the place of classic design in this same system. Both participants were selected based on a high level of personal involvement and interest in



clothing and appearance behaviors as well as the ability to provide insightful and in depth responses to questions about the nature of classic design. This length of involvement and experience with reflection was important because the purpose was to understand the role of classic design within the context not only of individual wardrobe management but also within the continual influence of the fashion cycle. Finally, these two women were also of a similar body type and clothing size, i.e. circa size 8, to relate to a fashionable appearance within the context of the fashion system.

Interviews were conducted in the participants' homes so that each participant's personal wardrobe provided interview prompts and concrete examples of classic to inform and direct the discussion.. The participants were asked the following questions: 1) Please describe your personal style, 2) How do you define classic clothing? Can you give some examples? 3) Please tell me about the item you have selected as classic design. Why did you choose it? How does it fit into your overall wardrobe? When and how do you wear it? When and why did you buy it? When you are wearing it how do you perceive your appearance? and 4) When do you like to wear classic clothing in your wardrobe? (Appendix A) Photographic images were taken of the various garments chosen by the participants from their current, working wardrobes, as examples of classic design for reference during data analysis of the interviews. These questions were intended to uncover concrete and personal applications of the abstract meanings and definitions of classic design found in the literature

It was important to have participants choose items they still wore since inactive clothing is often considered unfashionable or dated rather than timeless. Timeless

implies that something is outside of the cycle of fashion and continues to be relevant even when worn with garments that fit only within a certain era or time. A general example is the trench coat, which has been worn consistently over the last century with a vast array of styles and often fleeting fashion trends. More specifically, participant #1 had a leather motorcycle style jacket that she has worn for many years though the other garments she wears with it have changed.

### ***Data analysis***

I chose to adapt Richards (2009) suggestion of approaching qualitative analysis using three types of coding: descriptive, topic, and analytic. While descriptive coding does not fit well with the abstract nature of the subject of this study, both topic and analytic coding are appropriate. The research questions were used as a topic coding starting point but with constant alertness for emerging topics. After topic coding was completed analytic coding began.

Analytic coding was approached as open coding defined by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) as a process where “the descriptors emerge from the data” or as Patton (2002) calls it “inductive analysis.” This inductive method seemed particularly suited to the abstract nature of this phenomenological study as well as being particularly helpful in understanding the individual viewpoint (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Additionally, the data were coded for anything surprising or unexpected. The coding process involved revisiting the data several times and recoding when necessary to facilitate the next step; organizing the coded data into categories, which were then developed into themes (Litchman, 2006). Per Litchman (2006) the categories, both from the topic and the

analytic coding were combined and interpreted into concepts. Upon review of the analytic codes and their obvious relation to the research questions it became apparent that the topic coding did not add any additional connections in the data. The analytic codes were then refined, through several reviews, to accurately reflect the data and to develop themes.

## **Results**

When asked how they define classic clothing, timeless was a term that both participants chose. They explained timelessness as longevity within their personal wardrobe and the fashion system. Participants gave more specific descriptions of classic as well when they discussed their clothing and wardrobe choices. One of the ways they did this was by pointing out how both the form, or formal attributes, and the context, both cultural and personal, made each garment they chose for the interviews classic design. When discussing the form, participants described attributes associated with the three main types of structuring in garments, layout, surface, and light and shadow, as defined by DeLong (1998). Layout structuring includes the “combination and manipulation of materials” such as seams, pleating, collars and similar features to create the lines of the garment. Surface structuring refers to traits such as texture, color, and print inherent to the two-dimensional material from which a garment is constructed. Finally, light and shadow structuring primarily indicates how reflection and illumination affects the visual aspects of a garment (DeLong, 1998). The proper interaction of these three types of structuring was crucial to the participants’ choices for classic design. For instance, if the color (surface and/or light and shadow structure) or fit was not correct (layout) then

regardless of the appropriateness of the other formal attributes the garment was still not considered classic. The participants' (or viewers') interpretation or aesthetic response to these formal properties was further informed by personal context, such as each piece's role in their wardrobe, as well as cultural context, such as ideas about the value of classic design and how it is socially interpreted. The combination of these formal and contextual attributes together created a more precise picture of classic design in clothing and what was essential and nonessential and like in the aesthetic responses, the parts are inseparable.

Words both participants chose in response to Question #1 to describe the form or formal attributes of classic design were simple, elegant, and high quality. Additionally, particular styles, colors and fabric choices were considered indicators of classic design. According to Participant #1 classic design is a continuum rather than a fixed point reflecting a specific combination of attributes; classic design moves from basic classic to more unique classic based upon how various attributes of structuring are applied in a garment. This is similar to McJimsey's (1963) description of the design of garments running from poor to distinctive classic. Though McJimsey's (1963) continuum is more value laden, it still involves cumulative levels of successful implementation of the formal attributes, tied to the 3 types of structuring, of a garment. Such attributes can either be an individual part of the construction or design of a garment or a description of how the various types of structuring work together to create a classic design. Regardless, these formal attributes were considered essential by the participants for an article of clothing to be considered classic design.

When the participants answered Question #3, about the specific garments they chose as classic, the significance of particular attributes became apparent. The importance of specific attributes could shift depending on which ones were more prominent within the garment. Participant #1, for instance, described how if the fabric or surface structure of the garment was more prominent than the shape or cut of the garment, it became the decisive factor in the garment's classic or not classic designation. She explained that a classic design should generally be made in a neutral color and with not too much shine or sparkle (light and shadow structure) as this takes away from impact of the layout, i.e. silhouette. A specific example is a jacket that she identified as classic in cut and style but then eliminated from inclusion as classic design because of its sparkly silver, textured fabric.

Also, for Participant #1 certain shapes or silhouettes in garments seemingly made them classic by default, thus presenting the possibility that the layout structure plays a greater role in classic design than either surface or light and shadow structure. She particularly emphasized that cut and style were paramount and that in many instances if those were classic than even a non-classic color could not shift the design's status as long as that particular color flattered the wearer. To illustrate this point, Participant #1 discussed the 'little black dress.' While she considers the 'little black dress' a classic she does not personally wear the color black, but she still has a type of 'little black dress' in her wardrobe. In her case the dress is a taupe color, which she considers more flattering to her coloring. The common denominator in her opinion between her dress and the more standard black dress is simple, elegant, and quality fabric, cut, and silhouette.

Participant #2 emphasized similar ideas but with slightly different applications. She described classic design as having an overall simplicity and elegance, which she interpreted to mean restrained cut and silhouette and lacking great contrasts of fabric and color. She explained this restraint in classic design by stating, “you dress to enhance your look. You don’t dress to show off...the latest fashion.” In other words, the formal attributes of classic design allow the personality and appearance of the wearer to take center stage; that classic design is something that enhances personal coloring and body type, echoing Participant #1’s statements. In both participants’ opinions aspects such as color, fabric choice (whether something is shiny or matte), and excessive embellishment could potentially derail a garment’s designation as classic, especially when these things create an unflattering appearance for the wearer. Based on these explanations especially prominent surface and/or light and shadow structuring contradict or nullify attributes of layout structuring that might otherwise be interpreted as classic design in a garment. However, the proper combination of the three types of structuring in the form elicits from the viewer/wearer evaluations related to context that further solidifies garments’ classic design status.

When asked about the role classic clothing played in their wardrobes, contextual evaluations on the part of the viewer—of the formal attributes—played a role for both participants. These contexts included things such as the length of time the garment was owned, how often it was worn, its initial cost, its associated memories, and associations with a particular fashion designer. One of the major traits that both participants discussed regarding classic design’s personal context in their wardrobes was versatility. A classic

garment performed ably for the wearer/viewer in many different situations or for many occasions resulting in a positive sense of self-presentation and often positive outside feedback. This creates a personal context for a classic garment that contributes to its longevity in the wardrobe, one that should continue unless that positive personal context is altered. Participant #2 identified classic design as a garment with a layout and surface structuring that allows for accessorizing in multiple ways. She frequently mentioned different scarves, jewelry and belts that she used to shift the overall appearance of her classic garments (Figures 7a, b, c). In terms of classic design, she also discussed the idea of interchangeability as versatility--where different garments can be paired with a number of others to produce many unique looks.

The participants' descriptions of versatility included historical and cultural contexts as well. Participant #1 described classic design as being versatile not only within her specific and unique wardrobe but also among a variety of people. She, in fact, determined that part of this versatility among different people was the ability of designers to interpret classic design and still allow wearers/viewers to place their design within historical or cultural context. She explained, "people have a variety of renditions, like the denim jacket. You know is it classic, no, but the idea is classic...it's a classic idea that is reinterpreted in some way" so classic in this sense is about how wearers' understand the broader cultural and/or historical context in the underlying layout structure of a design than the details of a particular version. (Figure 8) The details of a particular garment, however, do contribute to personal context, how the wearer/viewer fits the particular designer interpretation of a classic design within their wardrobe. Participant #1 identified

several denim jackets she owned as individual, unique renditions of classic design that were still culturally significant but the varying design details helped them fit more effectively into her personal context or wardrobe needs.

The concepts of viewer and context take on further relevance when classic design is considered within the presentation of self and the aesthetic experience. Performance of self as an expression of one's unique qualities was important to both participants. One way this is demonstrated is that classic design must be applied in a manner that is appropriate, both to occasion and person. This characteristic is about the wearer's overall dress and appearance rather than referring to a single garment. This idea of appropriateness contributes to the idea of classic clothing as a form of self-expression. Participant #2 discussed this in terms of the styles of actresses Katherine Hepburn and Audrey Hepburn, which she considers classic. She emphasized that their styles were coherent and understandable; that they presented a cohesive and well thought out appearance that fit with their perceived personalities. So it is not so much about the exact articles of clothing worn as it is about the careful selection and interpretation of clothing to present oneself well that determines an overall classic style. Participant #2 continually emphasized that any clothing she wore, including classic, must make her "feel" like herself, while simultaneously, fitting her body type and her lifestyle or activities.

In a similar fashion, Participant #1 stressed that classic design must always accentuate her coloring, to the point that if it did not, she would not choose it regardless of how classic it was otherwise. As an example, she mentioned a black, Chanel jacket that was a gift. (Figure 9) She considered it classic but the wrong cut for her figure and



color for her coloring. She underscored the fact that while the jacket was classic in an iconic or cultural context it was not classic in a personal context. Accordingly, though classic design may convey a collective cultural or historical context it is still not a one size fits all proposition but rather predicated on each unique viewer's integration of such contexts within their personal frameworks and aesthetic experience. Furthermore, a garment may be considered classic design collectively but if it doesn't perform well for the individual then its classic designation may lose its effect or even convey a negative aesthetic experience to the wearer/viewer. In terms of the Chanel jacket, besides the color, Participant #1 pointed out the breast front pockets and jewel neckline which produced a negative aesthetic response to thinking about wearing the jacket. This negative aesthetic experience can translate into an inaccurate or undesirable performance of self for the wearer.

There were commonalities of terminology in each participant's description of classic design but these terms tended to be abstract. While abstract, they indicated that both participants similarly understand the idea of classic design. However, the experience of classic design described by the participants is intensely personal, involving the interpretation of contexts within personal frameworks that impact the presentation of self and aesthetic experience. It was in the application of terms they used, such as "simple," "elegant," and "quality," to the various attributes of the form, where the personal frameworks, (including interpretations of historical and cultural contexts) of the participants were most clearly seen. These frameworks were influenced by participant's backgrounds, education, knowledge and place in life so that neither one's description nor

explanation of the role of classic design was alike. From the results of this pilot study it seemed then that the idea of classic design, culturally and historically, is one that these two participants understand similarly but interpret differently to mesh with their personal style.

The interpretations and evaluations of classic design in this pilot study did not emerge from a common (to both participants) set of garment attributes rather each participant discussed classic design in terms of her unique clothing choices. Layout structuring seemed more important than other structural aspects based on the findings, which indicated that layout structuring was a priority in classic design. Participants indicated that surface and light and shadow structuring, while not inconsequential, either positively or negatively impacted a classic design designation given the proper layout structuring. Therefore, the next step seemed to be to choose a set of garments with similar layout structuring but variable surface and light and shadow structuring to understand the degree of influence of these three types of structure on the viewer's interpretation of classic design. In this manner attributes inherent in the form of the design, especially those associated with layout structuring, such as cut, silhouette, and shape, could be held constant for all participants. Holding the garments constant in a second pilot study would also allow a closer examination of the culturally, collective understanding of classic design. It would potentially allow any variability in viewers' personal interpretations of the collective idea of classic, as indicated by Pilot Study #1's findings, to be more apparent.

Additionally, it seemed prudent to determine how a younger demographic viewed the notion of classic design in contrast to those who have a longer history of involvement with fashion to begin to ascertain classic design's overall cultural relevance and status. Moreover, using undergraduate students helped determine if a younger generation viewed and described classic design in a similar or different manner than those of an older generation. Additionally, having standard examples given to a large group of similar, demographically at least, participants would provide a better understanding of the variation of ideas about a particular or individual design designated classic.

## **Pilot Study #2**

### **Method**

#### ***Data collection***

Using the terms identified in Pilot Study #1 and an email survey of four female apparel graduate students enrolled in a Material Culture course, a list of formal attributes and terms associated with classic design were compiled. These traits were used to guide the selection of a set of one type of garment: winter coats. Coats were chosen because participants in Pilot Study #1 and students in a Material Culture graduate course indicated coats were a type of clothing for which classic design was desired and useful. Additionally, most wardrobe and fashion advice instructs women that a winter coat is an item that should be intentionally purchased to last for more than a single season; it should have longevity based upon its form—cut, line, shape, fabric, color. Furthermore, while coats can be accessorized in various ways, they typically function equally well on their

own and do not require additional garments to be appropriate and complete as for instance a blouse or skirt might.

Because heretofore timelessness was used to define classic, coats were selected where the date of manufacture or creation was not stylistically obvious. The initial coat selection (20 coats) was made from a specified date range, 1920-1990, using the Goldstein Museum's digital archive and from a selection of un-photographed artifacts with the aid of the collection assistant. The first set of 20 coats were examined and narrowed to a more manageable 10 for the purposes of the study. Based on the available coats within the specified date range an attempt was made to include coats from a wide a range of attributed dates. The final 10 coats date from 1928 to 1969, with the majority circa 1940-1960. They are: Coat 1) designed by Seymour Fox, circa 1961-62, Coat 2) designed by Norman Norell for Traina-Norell. Purchased by Margot Siegel, circa 1942-1946, Coat 3) designed by Pauline Trigere, circa 1960, Coat 4) designed by Seymour Fox, purchased by Margot Siegel, circa 1960-69, Coat 5) circa 1950s, possibly homemade, Coat 6) unknown designer, circa 1940s, Coat 7) designed by Calvin Klein, circa 1969, Coat 8) designed by Balenciaga, circa 1960-69, Coat 9) made by The Halle Brothers and tailored by Monarch, circa 1950s, and Coat 10) designer unknown, circa 1928. (Figure 10) These coats were examined using material culture analysis based on DeLong's (1998) apparel-body-construct, which is divided into form, viewer, and context.

In accord with this method, first the coats' formal attributes were assessed by closely examining and describing the layout, surface, and light and shadow structuring of

each garment. Layout structuring includes the “combination and manipulation of materials” such as seams, pleating, collars and similar features to create the lines of the garment. Surface structuring refers to attributes such as texture, color, and print inherent to the two-dimensional material from which a garment is constructed. Light and shadow structuring primarily indicates how reflection and illumination affects the visual aspects of a garment. Second, in the viewer stage, the coats were contemplated as a group to more fully understand how and why these coats represented classic based not only on their descriptive characteristics but within the cultural and experiential perspectives of the viewer as well. In this stage, the coats were contemplated as a group to more fully understand how and why these coats represented classic based not only on their formal attributes but within the cultural and experiential perspectives of the viewer as well. Finally, DeLong (1998) begins the incorporation of external evidence or context in the third phase of her method. This stage consisted of the analysis of stylistic relationships between the coats’ formal attributes and cultural and historical context based on attributed dates of creation.

Any available images of the coats from the Goldstein’s digital archive were used. These images are photographed by a professional and taken with the coats on full 3-D display mannequins (with heads, arms, and legs) approximating how the coat might appear when worn. For any coats not photographed for the archive, images were taken with a digital camera in the research area of the Goldstein with the coats on hangers. These images were compiled, organized, and presented in a PowerPoint presentation to students in the Material Culture graduate level course.

Students were asked to select the coats they considered classic, not classic and potentially classic design. Based on the coats the majority of students considered at least potentially classic the coats were narrowed to eight (Coats #1-8). Coats #5 and #6 were eliminated based on the disparity in quality between the amateur and digital archive's professional images, so that only coats with professional images were selected for part B of the pilot study. Another consideration in the eliminations was that the 3-D mannequins used for the archive more closely approximate the human form than hangers. The remaining 6 coats were assessed and reduced to 3 (Coats #1, 3, and 7). Coats #2, 4 and 8 were eliminated based on the further evaluation that many of the formal attributes in these coats, especially in layout structure, were duplicated amongst themselves and in the remaining three examples.

The three remaining coats (numbered 1, 2 and 6 in the new presentation) were expanded to six. The additional three coats were selected based date of creation (1920-1990), the availability of images in the digital archive, and a thoughtful attempt to add more variation in the layout, surface and light and shadow structuring (based on comments about specific formal attributes of classic design from participants in Pilot Study #1 and material culture analysis). The additional coats are: Coat 3) designed by Claire McCardell, circa 1955, Coat 4) designed by Pauline Trigere, circa 1970-79, and Coat 5) attributed to Christian Dior, circa 1947-1955 (Figure 11).

Images of the final six coats were combined into a PowerPoint presentation and a corresponding survey was developed. (Appendix B) The survey used semantic differentials, closed ended, and open-ended questions about the coats. Semantic

differential scales were chosen because they have proven useful in measuring the meaning of ideas and concepts (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). From the analysis of Pilot Study #1 and definitions of classic design in the literature fourteen sets of opposite terms were selected for the semantic differentials. The terms selected reflect the finding of Pilot Study #1 that a collective understanding of the idea of classic design exists. The pairs are: extravagant-conservative, embellished-plain, unique-ordinary, awkward-elegant, high quality-low quality, timeless-trendy, beautiful-ugly, modern-traditional, like-dislike, wearable-not wearable, distinctive-common, complex-simple, authentic-inauthentic, and unfashionable-fashionable. The sets of terms were placed on a 7-space scale and each point was given a numerical value ranging from 3 to -3 with 0 representing the center or neutral space (Figure 12). Participants were asked to assess the six coats individually using the 14 sets of semantic terms. Finally, participants were asked to answer the close and open-ended questions by referencing the entire group of coats. Participants were asked to choose which coats were the most classic and not considered classic and explain why. They were also asked to list three attributes that they believed defined classic design and explain why.

The survey was distributed to 53 undergraduates enrolled in a design course focused on fashion trends and their communication. The course content was focused on the nature, movement, and anticipation of trends as well as the interaction of the aesthetic evaluation of clothing trends. The survey was administered near the end of the semester and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Undergraduate design students enrolled in this particular course were chosen in an effort to obtain thoughtful and insightful

answers regarding the nature of classic design based on their completion of the coursework.

### *Data analysis*

The seven spaces on the all the differential scales were assigned a number ranging from 3 to -3, moving from left to right. The semantic differential data from each coat was then entered onto an individual spreadsheet. Each of the differential scores for all six coats was averaged and the standard deviation was calculated. The averages and standard deviations were then organized together in one spreadsheet where the appropriate word from each word pair, based on their average scores, was assigned. Additionally, the means and standard deviations of the scales were calculated for each coat based on which participants had chosen them as “most” classic. Since Coat #2 and #5 were by far the most popular choices for “not” classic, the means and standard deviations from those participants who chose it in this category were also calculated. The overall scores means were then compared with the means calculated from participants who selected each coat in the two categories of “most” and “not” classic to see if there were differences.

The answers to Questions #1(most classic) and #3 (not classic) were tallied and percentages were calculated. The subsequent rankings for the coats were then used as a basis for examining and analyzing word pair directionality for each coat’s semantic scales. The word-pairs’ means were compared across all coats as well as among coats with similar and divergent rankings as “most” and “not” classic to determine patterns.

The answers to Question #2 (the list of three attributes that describe classic) were entered into a spreadsheet. Analytic coding approached as open coding where “the



descriptors emerge from the data” was used to analyze the answers (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). Based on this coding the answers were organized into initial categories. A second review of the data resulted in the reorganization and combination of some categories. As a final step, the final categories were used to develop themes that accurately reflected the data.

## **Results**

Question #1 asked participants to choose the coat they considered the “most” classic out of the six coats presented in the survey. This question is based upon the assumption that through careful analysis the coats included in the survey met the minimum requirements, in their formal attributes, to be considered classic design. The coats chosen for the survey share amongst themselves many of the formal attributes indicated by the participants in Pilot Study #1 as well as the student in the Material Culture course, as essential for classic design, such as high quality, simplicity, and elegance, and yet still survey participants were varied in their selections. Each of the coats presented in the survey was chosen as the “most” classic design by at least one participant. Many participants actually chose more than one coat as “most” classic. The largest percentage of participants considered coats #3 and #4 the “most” classic, at 34% and 32% respectively. (Figure 13) These two coats were also the least chosen as “not” classic. Coat #3, was chosen by only one participant (2%) and Coat #4, by only two participants (4%) as “not” classic. So, even though these two coats were not unanimously chosen as “most” classic, many of the participants still considered them to be more classic than the other coats. Coat #1 was less popular but still had a significant

percentage of participants who considered it classic with the next highest percentage at 21%. Coats #5 and #6 tied at 11% while Coat #2 only had one participant (2%) who thought it was the “most” classic. (Figure 14)

In connection with their choice of the “most” classic coat, Question #2 asked participants to list three attributes that define classic for them. Many of the participants referenced the coat(s) they chose as “most” classic in the three attributes they listed. For instance, Participant #5 chose Coat #1 as “most” classic and explained that she chose it because the color combination was not trendy, the shape (layout structure) which would flatter many people was a fashionable design constant, and that the details of the embellishments and findings (surface structure) blended well into the whole. Similarly, for example, Participant #15 who chose Coat #4, the second most popular choice (by 2% or one less participant) indicated that the “properly proportioned fur collar,” the coat length which contributed to its versatility, and the timeless color (camel) made it the “most” classic. Though the specific answers are different because these two participants are referencing different coats, the general underlying formal attributes they associate with classic design are not too dissimilar. Both participants refer to the significance of layout structure in classic design, Participant #15 by discussing the versatility of the coat’s length and collar proportions to the whole and Participant #5 by indicating that the type of silhouette or shape seen in Coat #1 is essential for classic design. They both discuss the effects of surface structuring as well: camel colored fabric, the extravagance of the fur collar (Participant #15) and embellishments that blend into the garment (Participant #5). This emphasis on the importance of formal attributes associated with

layout and surface structuring occurs throughout the surveys as participants discuss the attributes of classic design in terms of all six coats. Even participant #7, who chose Coat #2 as “most” classic, wrote that classic is timeless when the underlying (layout) structure remains constant but is still able to “undergo various changes or variations in specific looks”. This echoes Participant #5’s answers regarding Coat #1, which pointed to a silhouette or shape that remains fashionable as a key design constant for classic.

Coat #2 was the most frequently chosen as “not” classic (57% of participants) predominately because of its color. It is a quite bright green hue (Munsell Color Code 2.5G7/10). Participant #24 wrote, “the color is too vibrant to be a classic.” The second highest percentage of participants chose Coat #5 (30%) as “not” classic often because of its color, a pinkish red, though this was less unanimous. Several participants indicated that they considered red a classic color. Color seems to be an important attribute for determining classic design; it was also mentioned as a reason why certain coats were “most” classic. Participant #15 indicated, “camel color: a classic and timeless color for outerwear.” The use of other neutral colors, such as navy, black, and grey, were predominantly categorized as classic design attributes. However, even a neutral color did not guarantee that a coat would avoid the “not” classic designation.

Coats #1 and #6 were chosen by 13% and 8% of participants, respectively as “not” classic; Coat #1 is navy and Coat #6 is grey. Formal attributes in layout structuring took greater precedence than color for those participants who chose these coats as “not” classic. For instance, the amount of detail and contrast in surface embellishments as well as the collar shape were mentioned as reasons Coat #1 was “not” classic. For Coat #6,

the length and shape or silhouette were reasons given by participants for why it was “not” classic. In fact for each of the coats chosen as “not” classic, there was generally one predominant reason given, like color, rather than multiple reasons. It seems that one wrong characteristic such as color or design choice can keep a garment from being classic. Conversely, classic color did not necessarily override details of layout structuring to contradict viewers’ interpretations of classic design’s formal attributes. However, while most participants were adamant about color or other details keeping a particular coat from being classic, there were still 11 participants (21%) who indicated that there weren’t any of the coats that were “not” classic. This leads to the question of what and/or how many formal attributes of structuring, together or alone, besides color can decisively impact a design’s categorization as classic.

While some participants referenced the coat(s) they chose as “most” classic when they explained the attributes that defined classic to them, others listed and described more general attributes. The terms listed most frequently by participants as defining classic are 1) timeless, 2) simple or simplicity, and 3) versatility. These three attributes provide insight into concepts embedded within a collective cultural context of classic.

The most commonly listed of these terms, timeless, displayed the least variation in application and meaning among participants. Timeless was described by participants as design that “has changed little (Participant #7),” “has...aspects that are seen over and over again (Participant #42),” has “stood the test of time (Participant #4),” “can always be worn (Participant #4),” and is “something that could be stylish today as well as 25 years ago and 25 years from now (Participant #39).” All of these statements imply that

longevity, both stylistically, in a design's formal attributes, and within the cultural context of the fashion system, is part of classic design. Several participants believe, that in terms of classic design, timeless also means that the formal attributes (in layout structure) remain recognizable and familiar over the years, even though small details, especially in surface structuring might change. In other words, part of timelessness is a certain stability of form from which viewers are able to ascertain the appropriate cultural context to guide their aesthetic response. Ward (2011) associated designed objects with this type of continued aesthetic response as having a "stable authenticity."

The second most popular term, simplicity, was described primarily as design with limited external embellishments, basic silhouettes and/or restrained details of cut, like collars or pockets. One participant (#17) succinctly stated that simplicity is "not having all the bells and whistles. It is just a nice plain coat." However, some participants also made connections between simplicity and timeless. They believed that timelessness is in some ways predicated on simplicity. Participant #35 stated, "simple items are likely to have less embellishments and design details—all of which date a garment." In other words, the more added features or unique findings, the more likely it is that a viewer/wearer can easily place a garment within a specific historical context. Exact knowledge of historical (and cultural) context diminishes the ability of the viewer/wearer to interpret the garment within their personal framework or needs; the historical context is strong enough to obscure potential interpretations within current personal (and cultural) contexts. The garment may then not be able to be considered fashionable, or relevant

with current styles. In contrast, classic design (simple design) can be successfully incorporated into whatever style is current and not necessarily reveal its origins.

Similarly, some participants linked simplicity, limited details, and embellishment, in classic design, with versatility, the third most popular term listed. When discussing simplicity one participant (#41) stated, “simplicity [means you can] wear [it] with anything, [its] not too over the top, [and it] looks good on everyone.” This statement includes both of the distinct applications of versatility described by participants: 1) the ability to go with many different garments and 2) the ability to look good on many different people. The first application, the ability to go with many different garments, also includes an implication of timelessness; that a classic garment can be worn in any time period and “for multiple occasions” (Participant #44). A classic design can not only be seamlessly inserted into a wearer’s wardrobe even as fashion changes but can help the wearer successfully meet the needs of various situations/activities through appropriate presentations of self.

When explaining the second interpretation of versatility, the ability to look good on many different people, Participant #31 mentioned “something that almost everyone would wear no matter [what] age” while another participant (#39) stated “that [classic] has a fit that could flatter many different individuals.” The foundation of this interpretation of versatility is that it should be as close to universally flattering as possible. Cut, line, and silhouette play the greatest role in whether something fits different body shapes so in this sense layout structure is most important. However, when considering the wearer’s age and coloring, surface and light and shadow structuring

would play a role as well. The notion that classic design is flattering to everyone implies care is taken in the selection and combination of these formal attributes of a garment. Furthermore, the fact that classic is flattering for many figure types, ages, and physical colorings, also imputes a level of timelessness to the design. For instance, a young owner of classic design has the potential to wear it over many years because it will accommodate many changes in their figure, coloring, and age related lifestyles.

Other attributes participants listed relate more specifically to how a coat should be designed in order to meet the requirements of timelessness, simplicity and versatility inherent in classic design. These attributes concern color choice, the amount and type of embellishments, details of cut, fabric choice, and overall silhouette of the coat. For instance, many participants indicated that classic coat design should have a color that is not trendy such as a neutral; it cannot be linked to a particular era. As Participant #35 explained, “a classic is a neutral that doesn’t change with the seasons unlike color trends.” Another participant when discussing the color navy as a neutral stated that “it can fit in with any trend” (Participant #37). These comments link neutral colors to timelessness and versatility both attributes identified as essential to classic design. Participants similarly explained that embellishments and details should be kept to a minimum because they might otherwise date the garment thus reducing versatility and timelessness. Some participants even advocated a complete lack of embellishments or fancy details such as unusual pockets and necklines as important for classic design.

Regarding how silhouette, garment cut, and fabric choice plays a role in determining classic design in coats, there was less specificity in participants’ answers.

However, more than one participant commented regarding the length of the coats. Coats with a knee length were perceived as more classic because that length was considered more versatile. A coat with around a knee length could be appropriately worn for many types of occasions. Other features of cut that were discussed by participants were collars, pockets, and how the overall shape fit the wearer's figure. In particular, the presence of a slightly defined waistline was believed by some to be indicative of classic design. Several participants also mentioned using quality wools and fur in construction as essential for classic design.

The open-ended questions asked participants to evaluate the coats as a group and make comparisons to determine which coats were "most" classic and which were "not" classic. However, the semantic differential scales asked participants to assess each coat individually for each set of 14 word pairs. These discreet evaluations of each coat provide additional insight into how participants conceptualize the formal attributes of classic design. The word pairs, by providing many common descriptors of classic design and their opposites enabled participants to apply and interpret them based on the specific attributes of each coat. The average ratings for the coats on each of the 14 word pairs can then be compared to one another and evaluated in relationship to how each coat was ranked as "most" and "not" classic.

In looking at the scores across the entire group of coats for all word pairs, the general tendency is toward averages closer to a neutral designation on the scales rather than either extreme. (Figures 15-20) Of the 84 total semantic scales (14 for each coat) only the means of 16 of them were above the halfway mark towards one extreme or



another. Coats #4 and #5 had four means above this mark, Coat #6 had three, Coats #1 and #2 had two each and Coat #1 had only one. There was no consistency among the coats for which word pairs had these higher average scores. Otherwise, the overall means for all the coats in all the word pairs were between the neutral point and half way (1.5 to - 1.5). This neutrality may be inherent in the formal attributes of these particular coats, which were intentionally chosen as model representations of classic design.

While the means tended towards neutrality, the standard deviations tended to be high enough to reduce the significance of the means. Over half of the differential scales were above 1.25 and only four were under 1.00 indicating that participants' choices generally ranged widely across the scales for any given coat's word pairs. These tendencies suggest the impact of the personal interpretations and evaluations of formal attributes that epitomize classic design. So while, the semantic differential scales did not produce any significant data regarding common terms associated with classic for a particular coat or classic design in general, the variability of responses reinforces the results of the open-ended questions, which also demonstrated a diverse range of individual and personal interpretations.

Overall, though each of the six coats' semantic differential scores or means did not produce significant results which decisively illuminated particular attributes which played a role in participants' choices for "most" or "not" classic they did have an secondary impact on the survey results; they influenced the terms participants used to answer Question #2. The terms participants used in the three attributes they associated with classic very closely mirror words utilized in the differential scales. This could

certainly be coincidental but it could also mean that the differentials in combination with the images of coats aided the participants in conceptualizing a description of classic by providing concrete examples of both formal attributes and applicable terminology.

Since the process of completing the semantic differentials seemed to allow and encourage participants to conceptualize the concept of classic through the application of descriptive terminology they will be included with no changes in the final survey. However, the answers will not be analyzed as part of the how results of the study but rather their inclusion in the survey is a means of promoting the written discussion necessary for informative and thoughtful answers to the open-ended questions.

The open-ended questions produced thoughtful answers and sufficient data and as a result very few changes need to be made. However, since many of the participants addressed the particular coat they chose as “most” classic in their list of three attributes of classic design it seems prudent to make a few slight changes for subsequent versions of the survey. Question #1 should include a follow up question asking participants to identify the specific formal attributes associated with that particular coat that make it “most” classic. Question #2 can then be addressed primarily towards general attributes that can be applied to all classic design. Question #3 should also be reworded slightly to ask for specific attributes that make a particular coat “not” classic.

In conclusion, the results demonstrate that though participants have collective ideas about the general and specific formal attributes that make classic design, they varied in their application and interpretation of those attributes within specific garments. It may be that this is the very essence of classic design; the ability to be successfully

interpreted within a variety of viewers' personal contexts to meet wardrobe and self-presentation needs. In fact, this was a definition of the concept of classic design that emerged from the survey questions; classic was versatile and timeless because it was simple and relevant for many body types, age groups, target markets, situations, and moments in history. Classic design then is something that is appropriate or wearable, meeting the particular needs of a variety of potential wearers in a variety of ways.

The results also indicated that there are certain formal attributes that have a higher priority in determining classic design. One such attribute was color. Another was the amount and type of applied embellishments and/or internal details of cut and line. Both of these attributes could push the categorization of a coat towards or away from classic; if the viewer considered the color classic and the embellishments subdued enough then the coat was more likely to be considered classic. However, even these formal attributes were subject to personal contextual interpretations. Not everyone agreed on which colors and types of embellishments and/or details were classic and which were not. Based on the varied opinions regarding which coats were "most" and "not" classic, classic design, much like trendier styles, might actually move in and out of popularity. This movement within the fashion system could be partially based on how individual coats' formal attributes are perceived to meet the needs of the wearer to present a current and fashionable appearance.

### **Future Research**

The viewer aesthetic response to the formal attributes, both visual and tactile, is almost unconscious and instantaneous; it is according to Norman (2004) visceral design.

However, clothing is not typically only about the structuring of the formal attributes. Clothing also encompasses the other two aspects of emotional design, behavioral and reflective. As Pilot Study #1 demonstrated it is the reflective aspect of design, or interpretation of formal attributes (which constitute both behavioral and visceral design), where personal meaning is assigned. This interpretation of formal attributes determined how classic design was applied within individual participant's personal and cultural contexts. A similar interpretation occurred in the Pilot Study #2 but was directed towards a standard set of garments, not selected by the participants. Therefore, going forward it is essential to understand more about how interpretations of classic design work within the personal frameworks and self-presentation needs of various age groups and how changes in the formal attributes impact the love or hate consumers may have for classic clothing.

The older participants in Pilot Study #1 had a very clear concept of classic that they intentionally applied to their dress and appearance needs. They also quite pointedly incorporated classic design into their wardrobes because they believed it produced an appropriate and well thought out presentation of self which accurately reflected their personalities and lifestyles. The younger participants of Pilot Study #2 also had a common collective understanding of classic design that in many ways echoed the descriptions from Pilot Study #1. It was, however, less clear if the participants of Pilot Study #2 were as interested in using classic design to meet their personal appearances needs. This may have been the result of using the standard designs—and perhaps calls for a slightly different approach for them to identify with classic. Or they may not be attuned to classic designs because of their immersion in the fast fashion system.

The collective cultural concepts that many participants, in both studies, ascribed to classic were timelessness, versatility and simplicity. However, what is behind these collective cultural concepts of versatility, simplicity and timelessness and how they translate or become visible in the formal attributes of the garment is important to understand in order to design for extended use. For instance, none of the participants in the Yusef (2012) study indicated that they knew their favorite garment would become a favorite when they acquired it. They merely bought something they liked, based on their aesthetic response, and emotional attachment happened over time. This type of emotional attachment does not always happen. Sometimes a garment that is liked initially is not always liked later. In this era of lower quality fast fashion, in terms of construction and material, many times garments don't physically hold together thus diminishing the initial hedonic pleasure of the purchase even for self-identified fast fashion consumers (Watson & Yan, 2013). In contrast, consumers who purchase higher quality items, often items that they consider classic design, continue to experience pleasure in their purchases over the years, thus creating greater potential for something to be a favorite (Watson & Yan, 2013). Therefore, in conclusion all aspects of the aesthetic experience are at work when consumers assess a design's potential for classic-ness within the fashion system. However, it is still unclear how the parts of the aesthetic experience—form, viewer and context—each individually and discretely comprise the entirety of the experience of classic design, e.g. which (if any) part(s) is more prominent and/or foundational and which part(s) are less so, and how do they interact with each

other, e.g. does a certain part, form, viewer, and/or context, influence the evaluation of the other part(s) more than the other(s).

## Chapter 4

### Method

Based on these pilot study conclusions, the direction of the next step in this research can be framed. Further clarification is still needed on the roles and relevance of particular formal attributes in the creation of classic design. Through the integration of surveys and in-depth interviews this next phase will address the following questions.

1. Are there certain formal attributes that are essential to classic design and how much variation in these attributes is acceptable before a garment is categorized as trendy rather than timeless, limited use rather than versatile, and complex rather than simple?
2. How does a design become classic to an individual? What can be its history with the wearer/viewer? Is it considered classic when purchased and/or is it identified as classic based on its performance in the wardrobe over time?

Additionally, while the Pilot Study #2 participants (like Pilot Study #1 participants) certainly believed that important attributes of classic design were timelessness, simplicity and versatility among age groups and figure types, the surveys did not ask them how and if they apply their concept of classic to their personal self-presentation. Furthermore, younger consumers have a higher fashion involvement (O’Cass, 2001). This may be partially due to a greater acclimatization to perceived benefits of fast fashion and the swift dissemination of style through the Internet (Joy et al., 2012). In light of this a few additional questions related to the context of a young consumer group are addressed.

3. What place does classic design have in the current marketplace especially among younger consumers? If classic design has a place, how do they incorporate classic design as a part of their wardrobes and self-presentation needs?

The next step for this study is to improve and clarify the survey from Pilot Study #2 to address any identified issues in its ability to explore the formal properties of classic design. Additionally, to obtain more information on the personal context for classic design within a younger age group, in-depth interviews will be conducted with 18-20 of the survey participants. For the potential interview participants the survey serves as an introduction to the concept of classic and/or a gateway for participants to more deeply contemplate their thoughts on classic design and its place in their wardrobes and the fashion system.

Since more information is desired about classic design and a younger, fashion-involved demographic, the 60 undergraduate students enrolled in the same course, Fashion: Trends and Communication (as participants in Pilot Study #2) were used. This course is focused on the nature, movement, and anticipation of trends as well as the interaction of the aesthetic evaluation of clothing. As noted for Pilot Study #2, students enrolled in this course were chosen because based on the course content they seemed likely to provide thoughtful and insightful answers regarding the nature of classic design. Though in one sense this is a convenience sample, it is also appropriate, since over half of the students enrolled in the course are Retail Merchandising or Apparel Design majors. Students in these majors are likely to demonstrate high fashion involvement due to the nature of their academic preparation for careers in the fashion industry. Such high



fashion involvement, marked not only by the acquisition of fashion products but also of fashion knowledge, provides a definite benefit to this study (Hourigan & Bougure, 2012).

## **Data Collection**

### **Research Survey**

The survey used a PowerPoint presentation with the following six coats used in Pilot Study #2: Coat 1) designed by Seymour Fox, circa 1961-62, Coat 2) designed by Pauline Trigere, circa 1960, Coat 3) designed by Claire McCardell, circa 1955, Coat 4) designed by Pauline Trigere, circa 1970-79, Coat 5) attributed to Christian Dior, circa 1947-1955, and Coat 6) designed by Calvin Klein, circa 1969. The coats were presented individually, each with several views, including a back and front view and at least one close-up, for the participants to fill in the semantic differentials, and then all together for participants to answer the open-ended questions that asked them to compare and contrast all six coats. The survey included 14 semantic differentials unchanged from those used in Pilot Study #2.

The open-ended questions on the survey were changed slightly. A follow-up question was added to Question #1 asking the participant to explain why they chose a particular coat(s) as “most” classic. The order of Questions #2 and #3 was switched to encourage participants to respond to concrete examples of both “most” and “not” classic garments before contemplating the idea of classic as a more abstract or symbolic concept. Question #2 was changed to a 3-part question. Part #1 asked participants to identify which coat(s) they do not consider classic and Part #2 asked them to explain why they chose each coat(s) as “not” classic mirroring the wording used in Question #1 related to

“most” classic coat(s). An additional sub-question was added to survey Question #2: What and how would you alter specific design attributes in each of the coat(s) **not** considered classic to make them classic? The intent of this question was to encourage participant reflection on the formal attributes of the coats rather than the more symbolic and expressive attributes of their design. Question #3 (unchanged from the first survey) asked participants to list and explain three attributes of classic. The intent of this question was for participants to take a broader view of classic design apart from the six coats. Finally, all survey participants were asked if they would be willing to be interviewed to discuss the concept of classic design and its personal applications in their wardrobes. (Appendix D)

The survey was given in November 2014 during a regular class session for the course Fashion: Trends and Communication. The survey took approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. Fifty-five undergraduate students took the survey and were given participation credit points for the course.

### **Interviews**

The interviews were designed to further clarify survey answers related to how formal attributes contribute to classic design and to more deeply investigate the personal and cultural contextual interpretations of classic clothing within the sample demographic. All survey participants who indicated that they would be willing to take part in an interview were sent an email (Appendix E) explaining in more detail the purpose and focus of the interview and asking if they were still willing to participate. Participation

credit, for Fashion: Trends and Communication, was offered to all students who participated in the interview portion of the study.

Ideally, the final interview participants would have represented the exact proportion of survey participants' answers to Questions #1 and #2 pertaining to which coats are "most" classic and "not" classic. However, though 42 of the survey participants indicated on the survey that they would be interested in participating in an interview only 22 (19 female and 3 male survey participants), responded and scheduled an interview. The male interview participants were eliminated from the data analysis since research has demonstrated that women have a higher fashion involvement than men, which was determined to be a desirable characteristic for the purposes of the is study (Hourigan & Bougure, 2012; O'Cass, 2001). In addition, it was deemed that males would need different images to reflect upon. The final 19 interview participants used for the study were a convenience sample of the survey participants selected based on their positive response to the recruitment email. Still, each of the six coats was considered "most" classic and "not" classic by at least one of the interview participants.

The interviews consisted of two parts: follow-up survey questions and questions related to participants' personal dress and appearance behaviors related to classic clothing. (Appendix D) The interviews were conducted on the campus of a Midwestern university over a two-month period from November to December 2014. Interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and were recorded and transcribed verbatim, by the researcher and a third-party transcription service. Participants were asked to bring one or two items of clothing to the interview from their working wardrobe that they considered

classic. Photographic images were taken of all participants' examples of classic clothing, for the researcher's reference during transcription and data analysis.

In the first part of the interview participants were asked follow-up questions that directly referenced their survey answers about the coats. Images of the coats were shown on a computer screen during the interviews and participants were allowed to scroll back and forth to the images of individual coats as needed. The first questions asked participants to clarify and discuss their survey answers regarding the coats they indicated were "most" and "not" classic. Also in this section participants were asked if they would wear any of the coats they considered "most" classic and any of those they considered "not" classic. This question was included to examine the potential influence of personal preferences on decisions about classic design.

The second part of the interview consisted of questions related to the participants' personal styles and utilization of classic in their wardrobe and appearance behaviors. To facilitate discussion, participants brought one or two examples of clothing from their personal wardrobes that they considered classic design. The discussion of these personal articles of clothing allowed individual interpretations and contexts to be explored in relation to the formal, expressive and symbolic attributes of classic clothing. The combination of the surveys, which included a group of garments held constant among all participants, and the interviews, where participants' impressions related to their personal and cultural context were explored, through garments unique to each participant, helped reveal the connections between all three aspects (form, viewer, context) of the aesthetic experience in classic design

## **Data Analysis**

### **Survey**

The answers to Questions #1.1 and #2.1 (which coats were “most” and “not” classic) were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. From this spreadsheet the number of times an individual coat was chosen in either category was tallied and percentages were calculated. Participants often chose more than one coat for each category so the percentages do not add up to 100% for either the “most” classic or “not” classic category. Participants listed anywhere from one to four coats for each category and a number of participants placed each of the six coats in one category or another. The number of different combinations used, (in answers with more than one coat chosen), in either category were recorded. Additionally, the percentages of participants who chose one, two, three and four coats either category were calculated. These numbers were then compared and contrasted to investigate the level of individuality versus conformity in the identification of classic designs given a set group of examples.

The answers to Question #3, the list of three attributes that describe classic, were entered into a word document. Analytic coding approached as open coding where “the descriptors emerge from the data” was used to analyze the answers (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). Based on this coding the answers were organized into initial categories. A second review of the data resulted in the reorganization and combination of some categories, and the development of themes related to the formal, expressive and symbolic attributes of classic design as described by participants.

Next the responses to Questions #1.2 and #2.2 regarding why particular coats were considered “most” classic and “not” classic were organized into separate word documents for each coat. From these documents, analytic coding for the “most” classic responses and the “not” classic responses for all six coats, based on the codes developed from Question #3, was conducted with constant vigilance for any new, emerging topics. The final categories, related to formal, expressive and symbolic attributes, were compared and contrasted among all six coats within the “most” and “not” classic designations. From these categories, related to participants’ reasons for their “most” and “not” classic designations, themes were developed that applied to each group (“most and “not” classic), specifically. (These themes or categories were also compared to the total percentages of participants including each of the six coats in the “most” and “not” classic categories.) The analysis helped to determine which formal, expressive, and symbolic attributes were consistently considered “most” classic and which were considered “not” classic as well as participants preferences to explain or describe classic, e.g. did they use formal, expressive or symbolic attributes to determine classic and “not” classic.

Finally, the responses to Question #2.3 were organized by coat into word documents. Topic coding based on suggested changes to the formal attributes in each coat was conducted. These codes were organized into categories, on a coat specific basis. Participants were very specific in their identification of formal attributes that were “not” classic in response to asking how they would change the coats. These responses allowed for a more detailed identification of formal attributes that potentially kept a design from being or becoming a classic in the analysis of this question than for Question 1.2, which

asked why a design was considered “most” classic. Based on responses it seemed that participants had an easier time identifying formal attributes that were “not” classic than those that were classic.

### **Interviews**

I adapted Richards (2009) suggestion of approaching qualitative analysis using three types of coding: descriptive, topic, and analytic for the interviews. While descriptive coding does not fit well with the abstract nature of the subject of this study, both topic and analytic coding are appropriate. For the first half of the interview, the follow-up survey questions, the categories and themes developed from the topic and analytic coding of the survey responses were used as a starting point for topic coding but with constant alertness for emerging topics. This choice was based on the fact that the first part of the interview was designed to explore, in greater depth, interview participants’ answers to the survey questions.

In the first half of the interview, the answers to Questions #4 and #7, regarding which coats participants stated they would wear and not wear were tallied and percentages calculated for the most and least popular coats as they occurred in the “most” and “not” classic categories. The participants’ explanations about “Why or why not?” they would wear each coat were also compared to their responses to Questions #1.1 and #2.1, or which coats were “most” and “not” classic, to investigate the potential influence of personal style preferences on participants’ choices for “most” and “not” classic coats. Participant’s answers to Questions #4 and #7 were again referenced when analyzing Question #1 from the second part of the interview: Please describe your personal style.

This second part of the interview was focused on the participants' personal interpretations and use of classic clothing in their wardrobe and appearance management behaviors. It consisted of three groups of question(s) focused on different aspects of personal applications of classic design and individual preferences in appearance behaviors. Question #1 was analyzed individually as it pertained to participants' descriptions of their personal style preferences. Question #4 and its sub-questions, which were focused on participants' descriptions and related explanations of their personal examples of classic design, were analyzed together with the exception of Question #4g. The answers to question #4g, "Did you believe it was classic when you bought it?" were tallied and percentages calculated and then compared to the results of analysis of the rest of Question #4 for each individual garment and participant. The answers for Questions #2, #3, #5 and #6 were analyzed together with the exception of "Do you like to wear classic clothing?" for which participants' 'yes' and 'no' answers were tallied and compared to the results of the analysis of the rest of these four questions.

Topic coding was continued throughout the second part of the interviews primarily organized by single or groups of related questions as noted. After topic coding was completed analytic coding began for the second half of the interview. Analytic coding was approached as open coding defined by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) as a process where "the descriptors emerge from the data" or as Patton (2002) calls it "inductive analysis." This inductive method seemed particularly suited to the abstract nature of this phenomenological study as well as being particularly helpful in understanding the individual viewpoint (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Additionally, the



data were coded for anything surprising or unexpected. The coding process involved revisiting the data several times and recoding when necessary to facilitate the next step. The coded data were organized based on the answers to each question and all their subsequent parts, into categories, which were then developed into themes (Litchman, 2006). The topic and analytic codes were then refined, through several reviews, to accurately reflect the data and develop themes.

## Chapter 5

### Results-Surveys

The surveys required all 55 participants to analyze of the same group of potentially classic garments; six coats selected from the Goldstein Museum of Design digital database. In choosing from this set group of examples participants explained and identified their personal perceptions of and cultural associations with “most” and “not” classic designs. As a result of all participants using the same six coats as examples, for both categories, a direct comparison related to participant indications of “most” and “not” classic individual coats and their formal attributes was possible. Survey participants also identified cultural and personal associations or expressive and symbolic meanings they correlated with the formal attributes in coats considered “most” and “not” classic.

#### **Question 1.1: Please Indicate the Number(s) of the Coat(s) You Consider Most Classic.**

Six coats (Figure 11) were chosen as final images to be used as research probes because they share many formal attributes that the participants in Pilot Study #1 indicated were essential for classic design, such as high quality and simplicity. However, even given the careful selection of coats to meet the basic criteria of classic presented in the pilot study the participant responses in Pilot Study #2 regarding the coats that belonged in the “most” classic category still varied. Many participants in Pilot Study #2 unexpectedly chose more than one coat as “most” classic.

The same general trends are apparent for the participants of the final survey (n=55). (Figures 21 and 22) The coats considered most classic by over half of the participants were Coat #6 (n=36) at 66% and Coat #3 (n=32) at 58%. These two coats are

followed closely by Coat #1 at just under 50%, with 27 participants choosing it as most classic. This is a departure from Pilot Study #2 where Coats #3 and #4 were almost tied as “most” classic, but each by quite substantially under 50%. There is a 24% increase in the final study in the number of participants (n=32) who indicated Coat #3 was “most” classic when compared to the Pilot Study #2 (n=18). Coat #4, though ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in terms of participants choosing it as “most” classic and was still considered “most” classic by 25 participants (44%) which is 12% more than the percentage (32%) from Pilot Study #2 who considered it “most” classic. There is an even greater variance between the scores for “most” classic for Coat #6 in this study and Pilot Study #2. In Pilot Study #2, only 11% chose Coat #6 as “most” classic compared to 66% in the final study. Coat #1’s scores also showed a large difference with 49% choosing it as “most” classic in this study compared to only 21% in the pilot study.

The two coats with the lowest percentages for “most” classic are Coats #2 (9%) and #5 (27%). Of these two coats, Coat #2 was the one considered by the least number of participants (n=5) as “most” classic followed closely by Coat #5 with 15 participants who chose it. These coats with the lowest percentages can be considered “not” classic. They show the least variation between this study and Pilot Study #2. Coat #2 was also chosen by only a small percentage of participants (2%) as “most” classic in the pilot study as was Coat #5 with 11% selecting it. Still, it is notable that each of the six coats was considered by at least a few participants as “most” classic.

**Question 1.2: Please Explain Why You Chose the Coat(s) as Most Classic.**

Most participants (n=48 out of 55 final survey participants) listed more than one coat in the “most” classic category and their answers frequently encompassed all the coats chosen for inclusion. The reference to whichever coats were chosen by any given participant, as a group rather than discrete garments, seems potentially related to the wording of the question. The question seems to have been interpreted by participants in such a way that they should identify the similarities that make their chosen coats “most” classic and state them as a description of the group. Whereas in writing the question the intention was to solicit answers identifying specific features in individual coats that could then be compared more precisely among participants. However, participants, once they decided on the coats they considered “most” classic, seemed to then think of them as a group rather than as individual coats when providing explanations for their choices. For instance, one participant stated, about Coats #3, #4 and #6, “They are all styles of jackets that have been around for many years. They have shapes and forms that create a common feminine jacket. The colors are very neutral and easy to wear with multiple outfits.” Or another participant explained that they, “chose these as the most classic coats because of their structure, color and length,” referring to coats #1, #3, and #5. A third stated, “structurally, they are more classic because of the silhouette, and the material an[d] color” referring to coats #1, #4, #5, and #6.

These examples illustrate another trend in the responses to this question that reinforces the concept of classic as a style: a general similarity that did not alter significantly for any particular coat or combination of coats chosen by participants as

“most” classic. Each of these answers share references to one or two coats, but none referring to the exact same group of coats. There is not a single coat commonly chosen as “most” classic among all three of these responses. However, all three still share a focus on silhouette or shape, color, and overall design though expressed using slightly different terminology. These three responses do include five out the six coats used for the survey. The only coat missing from these examples is Coat #2. This is unsurprising given that only five participants selected it as one of the “most” classic coats. Even then, a participant who chose that coat as “most” classic, stated that, “the shape of the coats has been used for decades. The collar style has never disappeared...the length is the most common length...” when referring to Coats #2 and #3 as “most” classic (Participant #38).

### **Formal attributes**

The explanations for why a certain coat or groups of coats were chosen as “most” classic referred 76% of the time to formal design attributes. The comments about formal attributes dealt primarily, in varying levels of specificity, with the layout (seams, length, collars, manipulations of material to create lines and shape) and surface structure (texture, color, print, embellishments) of the coat. Light and shadow structure defined by DeLong (1998) as pertaining to how light or illumination affects visual aspects of the garment were notably absent from participants’ answers. This is expected as these images were notably photographed in full illumination, taken from the Goldstein Museum of Design’s online digital archive and because this source of structuring is not often in the awareness of students.

The majority of participants were fairly general in their references to layout and surface structure. They described the coat as a whole rather than narrowing in on particular design attribute(s). For instance, one participant (#48) stated that Coats #3, #4 and #6 are classic “because of the way their designed” and another mentioned (Participant #46) that Coats #2, #5 and #6 had “clean, simple lines”. These comments provide an overview of how participants envisioned the parts or details working together to produce a coherent design; a design in which the individual attributes of layout and/or surface structure did not compete with each other or overwhelm the complete design. Many participants used the adjective “simple” to describe this coherence of the layout and surface structure found in classic design. Participants stated that the “details,” the “shape,” the “embellishments” and the “lines” should be “simple” which then meant the entire design became simple. As one participant pointed out regarding Coats #3, #5, and #6, “[they have a] simple style in the way they appear...the construction may be a bit more complex, but they appear more simple” (Participant #36). In other words, simple in overall appearance does not mean that the individual attributes of layout and surface could not be complex but that they should not proclaim that complexity and potentially take priority in the design.

Even when participants emphasized specific attributes of layout and surface structure in coats they considered “most” classic, they still considered these attributes to be supporting players in the role of creating a classic design. In fact, certain attributes of layout and/or surface structure when found in combination were described as creating or recreating a relevant style of garment that was then considered classic. These

combinations were referred to as a recognizable type that seemed familiar and easily understood by the participant(s). For instance, Participant #52 wrote, “[the coats’] look has been reinvented, but [is] still as recognizable form of pea coat.” (This participant only listed Coat #4 as “most” classic but seemed to be discussing multiple coats.) Participant #22 stated, “the fabrics, style elements and shape are things that seem to always be able to be found in the market.” This recognizability was interpreted as giving the coats a continued fashionableness. Participant #15 stated, about Coats #1, #3, and #4, “They are variations on the classic pea coat style, which never goes out of fashion.” This statement implies that viewers can read and understand the combinations of certain pockets, collars, colors, lengths and closures on these coats, as both classic and fashionable because they refer to a culturally known style of coat.

Though some participants evaluated the coats’ formal attributes as whole, others listed specific attributes such as “ the conservative fit, the shape of the collar, and the color” (Participant #6). These lists included attributes of both layout and surface structure. One participant (#16) stated that the “straight A-line fit is a classic silhouette” and “neutral colors” made coats #1, #3 and #6 “most” classic. This is echoed almost exactly by Participant #28 who stated, “the silhouettes are a loose A-line...the colors are neutral” about the same three coats. Still another participant wrote, “these coats are most classic because of their shape, [and] color...” about Coats #1 and #6. In these examples most participants combined both layout and surface structure attributes when discussing why coats were “most” classic.

### *Layout Structure*

Attributes of layout structure were, however, given priority in the explanations of the “most” classic category. The attribute of layout structure most commonly listed was silhouette, or shape. Participants also noted that the “fit” of the coats is important for classic design. Fit is impacted by the silhouette and/or shape of a garment so comments using the word “fit” are included under the term silhouette. Silhouette (and its two iterations) was mentioned by 54% of the participants (n=43) who discussed formal attributes in their explanations of why certain coats were “most” classic. The shape or design of collars was listed by only 16% and the length of the coats was only mentioned by 21% of participants (n=43) discussing formal attributes.

In terms of silhouettes many participants were not specific about the kind of silhouette, i.e. A-line, hourglass, straight, etc. but rather wrote statements like, “the shape of the coats has been used for decades” (Participant #38) or “the...shape [is something] that seem[s] to always be...found in the market” (Participant #22). Similar comments were written about coat length and collar shape in connection to “most” classic coats. All of the comments make a connection between “most” classic and specific attributes of layout structure and fashionableness or at least continued market production. However, generally the fashion industry will not keep producing what does not sell and consumers buy only what they perceive as either attractive or on trend. The conclusion can then be drawn that classic designs remain in fashion only as much as they contain certain silhouettes, collars, length and pockets that are perceived to have longevity and attractiveness to the consumer. This again is the concept of recognizability but in slightly



different terms. Consumers or wearers are not surprised by most of the formal attributes in the “most” classic coat; they have seen them in the past and continue to see them now in current designs. There is, in a sense, a perception of limited risk in choosing classic design because of its recognizability through a familiarity with the formal attributes. There is nothing that appears to be too out of the ordinary in experience of such coats for the majority of consumers.

### *Surface structure*

The most popular attribute of surface structure that participants said made a coat “most” classic was color. Fifty percent of the participants who discussed formal attributes mentioned color. Sometimes specific colors were mentioned such as one participant who wrote, “the colors are black, camel, and grey [Coats #3, #4, & #6]. These are classic colors...” (Participant #33). At other times participants merely wrote, “the colors are neutral...” which in this case refers to Coats #1, #3 and #6 (Participant #28). Color was used as a reason, at least once, as a reason for being “most” classic, for each of the six coats in the survey, except Coat #2. The majority of participants who discussed color in their answers considered neutral colors to be more classic than brighter and more saturated colors. This correlates with the percentages of the highest scoring coats, #6, #3, and #1, in the “most” classic category, which are respectively, grey, black, and navy in color.

Aspects of surface structure, besides color, identified as important for classic design included surface embellishment. Comments regarding surface embellishment discussed the amount of embellishment rather than the type of surface embellishment.

When commenting on embellishment, participants pointed to a lack of surface embellishment as indicative to why certain coat(s) were “most” classic. For instance, one participant (#10) stated that, “low embellishment make these the most classic...” and another (#30) wrote, “...little to no embellishments, and no extravagant details, that are over the top” as making something classic. In other words, simpler was better in terms of “most” classic. The concept of simplicity in surface embellishment echoes participants’ descriptions of “most” classic coats as being simple in overall design. Minimal levels of surface embellishment can also be connected to the greater emphasis participants placed on the aspects of layout structure and their ability to allow consumers to perceive classic designs as still fashionable. Greater amounts of surface embellishment can camouflage aspects of the layout structure that participants identified as attributes that ideally helped consumers perceive classic designs as still fashionable. As well, the wrong type of embellishment could date (historically) a garment thus making it “not” classic. The idea of not being able to date a garment, or know its era of origin is directly related to the idea of classic design as timeless; it has no readily identifiable era of origin and thus it is fashionable always. In this attribute of classic design, embellishments or lack thereof play a significant role.

The fur embellishment found on Coats #1 and #4 is a good example of this phenomenon. Embellishments were connected to fashion trends or the ability to place a coat in historical context. Statements about the fur embellishment were divided; participants either linked or didn’t link fur with classic. Some saw the fur as an embellishment that provided texture and just enough interest to contribute towards

making a coat “most” classic, like Participant #6 who wrote, “the fur collar exemplifies a sophisticated fur coat...” Other participants thought fur detracted from the designation as “most” classic. For example, Participant #38 wrote about the collars on coats #2 and #3 “[a] non-fur collar is more classic than trendy.” The participants who didn’t think fur was classic explained that it was because it connected a coat with a specific era and made it out dated or unfashionable. Participant #36, in response to Question #2.2, explaining why Coats #1 and #4 were “not” classic, stated, “The fur is out dated...fur seems to come in and out of trend so it is hard to see it as ‘classic’.” Therefore, while fur was perceived by some participants as merely one of many embellishment choices, allowable as always in moderation on classic design, other participants linked this particular surface embellishment to what they perceived as inherent expressive and symbolic attributes of classic design: timelessness and fashionableness.

### **Expressive Attributes**

Participants also perceived the coats that they chose as “most” classic and described attributes related to expressive and/or symbolic. Typically, when participants mentioned expressive attributes in their responses, they were predicated upon the formal attributes they listed as making the coat(s) “most” classic. For instance, Participant #1 stated, “I think this coat is the most classic because the silhouette is very flattering and the color isn’t too daring. The coat has longevity.” The more expressive attributes of the coat being “flattering” and “not too daring” are based on the formal attributes of silhouette and color. The predominant expressive attribute associated with the coats participants considered “most” classic was wearability. Participant statements about

wearability mainly focused on classic's overall appeal to a variety of individuals, differentiated primarily by age and body type. However, wearability in these "most" classic coats was also linked to ideas about them remaining fashionable. Classic design as seen in these coats was something that participants perceived women would want to wear over an extended period rather than discarding when the next, new thing arrived.

These concepts are interpreted as expressive because the underlying idea is that, generally, people attempt to wear clothing that they perceive looks good on them, makes them look good to others, and/or has formal attributes that fit within current fashions. Therefore, classic is perceived, according to participant responses, as up-to-date and relevant within the current fashion zeitgeist, as something that makes someone look and feel good about their appearance. Participant #35 stated about Coats #3 and #6 that she chose as "most" classic, "The cuts, styles, and colors of these coats are versatile and lasting in my eyes." Classic lasts; it stays in fashion. As a result, classic makes many different people look and feel good and for a long time. This is what the participants seemed to mean when they wrote statements like, "I can also picture women from different eras wearing these coats," and "Both are coats that are in a style that can be seen throughout the years. Both are extremely wearable to a wide variety of people..." (Participants #9 & #42). These are positive statements about the coats chosen as "most" classic that reflect the idea that classic (and these specific examples) are still fashionable and will continue to be so.

### ***Wearability***

Wearability interpreted as flattering on many different people, helps explain why classic design is perceived as remaining fashionable for a long time. (By this the participants did not seem to mean that every classic would fit every person but merely that the most classic designs fit most people.) If a style is flattering it makes it more likely for a particular classic design to continue to be read and understood by different viewers as an attractive and up-to-date design. There is then within the expressive attribute of wearability the very practical idea that classic designs are still being worn, as they were worn in the past and will continue to be worn in the future. Participants frequently moved classic into the future through wearability. It was never perceived ever becoming unfashionable, unflattering or un-classic at some undetermined point in the future. Classic's wearability and relevance are assured, at least based on the explanations of participants for their choices of coats in the "most" classic category.

These statements were often accompanied by detailed descriptions about the formal attributes that created wearability in the coats chosen as "most" classic. The concept of classic as a flattering style intersects here with the expressive attribute of wearability. The "most" classic coats were describes as universally flattering based, in part, on the formal attributes; the specific attributes that participants perceived enabled specific coat(s) to fit the bodies and the personal styles of many different types of people. As Participant #6 stated, "they strike me as wearable, timeless pieces that most women are likely to have/want in her closet." There is a sense of desirability associated with the "most" classic coats in this statement. Another participant (#19) explained that the coats

chosen as “most” classic were “types” that a woman “could...wear them now and still be considered fashionable.”

The concept of a “type” of coat that is “most” classic links wearability with the formal attributes from another direction. Classic is wearable because it presents a set of formal attributes that contain known quantities in terms of fashion acceptance and attractiveness. A ‘type’ in this sense includes a relatively stable set of formal attributes that then form a whole design or ‘type’ of coat that seems familiar. A few participants identified the “traditional pea coat style” as a wearable classic (Participant #10). This identification sometimes happened through the double-breasted front closure which one participant described as a “look that has been in coat design for decades” (Participant #11). However, for the most part, while the “traditional” pea coat is created using specific formal attributes, participants in the survey did not require that a coat they called “most” classic exactly replicate the formal attributes of a pea coat. It was enough that participants perceived that certain coats partially mimicked or even just tangentially referred to the formal attributes participants associated with a pea coat’s design. For example, in reference to Coats #1, #5 and #6, Participant #30 states, “they all fit the classic women’s pea coat look with buttons down the center front, solid fabric with little to no embellishments, and no extravagant details....” These three coats are all different from one another and Coat #5 is particularly different from Coats #1 and #6, which share a similar silhouette (A-line) and front closure (double-breasted button) design. Apart from the single button closure and more hourglass silhouette Coat #5 is also a brighter red color instead of the more muted navy and grey of the other two coats. This example

illustrates that the pea coat as a “type” of classic, primarily provides a culturally relevant concept of classic that can be applied generally rather than a detailed prescription for designing a classic coat.

### **Symbolic Attributes**

This idea of classic as “type” based in history was a symbolic attribute of the coats described as “most” classic. Participants ascribed this symbolic meaning to the coats they chose as “most” classic but generally gave (outside of the few participants who cited the pea coat) no concrete examples of coats from the past. In fact, coats from the ‘past’ are referenced, more generally, throughout the explanations of why any of the six coats were considered “most” classic. Participants used phrases like, “different eras,” “across decades,” “been around for awhile,” and “many years past” to describe and explain how they associated the coats in the “most” classic category with undisclosed examples from fashion history. These phrases were frequently accompanied by the phrase “I have seen...” or ones similar to it thus implying the application of personal context to an interpretation of the ‘past.’ It is rather a personal and cultural context that they are applying in making their choices, something more ephemeral and vague but no less real to them.

Lastly, there were a few participants who explained that the “most” classic coats symbolized or meant iconic to them. Participants chose certain coats as “most” classic they explained because they immediately brought to mind figures or eras in fashion history. For example, Participant #25 wrote, “I have seen them or ones similar to them in old photos of family members and famous women.” This symbolic meaning is partially

related to the expressive attribute of wearability that included an aspect of continuity or a design that has been seen in the past and will continue into the foreseeable future. In this case, rather than a more general expression of fashionableness there is an association made by the participant between the coat(s) and a very specific person or cultural and historical era. They, in fact, explained that they chose the coats as “most” classic because they actually associate the term “classic” with those individuals or eras. One participant explained about Coats #4 and #6, “They are something I could see Jackie O. and Audrey Hepburn wearing” (Participant #5). This was the primary statement regarding classic for this participant. Her next statement, “more simple and sweet,” qualified the style she associated with these two women and as a result with the “most” classic coats.

**Question 2.1: Please Indicate the Number(s) of Coat(s) That You Do Not Consider Classic.**

As might be expected these two coats (#2 & #5) also have the highest percentage of participants who considered them “not” classic (Figure 21 and 22). Coat #2 was the most popular coat at 76% (n=42) in the “not” classic category. The second most popular coat in this category was #5 at 44% (n=24). Though lower than those in the final study the percentages for Coats #2 (57%) and #5 (30%) in Pilot Study#2 were also much higher for “not” classic than for “most” classic. However, the rest of the coats in the pilot study, Coats #1, #3, #4 and #6 had very low percentages for “not” classic as compared to this study. In this study, Coats #1 and #4 were tied at 29% (n=16). Next, was Coat #3 considered “not” classic by 24% of participants (n=13). Finally, the least popular coat in



“not” classic category was Coat #6 at 22% (n=12), and was also the highest scoring coat in the “most” classic category at 66% (n=36).

All of the survey participants (n=55) indicated that they considered at least one of the six coats “not” classic. Positively stated, this means that no one chose all of the coats as “most” classic or even relatively classic as opposed to completely un-classic. This is in contrast to the pilot study where some participants (n=11) or 21% indicated that they did not think any of the coats were “not” classic only that they did not belong in the “most” classic category.

**Question 2.2: Please Explain Why You Do Not Consider These Coat(s) Classic.**

Most survey participants (n=42) listed more than one coat in this category as well. However, in contrast to Question #1.2, respondents discussed each coat individually almost as often as they discussed them as a group with shared attributes. The participants’ responses read as if they were answering a slightly, differently worded question. The responses are focused on the elements that exclude the coats from the “most” classic group rather than what includes them in a “not” classic group. Still about half the participants still considered all the coats in the “not” classic category as a group with similarities rather than discrete examples that did fit into the “most” classic category. Though even when referring to the “not” classic coats as a group, participants still often discussed specific formal attributes in their answers.

The coats’ formal attributes were the primary focus of the answers to this question. When specific formal attributes were emphasized as determining a coat’s “not” classic designation, they tended to be fairly consistent across all participants. This was

true for each of the six coats but especially for Coats #2 and #5 the highest scoring coats in this category. For instance, for Coat #2, which 76% of participants (n=42) listed as “not” classic, 62% of participants (n=26) mentioned the green color and 45% (n=19) mentioned the collar shape as making that coat “not” classic. The shape (silhouette) and the breast pocket flaps were the most frequently cited formal attributes of Coat #5 which 44% of participants selected as “not” classic. On Coats #1 and #4, at 29%, it was the fur collars and sleeve accents that most participants cited as the prominent reason they were “not” classic.

However, twenty-four percent (n=10) of the 76% of participants (n=42) who chose coat #2 (along with other coats) as “not” classic did not specify any particular formal attribute but rather wrote comments like, “they [Coats #2, 4, 5, and 6] have trendy details” or “...these three styles [Coats #1, 2, & 6] are too modern of designs to be considered a classic look...” (Participants #26 & #32). These comments refer to the overall design of the coat(s), composed of formal attributes, but don’t cite any particular attributes as the distinguishing marks of a “not” classic coat. What these two respondents did, in these statements, is assign descriptors like “modern” and “trendy” to the concept of “not” classic or in other words, these terms are used as opposites of classic in the participants’ answers. The assignment of opposite terms is found throughout the responses to this question. Even when participants listed specific formal attributes in their answers, they overwhelmingly added a term, like “modern” or “trendy,” to qualify or explain exactly what the traits were if they were “not” classic.

A few participants did discuss marginally expressive attributes, such as the coats being neither “versatile, nor complimentary of an outfit and the feminine physique” or that they “would not look good on all body types” (Participants #2 & #27). These statements convey ideas that are the opposite of how the “most” classic coats were described. Still, as in the case of flattering and versatile for the “most” classic coats, being unflattering and not versatile, it was the formal attributes that were the foundation for the emotions expressed. Furthermore, these attributes are expressive because they make the coats less desirable to many women and subsequently less likely to make them feel attractive as compared to the “most” classic coats, whereas formal attributes described as flattering and versatile made the coat(s) wearable and therefore desirable. According to participants, classic helps the wearer feel good about themselves and their appearance. These “not” classic coats, on the other hand, presented a risk, their formal attributes were described as unique, trendy, outdated and modern; these are more of an unknown quantity in terms of fashionableness and wearability.

#### **Qualifying terms for “not” classic**

As stated, participants more often than not used qualifying terms to explain or categorize the formal attributes of the coat(s) they chose as “not” classic. The formal attributes participants listed, in response to this question, were mainly related to layout structure. The specific attributes of layout structure ranged, from collar shape to silhouette to length. There were also no particular attributes of layout structure for any particular coat(s) in the “not” classic category that were mentioned exclusively with an individual coat. This was also true with attributes of surface structure with one

exception, color. Color took precedence in surface structure, especially because the two coats that were not in a neutral color (Coats #2 and #5) were the highest scoring coats in the “not” classic category.

In light of this trend, the data analysis for this question did not focus on tallying the specific formal attributes listed by survey participants for individual and multiple coats. Rather the analysis focused on the use of the qualifying terms participants applied to the formal attributes. Forty-four of 55, or 80% of the participants, applied qualifying terms to the formal attributes they designated as “not” classic. The application of these qualifying terms followed no particular pattern. The formal attributes of collar/lapel shape, silhouette, and color were all just as likely to be termed “modern,” “trendy,” or of a “specific era” by participants as any other attribute. Since all six coats in the survey were chosen by at least one participant as “not” classic then all the coats had qualifying terms applied to their formal attributes. Moreover, all of the terms used to qualify formal attributes as “not” classic were found as often in various combinations as they were found singly.

The results related to the four most popular terms are examined separately. However, the terms are connected and complete separation was impossible, especially since participants often mentioned several terms together in their responses.

### ***Trendy***

The terms trend, trendy, and phrases like “not always in fashion” were the most commonly applied to the formal attributes of the “not” classic coats. They were used by 36% (n=20) of the participants to qualify the formal attributes listed for coats chosen as

“not” classic. One participant simply stated, “the colors [are] a bit too trendy, some of the lengths [are] trendy, [and] some of the lapels [are] too trendy,” referring to Coats #2, 5, and 6 (Participant #13). It was left to the viewer to determine what about each attribute makes them “too trendy” though color is fairly straightforward. Coat #2 is green, Coat #5 is red and Coat #6 is grey. (That grey would be considered trendy is somewhat surprising as many participants listed it as a classic color.) Other participants were more exact in their reading of the particular formal attributes that were “trendy”. For instance, Participant #34 stated, “I do not consider these coats [#2, #4, & #6] classic based on the details of the collar. Fur to me is trendy...” and “I do not consider this coat to be classic because of the daring neckline...the neckline is too fashion forward to be considered classic” about Coat #4. As this last example indicates participants sometimes connected the concept of trendy to another qualifying term or phrase used by participants: unique.

### *Unique*

The term unique is defined as “being one of a kind [and]...without...equivalent” (American Heritage Dictionary, 1985). It is in this sense that 31% of the participants (n=17) used the term to qualify the formal attributes of coats they considered “not” classic. For example, in attempting to clarify what they intended by the term unique they used words such as “unordinary” and statements such as “I have not seen such a...shape...” (Participants #27 & #11). In other words, unique is “unordinary” and “unfamiliar” and since unique is “not” classic then to some extent classic is then ordinary and familiar. Classic is something seen before or familiar to the viewers or as Participant #20 stated, “[it] can’t be considered classic if it has never been before.” In contrast, the

aesthetic experience of formal attributes in “not” classic designs involves the viewer trying to place the design into a familiar context and on some level being unable to do so. The viewer has never seen such a “collar” or “color” before; they have no reference point to understand it or to place it somewhere in fashion history.

The term unique as a descriptor for formal attributes that did not have a readily accessible historical context for the viewer (participant) suggests that in contrast, classic has historical references and roots. In fact, in explaining the uniqueness of certain formal attributes participants stated that they were not “traditional” and therefore the coats were “not” classic. These “unique” attributes were often viewed as new and modern, and even trendy sometimes; they stood out rather than blending in. Most participants who used the term unique had newness, as in “never seen before” in mind, however, one participant associated uniqueness with being outdated, as “[something] you wouldn’t see someone...wearing...today” (Participant #6). The term outdated was another one that participants used to qualify the formal attributes they considered “not” classic.

#### ***Outdated/Of a specific era***

Some participants used the term “outdated” to qualify the formal attributes they considered “not” classic. Participants (26% or n=14) also used phrases such as “from a specific era” or historical “time period” when qualifying the coats’ formal attributes. In fact, for Coats #2 and #5, some participants identified the exact time periods with which they associated the formal attributes and thus the coats. Coat #2 was associated with the 1960s or the 1950s while Coat #5 was associated with the 1930s-40s, the 1950s and the 1970s-80s. Since Coat #2 is from 1960s and Coat #5 the late 1940s, the associations the

viewer might make between the coats and a perceived historical time period did not have to be based on accurate knowledge of the fashion trends of these periods. It was enough for participants to perceive certain attributes as “old-fashioned,” “vintage” or as “a blast from the past” for them to consider the coats “not” classic (Participants #43, #35, & #19). This then made the coat(s) in question less than desirable for appearing up-to-date with current trends and so not classic, for classic always appears up-to-date or at the very least not out of fashion. Coats qualified as outdated because they were identified with a specific era were items that as one participant stated, “not worn today” as least if the wearer doesn’t want to appear outré.

### ***Modern***

The final qualifying term applied to “not” classic formal attributes is almost the exact opposite of outdated or of a specific era. It is modern. That both modern and outdated or old-fashioned could be used to qualify “not” classic formal attributes seems counterintuitive. However, the use of the term modern is really another way of saying that the coat’s formal attributes are indicative of a specific era; the current fashion moment. The exact time frame for modern is not specifically mentioned by most of the 22% of the participants (n=12). However a participant explained, “the fur on [coat] one makes the coat feel young and more fast fashion. The collar and yoke on [coat] two make it seem young and modern” (Participant #5). This comment seem to indicate that even more than a time period, modern is about the age of the potential wearer of the coats; that certain formal attributes make a coat more suitable for a younger person, chronologically, or a person of any age who is fashion forward minded. For instance, another participant

stated, “It looks more modern, [like a] designer coat” about Coat #3. As such it is “not” classic because classic must be wearable by many different types of people, based on age, ethnicity, or body type. It therefore cannot be seen as too fashion forward or modern or young or unique because this makes it desirable and emotionally comfortable to only a limited segment of the population; those who don’t mind potentially appearing significantly different from others.

**Question 2.3: What and How Would You Alter Specific Design Attributes in Each of the Coat(s) Not Considered Classic to Make Them Classic?**

**Coat #2**

As the highest scoring coat in the “not” classic category at 76% participants had much to say about changes they perceived would make Coat #2 more classic. The most popular change that participants indicated they would make was to an aspect of the layout structure of the coat; they wanted to alter the collar shape or line. Coat #2 has a rounded yoke type collar attached to a slightly raised jewel neckline with a narrow v-shaped opening at center front. The collar is deep both in the front and the back. Its shape was described as “unique” and participants varied in whether they perceived and called it a collar, lapel, yoke or even “flaps.” All these terms were included under the term collar, as part of the layout structure of the coat.

Sixty-nine percent (n=29) of participants (n=42) who selected Coat #2 as “not” classic indicated that they would change the collar/yoke/lapel to make it more classic. Overall, the design of the collar was not perceived as a classic design. Participant #2 responded that the “big collar [was] out of date and a bit overbearing” and that



“[she]...would tone down the drama of the big collar.” This was a sentiment expressed in a variety of ways by most of the other participants who wanted to change the collar. A more classic collar many participants indicated should be smaller. It should not have the larger flaps that go to the shoulder line but rather it could be “made into a capellette [sic], rain guard or make it smaller so it fits a better visual proportion” (Participant #21). Forty-five percent (n=13) of participants who wanted to change the collar also wanted to change the color of the coat.

In fact, changing the color was the next most popular alteration for Coat #2 to be more classic. Fifty-five percent (n=23) of the participants indicated that they would change the color. Most indicated that a more neutral color or “classic color, like navy or black” would be suitable (Participant #3). Participants suggested other colors such as “a neutral blue, grey, [or] tan” though black was the most commonly indicated color (Participant #12). Some participants did not want to change the color from green but rather wanted it to be “less saturated” or “duller”: they perceived the particular green on Coat #2 as “too unique” or even “seasonal” but not classic, i.e. neutral (Participants #11 & #8).

Finally, there were other types of alterations suggested by a few participants. These included changes to the length, sleeves, silhouette and the front closure or buttons. Four or fewer participants suggested each of these alterations. Some examples of the specific alterations they suggested were “possibly [changing] the button arrangement” or “change silhouette” or even “lengthen [it] just a bit” (Participants #10, #16, & #39). A few were more specific, like “take off the last three buttons” or “shorten the hem a couple

of inches” (Participants #36 & #6). In total, suggestions for these types of alterations came from 10 participants or 24%.

### **Coat #5**

The changes that participants suggested for Coat #5 were more varied and numerous. In fact, while Coat #2 only had two primary changes suggested by most participants Coat #5 had 4 alterations suggested that were almost equal in number from participants (n=25) who indicated that Coat #5 was “not” classic. The four alterations most commonly suggested for Coat #5 were changing the breast pockets, the color, the collar/lapels, and the silhouette respectively at 48% (n=12), 60% (n=15), 48% (n=12), and 52% (n=13) of the participants. The additional alterations suggested were changing the length, closure, and fabric. Again the majority of changes suggested were related to layout structure. Apart from color the only other aspect of surface structure participants suggested changing was the fabric texture at 12% (n=3). For Coat #5 combinations of two or more changes were predominant; 48% of participants (n=14) suggested three or more alterations and another 33% (n=8) suggested two alterations, totaling 88% of the participants. However, there was no particular combination of alterations that was more common than any other rather they were quite varied in nature.

In terms of changing the color, the most popular suggestion was to make the coat a “classic color” or a neutral color. Unlike the responses for Coat #2 most participants did not suggest a specific color for this coat, though Participant #38 did state they would “change [the] color to grey or black” and Participant #12 suggested “a more traditional tone like navy, tan, or black.” Others suggested keeping the coat red but making it a bit

brighter which was unusual, since most participants typically wanted neutral colors for classic coats. In general, suggestions for color were less specific for this coat than Coat #2; many participants just said they would change the color.

The next most popular suggested alteration was changing the silhouette at 52%. Based on response to Question #1.2 the A-line silhouette was more commonly viewed as a classic. Though a few participants in their discussions of silhouette related to “most” classic included the hourglass silhouette found on Coat #5 as a classic silhouette, most did not. Therefore, the suggested alterations to the silhouette of this coat generally called for a more relaxed or “more loose-fitted” silhouette or in other words something closer to an A-line silhouette (Participant #12). Similar statements expressed the desire for the waistline on Coat #5 to “not [be]...cinched” and to “take [the coat] in less at the waist” (Participants #19 & #28).

The suggestions for alterations to the breast pockets and collar/lapel part of the coat were related though not always by the participants. Each of these two alterations was suggested by 48% (n=12) of the participants. The predominant concern about the breast pockets was related to the flaps, which seemed to participants oddly and awkwardly placed. Participants suggested that the breast pockets either be removed completely or moved lower on the coat. To make the collar more classic, participants suggested that the collar/lapels needed to be larger and less like those found on a dress or a 1950s “housedress”, as one participant stated they needed to “give the collar a bit more character” to make it classic (Participant #8 & #2). While participants did not necessarily suggest that the pockets and collar change together for the collar to be larger as most

commonly suggested, the pockets or at least the flaps would have to move or be removed completely.

The final three suggested alterations were related to the length, the front closure and buttons, and the type of fabric used to make the coat. All but one of the participants wanted Coat #5 to be shorter to be classic. Three out of the four participants who wanted to change the closure suggested different buttons but did not specify what type of button or this issue with the current buttons other than the fact that they were “not” classic. Finally, three participants mentioned altering the fabric, one suggested, “use[ing] a stiffer fabric” and another to “change the texture” (Participant#3 & #14).

#### **Coats #1 and #4**

Not only do these two coats share a similar number of participants who selected them as “not” classic, the predominant alteration to the coats’ designs was to an attribute of surface structure: the fur embellishments on collars (Coats #1 and #4) and cuffs (Coat#1). In fact, of the 16 participants who selected Coat #1 as “not” classic, 15 or 94% of them wrote that in order to make the coat more classic either the fur on the collar and/or the cuffs should be removed, in the words of Participant #36, “take the fur off...and have a plain lapel and cuff.” Coat #4 had fewer participants indicate that removing the fur would make the coat more classic but still 86% or 13 participants wrote comments such as, “I would change the fur to the material of the jacket” or simply to “remove the fur” (Participants #17 & #28). While overall, plain wool for the entire coat was considered more classic than having fur embellishments there were also a few participants who thought that it was the type of fur on these two coats which contributed

to making them “not” classic. These participants suggested altering the fur to make it a less obvious or statement making focal point on the coat. They preferred that the fur blend in more with the coat. According to participant responses this could be achieved either through a color change, such as Participant #17 suggestion for Coat #1, “change the color of the coat to a black with black fur” or Participant #1 suggestion for Coat #4 to “make the appearance [of the collar] less bulky.”

Additional suggestions for alteration for Coats #1 and #4 included attributes of layout structure similar to those suggested for Coats #2 and #5, such as length, silhouette, closure/buttons. Suggested changes to the buttons or front closure were actually also similar for both coats. One participant for each coat thought that Coat #1 should be single-breasted and Coat #4 should be double-breasted because “the double-breasted coat has always been a classic look” (Participant #30). The style and color of the buttons were, in fact, more often cited as making these coats “not” classic than the style of front closure, i.e. double versus single breasted. For Coat #4, the buttons were generally considered to be too big to be classic and one participant even thought that “fabric covered buttons” should not be used for classic (Participant #28). As for Coat #1, the silver metallic buttons were considered to provide too much contrast against the navy coat fabric to be considered classic. In this case, participants thought the button color should match the coat. Therefore, participant concerns about the buttons and closures, like the fur details on these coats, are related to these attributes as embellishments or surface structure rather than layout structure.

The other attribute of surface structure mentioned was color but only by two participants for Coat #1 and one participant for Coat #4. This is likely because these two coats already have neutral colors, navy and camel or tan. Neutral colors are considered classic. Participants who did suggest changing the color of these coats, suggested different neutral colors such as black or grey.

### **Coats #3 and #6**

In contrast, Coats #3 and #6, considered “not” classic by the fewest participants, at 24% and 22% respectively shared suggested alterations that focused primarily on attributes of layout structure. For each coat one particular attribute was considered the primary issue keeping each from being classic. For Coat #3 it was the collar shape, cited by 62% of participants (n=8), and the fact that it is a convertible collar, made to stand up, framing the face and head as well as lying flatly on the shoulders. For Coat #6, it was the almost floor length, identified by 83% of the participants (n=10). Further suggestions for alterations to the coats focused on the coats’ silhouettes. According to participants, both coats should be a bit more fitted and less boxy. Participant #42 would have given Coat #3 a “more tailored, fitted silhouette” and Participant #17 wanted to “take in the waist [on Coat #6], so its more flattering.” Additional suggestions for alterations on Coat #3 included changing the length of the sleeves, the front closure/buttons, and the length of the coat. For Coat #6, there was only one additional alteration suggested; the pockets were either too big or an incorrect style, i.e. patch, to be part of a classic coat.

## **Comparison of Questions 1 and 2**

There is considerable variance between the answers given by the participants in this study and the original pilot study though general trends in responses for Coats #2, #3, and #5 are similar. One reason for this may be that the question is worded slightly differently based on the results of the original pilot study. In the pilot study a number of participants listed multiple coats in their answer to this question rather than choosing a single example as was assumed. Originally in the question, the word “coat” was only singular but in for the final study it was reworded. The word “coat” was changed to “coat(s)” to indicate that multiple answers were acceptable. In the final survey, Question #2.1 paralleling Question #1.1, was also changed for this reason. The result is that more participants in the final survey chose multiple coats when responding to these two questions than did those in the pilot study. In fact, 42% of the participants (n=23) put all six coats in either the “most” classic or “not” classic category. Of the remaining 32 participants, 72% (n=23) listed four to five coats combined in both categories and 12.5% (n=4) listed three coats combined in both categories. The most common number of coats in the “most” classic category was three at 42% (n=23) and in the “not” classic category it was two at 40% (n=22).

Certain coats were chosen with greater frequency than others. The coat that was most often placed in one category or the other was Coat #6 at 86% (n=43), followed by Coat #2 at 82% (n=45), Coats #1 and #3 at 78% (n=43), Coat #4 at 71% (n=39) and finally Coat #5 at 67% (n=37). This indicates that participants were generally decided and certain, one way or the other regarding Coats #6 and #2. This lines up with the results

of Questions #1.1 where Coat #6 was the highest scoring in the “most” classic category and Question #2.1 where Coat #2 was the highest scoring in the “not” classic category. Of the remaining coats Coat #5 (Figure 11) was the most often left out of either category; 33% of participants (n=18) did not select it at all. It is possible that Coat #5 was difficult for some participants to categorize in terms of the dichotomy provided in the survey.

Answers to Question #1.2 revealed commonalities no matter which coat(s) were chosen as “most” and “not” classic. Participants pointed out specific formal design attributes as indicative of why all the coats chosen fit into the singular category of “most” classic. For instance, participant (Participant #10) pointed to the “traditional pea coat style...neutral colors and low embellishment” as attributes she believed made coats #1, #6, and #3 “most” classic. These three coats do share some similarities in layout and surface structure but even the attributes listed by this participant are not *exactly* the same among all three coats. The effect of this answer is a sense that the participant intentionally sought similarities to explain why they chose each of these coats as “most” classic. When answering this question, participants visually assessed and decided on the coats that they thought were classic and then needed to explain how they decided; what did they look for in a “most” classic coat? This method of assessing the “most” classic coats and answering the question was also present when participants discussed the expressive and symbolic attributes of the coats. This suggests that classic is considered, participants in this survey as a style as defined by Prown (1980) and DeLong (1998). Therefore, it must have formal design attributes that occur in unique and specific



combinations that in turn reveal and produce commonly held culturally symbolic and expressive attributes.

In contrast, participants' answers to Question #2.2, explain why you **do not** consider these coat(s) classic, tended to focus on attributes unique to each coat they listed as "not" classic. Rather than general statements meant to encompass all the coats like the used for Question #1.2, here participants singled out each coat they chose and individually listed the formal attributes that kept it from being "most" classic. They were looking at the coats and seeking differences from the "most" classic coats rather than similarities among the "not" classic coats they chose. Some participants still included statements that grouped all the coats they chose as "not" classic together when they explained their reasoning. These statements, like those for the majority of the answers to Question #1.2 applied attributes of the formal, expressive, and symbolic to all the coats in the category but they were almost uniformly antonyms of words participants chose for their descriptions of the "most" classic coats. Words like "daring", "distinctive", "flashy", and "trendy" were used for "not" while "most" classic coats were referred to as "[it] isn't too daring", "traditional", "nothing too trendy", and "common." This reinforces the idea that classic design is a culturally understood style within which there are similarities in the formal attributes to be found even if those attributes are more general than specific and more subjective, (applied in various ways) than objective.

### **Question 3: What Defines Classic for You? Please List and Explain Three**

#### **Attributes.**

In Pilot Study #2 this question was placed directly after the question asking participants to indicate which coat they considered most classic. However, for the final study additional questions were added so that participants could discuss the attributes of the specific coats they chose as “most” and “not” classic. This question was then moved to the end of the survey. The intention was to foster answers to this question with more general applications to clothing rather than related to the specific examples provided, as was often the case in the pilot study. After coding and recoding the data 11 categories emerged related to classic design in general as per the focus of the question. These 11 categories were interpreted into themes that reflect the viewers’/participants’ aesthetic experiences (DeLong, 1998) with a somewhat broader view than did the responses to previous questions. However, since the focus is still on the attributes of classic design there is naturally some overlapping of responses between sections of the survey.

The three resulting themes related to classic design aligned well with the DeLong’s (1998) definitions of formal, expressive, and symbolic attributes of clothing as seen through the participants’ knowledge, experiences and emotions. The three themes build upon one another with the 6 categories included in the formal attributes providing the foundation for the expressive and symbolic attributes. Additionally, while the formal attributes are not always directly associated with the symbolic attributes of classic there is nonetheless an indirect correlation through the expressive attributes. This is because the symbolic attributes listed by the participants exist partially as a result of generally

positive emotions associated and built upon specific combinations of formal attributes in classic clothing.

### **Formal attributes**

#### ***Layout structure***

The formal attributes include the elements of layout and surface structure listed by participants as important to making a design classic. However, the formal attributes are more than discrete elements of cut, line, silhouette, color, or embellishment they are also the parts that create the complete structure of a garment. Therefore, how the formal attributes or the parts work together in a design and thus impact the assessment of the formal attributes in that design are also essential attributes of classic design. The formal attributes discussed by participants include both layout and surface structure as well as combinations of layout and surface structure as defined by DeLong (1998). (While DeLong (1998) also included light and shadow structuring her definition and description of the formal attributes of clothing the participants did not discuss this aspect of the formal structure in their comments.) Layout structure includes the “combination and manipulation of materials” such as seams, pleating, collars and similar features to create the lines of the garment. Surface structuring refers to traits such as texture, color, and print inherent to the two-dimensional material from which a garment is constructed (DeLong, 1998).

Layout structure generated a higher number of participant comments as important for classic design than did surface structure attributes, with the exception of color, which was mentioned enough by participants to be accorded a separate category. Layout

structure impacts classic design in two different ways. The first way is through the individual attributes of what participants termed the “structure” of the garment. (Surface attributes, though considered structure in this analysis were more typically termed “details” by participants.) Participants listed among others the attributes of silhouette, placement and design of closures, length of garment, and cut and shape of collar/lapels. Participants had varying ideas about which particular attributes were more important for classic, i.e. silhouette versus collar shape or length versus closure, but tended to agree that simplicity or a “relatively simple construction, [and] no defining parts that stand out...” was essential for a design to be classic (Participant #27).

### ***Recognizability***

Having no single attributes that stand out within the design is the second way participants connected the formal attributes to classic design. In this case, the various attributes of layout structure create a classic design through the proper combination and/or relationship of individual attributes, which is then perceived as a whole rather than the parts. This whole design produces a recognizability associated by participants with classic design. A classic design should be a familiar design. It is not necessary for a classic design to be an exact replica, though it can be, of past style, but the design can only have a limited number of alterations or changes in details. The underlying classic structure must be maintained. It should be noted that the concept of recognizability as described by participants assumes that classic designs are always up-to-date, but not too fashion forward and have been so for many years (50 years was a popular number).

It is through consistency in the attributes of layout structure or in other words the “basic design elements, . . . which never really change their inherent shape” that a design becomes a classic (Participant #22). This same participant also described the minimally changing formal attributes of classic as having a “reoccurring silhouette” (Participant #22). What the participants who listed this constancy in layout structure as an overall attribute of classic design generally did not do, however, is provide a detailed description of any specific formal attributes required for this to occur. This attribute is not about prescription, i.e. the silhouette must be A-line, the collar must be a 3-piece rolled, but rather about a complete design for which viewers have a reference point; they have seen it previously and maybe on more than one occasion.

Classic design consistently and successfully returns to or remains on the fashion scene and with a high level of continuity in the formal attributes. This is unique for any design that exists within a system dedicated to continual change. Participants indicated that along with this comes an appeal that extends not only over longer periods of time, 50 years was the most popular choice, but also across generations of women in the same moment of time. There is a connection between length of time and generations of people that is expressed in the term recognizability. Because of this trait, classic can be “style[d] in many ways but . . . still [be] recognizable for its well-known traits” (Participant #53). If a design is constant in its layout structure, over 50 years, then the potential number of people who can view it, understand it, and respond positively to it, increases. It is liked across generations. As well, it becomes a garment that “will remain a staple in [the] closet for years” because it doesn’t really ever go out of style (Participant #26). It is

something that can “be reworked easily without making the item unrecognizable from the original, to become modern” (Participant #55).

### *Surface structure*

This idea of reworking or changing the original formal attributes slightly but not too much is often accomplished through attributes of surface structure. As previously discussed, attributes of layout structure are what makes a largely makes a garment recognizable but to make it modern as well requires adjustments in surface structure. This must still be done with care as there are certain attributes of surface structure intimately tied to participants understanding of classic designs versus trendy designs such as color and embellishments. In fact, surface embellishments are linked more often than cut, silhouette, and line to particular fashion eras. In other words, “embellishments are trends that signify a decade or a season” (Participant #38) and “set apart a more modern/trendy garment from a classic garment” (Participant #30). It is through surface structure, or “details” that participants indicated most clearly that a design could be linked to a particular era. It is also through surface structure that a classic layout structure can be updated just enough to make it current. However care must be taken for as one participant stated, “the details must be subtle otherwise the piece may be considered trendy” and not classic (Participant #9).

The idea that embellishments have the ability to make a design trendy is related to the concept that attributes of surface structure, in a classic design, should be simple or low key, for “classic is not embellished greatly” (Participant#1). Specifically, participants identified the careful selection and application of embellishments as

contributing to classic design. They discussed that “the shape and placement of pockets, buttons, and embellishments” were integral to producing either a classic or a trendy design dependent of the designer’s decisions (Participant #12). One participant even stated that “you could have a classic silhouette, but using nontraditional materials will instantly eliminate the classic feel of the garment and make it more modern” or in essence one design decision regarding the surface structure could shift a garment from classic to trendy immediately (Participant #30). A simple recognizable layout structure provides a foundation for a classic design but surface structure can then either reinforce or detract from this foundation.

### *Color*

Color is another attribute of surface structure that can easily detract from or increase a design’s classic-ness. Color was listed by more participants than all the other attributes of surface structure combine with one primary focus. Classic design means neutral colors because they “do not overpower the eyes,” and “[go] with everything” (Participants #22 & #9) The colors participants listed as neutral include black, navy, beige, navy, white, brown, cream, tan, and one participant even listed red. Another reason, participants wrote that neutral colors were important for classic was because they were “timeless” and as such could be “worn throughout the centuries” and “always [be] in fashion” (Participants #9, #17 & #19).

### **Combined attributes of layout and surface structure**

The proper combination of attributes of layout and surface structure, conveying simplicity in the entire design, contributed to three overall characteristics of classic design as described by participants: versatility, flattering and stylish.

#### ***Simplicity***

According to participants, classic is simple in all aspects of its surface and layout structure. There is no particular formal attribute that stands out or becomes a major focal point in the garment but rather all attributes work together to create a well-integrated design that is seen as a whole before it is seen as discrete parts. A few participants even noted that classic is “conservative.” It does not reveal too much of the body or emphasize too many attributes. It is “simple enough to not always be the loveliest part of an outfit” (Participant #18). This also implies that the result of classic’s successful integration of a variety of layout and surface structure attributes allows a classic garment to become a background rather than foreground piece.

#### ***Versatility***

Classic is simple; it does not stand out but allows other pieces, trendy or more fashionable pieces, to take center stage in an ensemble. This lack of outstanding or unique formal attributes makes classic versatile, another attribute participants associated with classic design. Classic design, as Participant #48 states, “looks great, especially with a variety of outfits.” This means that the most classic pieces in a wardrobe are the ones that go well with almost everything else. It can be accessorized and either keep its classic-ness or move towards trendy based on the other parts of the ensemble. “You can



dress it up or down when needed” as well, so classic can be both formal and informal (Participant #4). As a result, classic design is considered a wardrobe “staple” by participants; the foundation of a wardrobe that in other respects might be considered “trendier.”

### ***Flattering***

Participant descriptions of classic as versatile connect it to the final characteristic associated with the formal attributes: flattering. Flattering refers to the idea that classic design looks good on the female figure. In fact, it looks good on a variety of female figures. The garment is designed in a way that considers who will be wearing it as more important than fitting in with current design trends. Sometimes the layout structure was directly linked to giving classic design its ‘flattering’ characteristic. Participant #27 stated that classic “works on many body types, [is] fitted at the waist, not too long, not too short (knee length)”. However, the overall sense when all of the answers in this category are examined as group is that flattering means that it “fits well” and looks good (Participant #37).

From this perspective of classic as flattering, the thoughtful design of layout structure in particular is essential. Without well-placed seam lines, an appropriate silhouette, and the thoughtful application of details of cut such as collars and pockets, a flattering fit is difficult to create. For classic to “[have] the ability to be flattering for many types of people in different ways,” as Participant #1 states, requires more attention to the details of layout structure than a garment intended for a single demographic, i.e. Junior’s or petite-sizes. This attention to detail in the formal attributes also extends to the

surface structure where such things as color and placement or amount of embellishments can affect how flattering a garment is for any given individual.

### *Style*

The concept of having “style” or being stylish refers not to following trends but rather to the ability to present the wearer as fitting into current fashion trends while not seen to be slavishly following them or having a continuous or persistently similar look, usually with the connotation of quality. One participant described classic thus, “something that can be part of my life forever, not always in-date but never out-of-date” (Participant #14) and another wrote that classic is “fashion that does not age” (Participant #7). Classic provides stylishness without the need to constantly change one’s wardrobe or to continually purchase new garments in order to appear current enough with fashion trends so as not to appear hopelessly outmoded. Classic accomplishes this partially through simplicity in its formal attributes. It does not have added embellishments or silhouettes or colors that allow it to be perceived as obviously from a specific era or as an example of a particular trend, one that was only popular for a few years or a even just a single season. It can create a persistent yet fashionable look for those who choose to wear it in whole or in part.

### **Expressive attributes**

Expressive attributes refer to the emotions or feelings engendered by looking at classic or, in this case, the perceived emotions participants associated with wearing classic design. The fact that classic is considered, through its formal attributes, to be stylish, flattering and versatile impacts the expressive attributes. This theme includes the

emotions participants expressed associated with wearing classic clothing: “feeling good”, always fitting in with a group, and feeling “dignified” or “sophisticated.”

### ***Feeling good and fitting in***

“Feeling good” and fitting in with any group are related to each other and connected to the fact that participants consider classic both flattering and in style. The knowledge that classic is always in style and almost always flattering creates a feeling of emotional security in one’s own appearance and in how that appearance is perceived by others in social situations. As one participant explained about classic, “it makes me feel good and style savvy because I know I can’t go wrong with that [classic] piece” (Participant #4). Classic expresses a confidence and ability to present oneself well and stylishly. With classic there is no need to debate on whether it would be appropriate for most occasions because “you don’t have to think about whether it goes or not because it just does, always” (Participant #34). So not only is classic always relatively current in its appearance or at least somewhat consistent with trends, it is always appropriate, in part, because it is also always simple and recognizable in its formal attributes. Classic’s simplicity limits the potential for any particular design attributes to offend or confuse the viewer and its recognizability means it is more likely to be perceived and understood similarly by both wearer and viewer.

### ***Dignified and sophisticated***

Participants also described classic design as expressing sophistication, elegance or as making the wearer feel “classy, dignified, and professional” (Participant #6). Classic design makes the wearer feel like an adult, like someone “grown up and mature” even

when that is not necessarily the case (Participant #34). Since it expresses a dignity or sophistication that the wearer does not necessarily feel they possess, it is worn in situations where confidence is desired, not only in one's appearance, but also one's personal, social, and professional qualities. Wearing classic increases the chances of obtaining approval from those with which one interacts. Classic is the appropriate middle ground; "it's not bold or boring but elegant...[it has] a way of catching people's eye naturally" with no perceived artifice on the part of the wearer (Participant #34). Participants perceived classic as least likely to offend any given audience. Therefore, it has the effect of a self-fulfilling prophecy; it produces confidence. Since classic is perceived as expressing sophistication, elegance and dignity, it allows the wearer to think about other aspects of their professional and social interactions without fretting about how they look.

### **Symbolic attributes**

Symbolic attributes are the cultural meanings participants associated with classic. These attributes are often a response to the appropriate combinations of formal attributes. They are also predicated on cultural ideas and associations with and about classic. However, while the meanings are culturally embedded and transferred to the wearer (McCracken, 1988; Ward, 2011) via consumption, the symbolic meanings of classic are applied based on individual ideas about necessary formal attributes. So while there is quite a lot of consensus regarding the actual symbolic attributes of classic, there is variation among participants regarding which garments elicit said aesthetic response that includes the particular symbolic attributes of classic.

One of the main symbolic attributes of classic listed by the participants was timelessness. As one participant stated, classic is “something that has been popular and in fashion for a very long period of time” (Participant #42). However, this symbolic meaning is not typical of those generally associated with the aesthetic experience. It is rather a lack of identifiable symbolism that is itself symbolic of classic-ness in clothing. In other words, the fact that a particular coat or coats were seen either to *not be* symbolic of any identifiable decade or fashion era and/or viewed as relevant and meaningful of multiple eras meant classic to many participants. For instance, Participant #12 described classic as having formal attributes that “cannot identify with a specific era, such as a 50’s fit bodice and full skirt or the 60’s mod mini dress.” There is an imputed timelessness or universally relevant fashionableness from non-era specific attributes that is “easily relate-able [sic]” and “widely accept and adopted by many people” (Participants #8 & #5). Therefore, garments with which viewers’ associate time or historically tethered meanings, based on their interpretation of the formal design elements, associated are rarely considered classic.

On the other hand, there were participants who associated classic design with specific fashion figures and/or time periods. So rather than having a lack of formal attributes with a discernable past origin or history, classic instead is intimately associated with the specific looks and styles of a person or era. These associations are based in both real and perceived knowledge of these persons and eras. Specifically, participants associated classic design with such fashion figures, as Katherine Hepburn, Grace Kelly, ‘Coco’ Chanel, Elizabeth Taylor and Audrey Hepburn, who are all well known for

having very distinctive personalities that they expressed through their clothing choices. They were seen as fashion icons in their day and are still perceived as enduringly elegant and stylish. Their looks and personalities continue to have cultural relevance across the years, which is the part of the meaning of classic design. For instance, participants explained that classic is “something that can be passed to generations below you and still be sold in stores” and is based on “how long [they] have seen a style or fashion around” (Participants #51 & #33). In other words classic design has a culturally relevant past, a present and a future. It is iconic just like Chanel, Hepburn and Kelly. Its decade of origin can be determined through its formal attributes but it is still considered timeless, “vintage, but it works even now” (Participant #19).

### **Summary**

Overall, according to survey responses, participants viewed classic design positively. However, along with this positive opinion, classic design was considered to have a very specific role(s) to play in appearance and dress behaviors. These roles relate in many ways to the formal attributes that participants described as essential for a design to be classic in the first place. It was the simple and understated design of classic that participants explained allowed it to express maturity and sophistication, as opposed to designs with higher levels of embellishment or unique cuts or silhouettes. While participants did not necessarily dislike such formal attributes they did not categorize them as classic but rather as trendy, modern and young, the opposites of classic. It was the fact, that classic design is simple and understated that enables it to express sophistication and

elegance and which participants then associated with symbolic attributes, such as iconic and fashionable timelessness.

Still, even though some formal attributes, like color and silhouette, were listed, as classic, it is unclear how these attributes interact with each other. Are there attributes that have greater weight than others in making a design classic? The mental reasoning behind participants' choices is also not clearly conveyed in the survey. For instance, when participants identified a specific silhouette, why was an A-line silhouette considered classic, but an hourglass or fit and flare not considered classic by most participants. Finally, still needed is an exploration of how and why these formal attributes may relate to the expressive and symbolic attributes within a classic design.

In the next chapter, interviews with selected survey participants further explore the specific reasoning not evident in their survey responses. The first part of the interviews focused on exploring the reasoning behind participants' identification of "most" and "not" classic formal attributes and the expressive and symbolic attributes they connected to classic.

## Chapter 6

### Results-Interviews

Interviews of the 19 survey participants consisted of two main parts: 1) follow-up questions related to the six coats presented with the surveys and 2) questions related to participants' personal interpretation and use of classic design in their appearance and wardrobe management behaviors.

#### Interviews: Part 1

The first part of the interviews consists of follow-up questions for the survey answers especially the explanations regarding why participants chose particular coats over others for both the "most" and "not" classic categories. As previously stated in the survey results, participants' answers to Questions #1 and #2 tended to refer to individual coats as a group of coats which were "most" or "not" classic, and as such frequently generalized the formal attributes shared by individual coats in order to justify or explain their inclusion in one category or the other. This then still left a gap in knowledge regarding the details and range of specific formal attributes in terms of both layout and surface structure. For instance, many participants in response to Question #1 used the phrases "low embellishments" or "simple design." The question remained what precisely constitutes "low embellishments" or "simple design" in participants' views and what were the particular aspects of "low embellishments" and "simple design" in each specific coat.

The interviews were designed to probe participants' explanations (n=19) and use of phrases and terminology to describe or explain classic design, both in the positive and



negative sense. The interviews reintroduced participants to their answers on the surveys and the images of the coats to solicit, with as much specificity as possible, the formal attributes of classic design. Additionally, the follow up questions allowed participants to separate individual coats of the group (of one to three other coats) in which they were included. Participants were asked to explain why two or three different coats they selected were all “most” classic or “not” classic in terms of specific formal design attributes of each coat. In the analysis, participants’ responses were sometimes more succinct or less abstract when they were discussing the formal attributes that were “not” classic.

It is here in the analysis of the interviews that the attributes of classic design can be compared and contrasted as related to the integration and inclusion of specific formal attributes. The formal attributes directly affect the application of expressive attributes, which in together, solidify the culturally symbolic attributes that provide classic design with its cultural meaning as a style of clothing. References to these themes of formal, expressive, and symbolic attributes occur throughout the data, whether or not the interview participants (n=19) are discussing the coats from the surveys or their personal examples of classic clothing.

### **Follow-up Questions**

The follow-up questions were designed to probe the written answers given on the surveys primarily regarding formal attributes. Individual participant’s answers to survey Questions #1 and #2 were read to them and they were asked to explain their answers in greater detail and to clarify any general or abstract terminology or phrases used. This

data provided the priority of specific formal attributes within classic design and how they contributed to making a coat either “most” or “not” classic. Since these questions were built upon participants’ survey answers, discussion of specific coats will not be repeated but rather discussion will focus on themes related to participants’ explanations of the type and function of formal attributes in the “most” and “not” classic coats. While the emphasis of these questions is on formal attributes, the formal attributes do impact the expressive and symbolic attributes that participants associate with classic design. Therefore, this section also includes some discussion of expressive and symbolic attributes but only as participants related them directly to formal attributes.

Participants were also asked if they would wear any of the coats they chose as “most” and “not” classic. These answers were tallied by coat to see which coat would be the most likely to be worn (or not worn) in either group. Responses were also analyzed in relation to participants’ explanations of why they would wear certain coats, or why not, e.g. what were the common reasons participants would wear or not wear each coat. These responses provide evidence of the ability of participants to separate their personal tastes and preferences from their understanding and like or dislike of classic. These answers were compared to participants’ answers to the question asked later in the interviews of whether they like to wear classic clothing.

### **Formal Attributes**

Participants listed various formal attributes, primarily attributes of layout and surface structure, in the surveys as imparting an element of classic to garments. Specifically, embellishments, silhouette, and color were the primary indicators of a

“most” classic coat. In the follow-up questions participants further clarified and described these attributes. They also discussed how these formal attributes related to one another as well as how they functioned to create and/or express classic-ness in the garment as a whole.

This section covers aspects of the formal attributes that are different from survey responses or for which the participants extended a deeper explanations in the interviews. However, there were attributes of layout and surface structure discussed in the surveys that were again mentioned in the interviews, such as recognizability or flattering on the wearer. These attributes are not absent from the results but do not necessarily have separate discussions. There are two possible reasons for this: 1) they are often closely tied to some of the newer concepts or clarifications present in the interview data and/or 2) because participants did not significantly add to their survey answers in regards to these attributes.

***Priority of individual formal attributes within a garment***

In the interviews, 17 of the 19 participants clarified the order of importance for certain attributes in the layout and surface structure of coats for them to be considered “most” classic. Two of the formal attributes that participants considered a priority for classic design were silhouette and color. Sometimes another third, formal attribute, other than color or silhouette, was indicated as being a priority for classic design. This third attribute was either related to layout structure i.e., length, cut, and line or surface structure i.e., the amount and type of embellishments. These three attributes were discussed in differing orders for the 17 participants who clearly explained the concept

that certain formal attributes were more important for creating and/or recognizing classic design than others. Most participants (n=14) discussed at least two of these attributes and two participants discussed three attributes.

For participants (n=16), who mentioned both silhouette and color, the majority (n=14) indicated silhouette as the priority. Only two participants thought color was a higher priority than silhouette or other attributes of layout and surface structure. One participant thought that silhouette and color were tied for priority; each was as important as the other in creating classic design. Color was given the second highest priority in classic design by eight participants, embellishments or layout structure by three and silhouette by two. Of the two participants who indicated a third priority, one said, color and the other embellishments or layout structure. Some reasons participants provided for giving silhouette the highest priority in creating a classic design were that the other attributes were more easily changed, they did not affect the fit of the garment (a good fit was essential for classic), and that silhouette was the foundation for creating a design that people understood and considered flattering (Participants #3, #8, & #10).

### ***Clarification of specific formal attributes***

#### *Embellishments*

While on the surveys, the description of embellishments indicated that they were focused primarily on surface structure the interview responses indicated that sometimes participants included aspects of layout structure within the category of embellishments. Some examples of the types of embellishments participants discussed that are part of layout structure are pockets and collars. When aspects of the layout structure were

discussed as an embellishment it was because they were perceived as more unusual in their design, or more noticeable in their size or placement.

Participants indicated that classic design exhibited either a lack of embellishments or, as the interview participants further clarified, restraint in their placement, design and/or application. Classic design should not have “too much going on” in the design (Participant #6). The viewer should see the design as whole before their eyes are drawn to unusual details of cut, line, trimmings and/or findings. For instance, Participant #9 thought that the large, patch pockets on Coat #6 are too “obtrusive” and the coat is “not” classic at least partially because of their size and placement. Another participant explained that the contrast on Coat #1 between the navy wool and lighter greyish-white fur was too great for classic design (Participant #7). Participants equated minimal and discreet embellishments with simplicity. Such minimalism in the surface and layout structure allow it to be timeless or not visually indicative of a specific time period which according to participants is important as embellishments (and color) more readily connect a design to a specific era.

### *Silhouette*

In the surveys, the shape and silhouette of the coats were frequently listed as making coats classic. However, there was little interpretation of what about the silhouettes of certain coats made them “most” classic. This lack of clarity was further enhanced because each of the six coats was considered “most” classic by at least one participant and therefore silhouette was given as a reason for this categorization for each of the coats as well. There are similarities of silhouettes among the coats but they are not

identical. They range from less to more fitted at the waist and as a result some silhouettes lean towards a straight or A-line shape and others are more hourglass. In the interviews, some participants did specifically mention A-line and hourglass as “most” classic silhouettes, with A-line being the more common choice.

Still when describing a silhouette that was “most” classic, for participants it was less about an hourglass or A-line shape and more about how those silhouettes fit the body. This is why both types of silhouette could be considered classic. Of those interview participants who included silhouette in their discussions of formal attributes most of them discussed the idea that a classic silhouette was not “super tight” (Participant #3) or “totally form-fitting” (Participant #4) but rather flattered the wearers’ shapes (Participant #12). A less fitted silhouette was thought to be more universally flattering to many different figure types. However, it was also essential that the silhouette not be too loose either but rather something that “accentuates [any] curves in a nice way” (Participant #5). In other words, the “most” classic silhouette should neither hug each and every curve nor should it completely disguise the body underneath.

One reason cited by participants for why the not-too-tight, not-too-loose silhouette was “most” classic was that it is perceived as flattering to a variety of women (Participants #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #15, & #16). Classic is by nature, according to survey participants, versatile in who can wear it. In other words, it looks good on many different body types of women and makes them feel attractive. Therefore, for a silhouette to be “most” classic it needs to provide this kind of wearer versatility. The design that creates this culturally ideal silhouette and does not expose perceived flaws is more likely to be

consumed by those who desire to achieve a fashionable appearance. So, the “most” classic silhouette is the one that disguises any self-diagnosed problem areas on the body while simultaneously creating a fashionable and attractive figure for the wearer.

Some participants tied this “most” classic, flattering, not-too-tight, not-too-loose silhouette to the concept of femininity. They described the “most” classic silhouettes as feminine or rather as making the wearer appear feminine in terms of their figures.

According to these participants this was a desired outcome of wearing classic design, that it gave a feminine shape to the body (Participant #2, #9, #13, #18). The participants who qualified the “most” classic silhouette as feminine were stating in another way that a classic silhouette should make the most of a variety of female figure types and shapes.

The underlying assumption seemed to be that appearing feminine is a culturally accepted indicator of attractiveness for women; a woman is going to want to be seen as feminine, to accent the best parts of her figure or those which indicate her gender (Participant #15).

### *Color*

In the surveys, participants discussed that classic design required neutral colors, like black, grey, white, tan and navy. However, in the interviews participants clarified why these colors were considered essential for classic. They linked neutral colors or hues to classic because they perceived them to look good on everyone and to be appropriate in any given situation; they are versatile. Participants considered neutral colors versatile because they are perceived to be less decade or fashion era specific (Participant #6, #12, #17). Neutral colors are timeless and never go out of style (Participants #6, #7, #10, #11, #14). In contrast, highly saturated and higher value hues as well as unusual hues are

perceived to be indicative of trends and/or the fashions of specific time periods (Participants #6, #10, #14). These hues make a design much less versatile because it cannot be worn for an extended period, i.e. years and not eventually seen as outdated. Furthermore, such saturated, high intensity and high value hues also make the garment or design the focal point and instead of the wearer; the design becomes more foreground than background (Participant #17).

That classic should be background is another reason participants thought that classic should have neutral colors. A neutral color goes with most other colors and so it increases the ability of a garment to match and coordinate with other garments exponentially (Participants #4, #6, #7, #8). Participants were concerned that bright or unusual colors would not only limit the versatility of a classic coat in the wardrobe but also be less attractive if similar colors were worn. It is not thought to be unattractive to have the same neutral hue in varying values and intensity together in one ensemble; however, participants expressed dismay over potentially having several shades of brighter or unusual colors together in one ensemble (Participant #6). Wearing and accessorizing brighter colors was seen as more of a challenge and as such “not” classic. One of the qualities of classic, related to formal attributes such as color and silhouette is that it should be a safe and relatively easy choice when uncertain about assembling an appropriate and flattering ensemble.

While the majority of participants said that classic required the typical neutral colors, i.e., black, navy, grey, white, tan/camel, there were also some participants who said that classic did not have to be one of these colors (Participants #5, #11, #13, #15).



They thought that classic could be other hues as long as they were not too bright (saturated or intense) or unique. They suggested that hues other than neutrals should be lower values or less saturated to be classic, so rather than a bright green (which is not classic) a deep forest green would still be appropriate for classic design, instead of a neutral color (Participant #13).

### **Simplicity in formal attributes**

Though participants did indicate that some formal attributes were more important than others for determining classic design they also indicated that the integration of the formal attributes was of equal or greater importance. In the surveys, one of most common descriptions of formal attributes found in classic design was simplicity. Often participants made relatively general statements about simplicity either about attributes of layout and/or surface structure (necessary for classic) or in reference to the design as a whole. In the interviews this concept was discussed again but focused on what constituted a simple attribute and what kinds of attributes created a simple and therefore classic design.

### ***Balance in the whole design***

One of the aspects related to simplicity discussed by participants is that the viewing priority in classic design focuses on the whole rather than the individual attributes of layout or surface structure. In a classic design the viewing priority should be on the whole garment before any particular individual formal attributes draw the eye, if they do at all (Participants #3, #4, #10, #12-16). If any individual attributes are a visual focal point in a garment then it is not a classic design. Participants indicated this was true

for attributes of both layout and surface structure, though they thought it was easier for surface attributes, such as color, texture and added embellishments to become a distracting focal point. Classic should have “less visual interest, less design details” (Participant #15).

In order for the viewing priority to be on the whole garment, balance among the individual formal attributes is necessary. All the attributes need to “blend in” (Participant #10, #13, #15). The individual attributes in a design need to contribute to making a design considered classic in its entirety. Participants explained that balance was one way to achieve this visually perceived completeness or unity associated with classic design. Balance means that no single attribute of layout or surface overpowers any other. In a balanced design the individual attributes work in harmony with equal emphasis to create a design that seems cohesive, well conceived and classic. In other words, the formal attributes “blend” into the design so that nothing is perceived as out of place or incorrect.

This type of balance requires that there be minimal attributes that are perceived as unusual (or “not” classic), such as a bright color, unique pockets, or a very fitted silhouette, because if there are too many then the whole coat will be considered “not” classic. This also means that the combination of the individual attributes must allow the whole design to be viewed as classic. However, classic design does not require that no formal attributes be unique or trendy, merely that the impression of the whole is one of classic-ness. A result of this cohesion is a generally positive and lasting aesthetic experience; the design is popular and for long periods of time. This does not mean that

garments that are “not” classic do not have such design cohesion but merely that without it a design cannot be considered (or become) classic.

### ***Functional/Utilitarian***

Tangential to the concept of classic as a cohesive and balanced design a few participants described classic as functional (Participants #2, #5, #6, #14). Those participants who discussed functionality focused on the idea that a good design must do what the designer intends. Without functionality, in addition to a flattering fit and/or neutral colors, a design could never achieve the positive aesthetic experience that leads to longevity associated with classic design and good emotional design in general (Norman, 2004). More specifically in terms of this study a winter coat must function as a coat, keep the wearer warm and/or dry and do so well for it to be considered a classic. In fact, some participants indicated that since classic was a well-edited design that had been tweaked for generations, it had all the more reason to function well. Again the individual formal attributes create an acceptable and pleasing whole in which nothing seems out of place or without purpose. In other words, for these participants, attributes of layout or surface structure that do not further both the appearance and purpose of the garment are not classic.

According to these participants attributes that have a utilitarian purpose should be fulfilling the design. For example, pockets were a formal attribute which a few participants insisted required functionality. More specifically, a pocket’s shape and placement on a coat should not impede their functionality (Participants #5, #6, #14). Pockets (on a winter coat) should be of the appropriate size and height to be comfortably

used by the wearer. Pockets, that do not demonstrate such appropriate functionality, are on Coat #5. Located near the shoulders and indicated by flaps they are “not” classic because they are purely decorative. They are certainly not usable in the general way coat pockets are used, for warmth (and glove storage). This is not to say that participants stated that pockets could only be functional and not decorative as well but rather that for classic they should not be purely decorative.

***Balanced individual attributes***

Participants explained a second type of balance that was important for classic design: all the formal attributes in classic design should sit within a proverbially middle ground. Participants primarily explained the concept of “middle ground” or “mid-point” in classic design as ensuring that each attribute in the design did not stray too far towards any type of extreme (Participants #4, #13, & #14). Formal attributes that are too unusual, too detailed, too busy or sometimes even too plain can potentially make a design “not” classic. The proper balance must be maintained for a design to be considered classic. Perceived extreme or unusual details in layout and surface structure often pushed coats out the classic category and into a “not” classic categorization (Participant #1, #3). Assessing whether or not a design attained this middle ground or balance places priority on the whole rather than the parts. In other words, while participants thought it important that individual attributes display a mid-point balance the final assessment of proper balance was applied to the entire design. Therefore, a classic design is not required to have all formal attributes be classic, i.e. familiar, ordinary, traditional; it can have a few unique or trendy attributes but as one participant stated, the majority must be classic or

“at least 75% of the formal attributes” for the whole design to be classic (Participant #14).

When classic design exhibits balance in all of its formal attributes and attains this middle ground, it attains a sort of neutrality; it is not trendy but also not completely unfashionable (Participant #2, #14, #18). According to interview participants this neutrality or balance allows classic design to function in a versatile manner within the fashion system. It was also closely connected, in the participant responses, to formal attributes related to embellishments created either through layout or surface structure. For a coat to be balanced or neutral all the formal attributes need to be subtle because more overt or unique attributes tend to reference certain fashion eras and/or be less flattering to the majority of women. This is possibly why the emphasis on a balance of unique and traditional elements leans a bit more towards the traditional end of the equation.

The classic design should not be too nondescript either in its balance of attributes. Participants indicated that classic design could and should have some unique attributes but they could not encompass the entire coat. For instance, one participant explained that an overall print created too much interest for a garment to be classic, whereas a subtle tweed was just right especially when combined with fairly simple attributes of layout, such as silhouette, cut and line. Also of importance for the level of uniqueness in a classic design is the issue of recognizability. The formal attributes cannot be too unfamiliar or too unique; a classic design must retain its familiarity so that viewers can recognize and easily understand or place a design within a personal and/or cultural

context. However, there was not complete agreement among participants about how much uniqueness or visual interest was too much, only that too much was undesirable for classic.

### **Formal attributes through the lens of symbolic and expressive attributes**

Though the first part of the interview was primarily focused on refining descriptions and explanations about the formal attributes participants found important for a classic design, expressive and symbolic attributes were not absent from participant responses. In fact, participants often used symbolic and expressive attributes that they associated with classic design to determine which coats were classic. The formal attributes that were important for classic could only be specified after the coats met criteria regarding particular symbolic and/or expressive attributes associated with classic design. The process for doing this involved, participants first determining which coats matched their perceptions of how classic should make the wearer feel or what classic means culturally. Then, whichever coats met these symbolic and/or expressive criteria participants considered classic. Once participants made their selections (based on expressive and symbolic attributes) they looked more closely at the particular formal attributes and how they fulfilled the perceived expressive purposes and/or symbolic meanings of classic design.

Generally, this process seemed somewhat unconscious and only emerged via probing in the interview discussions. Participants would state things like, “the silhouette just being very straight but also having a subtle flair is a universal design more than anything. The design being universal makes it classic” (Participant #3). Another

participant stated about Coat #4 which she said was “most” classic, “it was the glamorous fur coats and the collars” (Participant #6). Both of these examples demonstrate that some participants first analyzed how a coat made them (or would make someone) feel, glamorous or what they thought it meant, universality, before they narrowed their focus to discuss the particulars of the formal attributes that accomplished this feat.

For some participants this process was more overt; the symbolic or expressive were the primary attributes of classic and not the formal attributes. They sometimes even struggled to precisely identify any specific formal attributes that they thought were essential to classic design or upon which the expressive or symbolic attributes were based. Three participants used this process of determining classic design. They explained that classic was based on a symbolic identification of the coats with past eras considered classic fashion eras, i.e. 1940, 1950s. The participants’ reference points for such eras included films, popular culture and/or iconic figures, i.e. Audrey Hepburn and Jackie Onassis (Participant #2, #5, #7, #13). If a coat(s) reminded participants of similar examples seen in films or that they associated with the styles of iconic women or even with a designated historic time period then the coats were classic. According to Participant #7, these images or associations did not even have to be completely accurate but were based, “more on pictures I have seen in my head from movies or black and white pictures that you see of old time movie stars.”

These participants couched all their comments and observations about the formal attributes in the coats in relation to this symbolic attribute. For instance, Participant #5 stated, “Number six [coat] reminds me of stuff that I have actually seen Audrey Hepburn

wear in movies before. It is not a form-fitting structure, but it's just something flowy [sic]. Maybe one of her sleuth movies....” These types of comments focused on the formal attributes present in the coats almost in retrospect, looking backwards to understand why these coats were symbolically associated in their minds with certain iconic figures and/or historic eras. This process also was sometimes applied to coats that ended up being considered “not” classic, as Participant #3 stated, “For number 2 [coat] I could see it on Twiggy...being able to see it in context...makes it not classic.” It is then the association with a figure or context that is already perceived as classic that is essential rather than just any past fashion or era.

## **Interviews: Part 2**

The second part of the interview was designed to probe participants' personal interpretation and use of classic design in their appearance and wardrobe management behaviors as opposed to the first part that focused on the physical formal attributes. An objective description, as much as possible, of desired and essential physical, formal attributes of classic design was a goal of the first part of the interview. In the first part the coats provided a common ground for the discussion of these formal attributes, which in their physicality are naturally objective though still subjective in their interpretation, e.g. which attributes are most important.

The main goal was to explore less objective attributes, the expressive and symbolic, in the interpretation and use of classic design, or in other words, how participant's perceived classic design's purpose and role in the current apparel culture. The questions focus less on formal attributes and more on the expressive and symbolic



attributes of classic design. These attributes are integral to why and how participants perceive classic design and its place in managing their appearance and building a functional wardrobe. While participants did discuss some formal attributes about their personal examples overall they mostly reiterated their previous explanations of these attributes from their discussions of the coats. The second part of the interview is connected to the first part through the final questions in Part #1 that asked participants to identify which coats in both the “most” and “not” classic categories they would wear and why or why not. This is directly followed by a discussion of the participants’ application and use of classic design in their wardrobes including their discussion of the one or two examples of classic garments they brought to the interview. The discussion of personal examples of classic led to a broader discussion about the role of classic design in participants’ appearance behaviors.

#### **“Most” and “not” classic coats chosen by interview participants**

The coats chosen for the “most” and “not” classic categories by interview participants had similarly directional percentages though not identical to those from the entire group of survey participants (n=55). In other words, the ranking of the six coats as “most” and “not” classic are in the same order though the percentages are different. Therefore, the interview participants’ discussions of what makes certain coats “most” and “not” classic can be seen as generally representative of all participants (Figures 23 and 24). As a result, the interview choices for which coats participants would wear from both the “most” and “not” classic categories can be seen to represent the larger group as well,

always allowing for the fact that no single individual experiences her world in precisely the same way as another.

### **Coats participants would wear**

Interview participants were asked, which if any of both the coats they chose as “most” and “not” classic they would personally wear. Each of the six coats occurred at least once in both the “most” and “not” classic categories (Figure 25). Therefore, each of the six coats could be chosen as personally wearable, at least once in either category by an individual participant. Figure #26 shows the total numbers from the “most” and “not” classic categories for each coat chosen as wearable as well as the total of both categories together. The total from both categories indicates that some coats were seen as highly wearable regardless of category. In general, however, participants were more likely to say they would wear at least one of the coats listed as “most” classic as opposed to ones they indicated were “not” classic. Evidence that supports this hypothesis is that eight participants said they would not wear any of the coat(s) they chose as “not” classic whereas, all 19 indicated they would wear at least one of the coats they listed as “most” classic.

Figure #27 shows that with the exception of Coat #4 the percentages of participants who indicated that they would wear each coat were higher in the “most” classic category than the “not” classic category. Participants viewed coats considered “most” classic as fashionable, versatile, and flattering. This supports their descriptions of classic design in the first part of the interview. In fact, flattering, fashionable or stylish, and versatile were common reasons given by participants for why they would wear a coat

from the “most” classic category. Participants also sometimes indicated that a coat they would wear fit their “style” or fit in their wardrobe. The exception to this trend, Coat #4, was often considered as a classic design better suited to an older woman (over 30 years) and therefore not currently wearable by many participants whose average age was 21 years.

From the “not” classic category Coats #2 and #4 had the highest percentages of participants who would wear them even though they were not considered classic. Coat #2 generated a lot of comments related to how the color and collar style were “not” classic but it was still appealing to many participants. The same was true of Coat #4, for which the most common reason given for its “not” classic status was the fur collar. Many participants perceived these coats as having some unique attributes that kept them from being classic but not from being a both personally appealing and currently fashionable designs. However, when participants indicated that they would wear one of these two “not” classic coats (and the other four) they often qualified their answers by limiting how and for how long they would wear them. Coats in the “not” classic category that would be worn by participants were sometimes described as specific occasion coats, to be worn for a party or a season. They also indicated, just like the coats in the “most” classic category, that they ones they would wear fit their personal styles.

### **Participants’ personal styles**

Table 1 lists the personal styles of the 19 interview participants in their own words. Participant #2 dresses based on her mood and views clothing as a costume to express her feelings on any particular day. Another participant (#9) says that she follows

the trends and likes to keep updated and current. However, she also prefers quality so doesn't shop at places like Forever 21 even though they are known for a fast turnover of styles or following the trends. Other words or phrases used to describe participant styles range from preppy to bohemian to edgy/urban to casual/comfortable. Several participants admit that they are not sure what their style is or that they are still trying to find a personal style. Three participants directly refer to classic as a component in their overall styles. Several others describe their styles as simple which according to the results of the surveys and the first part of interviews is synonymous with classic in the minds of many participants. Overall the styles described are diverse and each is unique to the participant.

#### **Participant examples of classic design**

Much like their personal styles, the 31 garments participants brought as examples of classic were also diverse (Figure 28). Twelve of the 19 interview participants brought two examples of classic garments and of those only one participant brought two examples of the same type of garment, a coat or blazer. The majority of examples fell within three main types. The most popular example of a classic garment was a dress at 32% or 10 of the examples. One potential reason that dresses had the highest percentage, especially since the majority of them were black, might be based in the cultural iconography of the 'little black dress'. The LBD is often perceived as a prime example of classic design in apparel (Smith, 2003). The next highest percentage was coats/jackets/blazers at 23% or seven of the examples. The choices of these types of garments might have been the influence of the coats used in the survey or merely a result similar reasoning behind the choice of coats as examples of classic; that coats are intended to be versatile and last in

the wardrobe for an extended period. The next closest percentage was shirts/blouses at 13% or four examples and the rest of the types only included one or two examples.

Some of the more singular examples were a skirt, shoes, scarves, a pair of jeans, t-shirts, and sweaters. The less standard examples do demonstrate that formal attributes of classic design that participants described, when looking at the coats, can be applied across a spectrum of garments and not just in coats or dresses. However this diversity in application was limited since 55% of the examples were in the top two categories and 68% in the top three categories. A potential reason for this might be the specific demographic of the participants in this study. Participants often qualified their garment choices in their explanations as either an accommodation due to limited funds or a limited need for a diverse wardrobe since their public activities predominantly involved attending classes. Another demographic with a different average age or income, i.e. not students, might present a different assortment of garments.

### ***Color***

There was also limited variation in the colors of the examples. Most of the garments were in solid, neutral colors i.e. black, navy, cream, white, tan/camel (Figure 29). Black was the most popular color for classic at 45% or 14 of the examples. There were two exceptions to solid, neutral colors: 1) two participants brought a green dress and 2) three participants brought garments with an all-over pattern. The three garments with patterns all had the neutral or muted colors participants associated with classic design. Furthermore, participants described the garments' patterns, a stripe, plaid, and herringbone as classic or traditional. The combination then of classic colors and classic

patterns, in the surface structure, equaled a classic garment even though a pattern was not generally perceived as an appropriate attribute for classic. All three garments were also perceived as classic upon acquisition. This supports participants' arguments that a true classic design could (and should) have some unique formal attributes to make it stand out (from other classic garments) and enable it to potentially express the personality of a wearer.

It is notable though that the two participants who brought green dresses did not think they were classic when they purchased them. It was later after they had worn the garments and discovered that they were versatile that decided they were classic. During the interviews they described these green dresses as extremely flattering, surprisingly versatile, given the color, and able to express their individuality without being inappropriately flamboyant or flashy (Participants #1 & #5). The three participants who brought patterned garments gave similar explanations of why they were classic. They argued that the patterns in the garments expressed their personalities while simultaneously allowing the preservation of a classic appearance. They based these assessments on the fact that the black and white, herringbone weave in the blazer, the black and white stripe in the t-shirt, and the muted blue and black plaid in the skirt were all traditional (or common) patterns that were produced in a neutral and/or muted color scheme (Participants #3, #15, #18).

#### ***Classic or not when purchased***

The majority of participants indicated that they thought the examples of classic garments they brought to the interviews were classic upon acquisition; they had actively

sought and/or purchased these garments based on a classic categorization. Only 6 of the 31 examples or 19% were not considered classic when acquired. As stated, not having a traditionally, classic color, such as black, was the reason given by two participants for originally thinking their examples were not classic. The other four participants, who initially considered their examples “not” classic presented similar reasoning, related to different attributes of layout or surface structure, for why they did not think their garments were classic immediately.

For instance, originally, Participant #10 did not think the black dress she brought was classic because it was intentionally designed with only one sleeve. Though it is black and was appropriate for work when she was in high school she did not foresee being able to wear it for three years. The black color and the fact that she still wears the dress three years into her college career changed her mind about the dress’s classic-ness. Though the particular attributes were different in all the garments that were not considered classic upon acquisition, the reasons for participants finally deciding that the garments, were indeed classic, were similar. Most explained that in reviewing their experiences with their examples they decided that they encompassed many of the essential attributes of classic design; they were versatile, flattering for the wearer, and timeless.

### *Aesthetic and utilitarian*

Participants were influenced by both aesthetic and utilitarian aspects in the acquisition of the examples of classic they brought to the interview. It was, however, more common for participants to indicate that their initial evaluation of their classic garment examples was based upon a positive aesthetic response; they were emotionally

pleased for various reasons with the garments' visual and tactile formal attributes. This positive aesthetic response was primarily related to how well the participants' examples of classic, matched or related to their personal styles. They assessed this by examining the one or two unique attributes of layout or surface structuring in their examples. These attributes then formed the basis for their initial positive aesthetic response. These few unique formal attributes are considered essential for a classic design to express the wearer's personality while still remaining simple and versatile. Often participants had been searching for an extended period, for the perfect example of a particular classic garment; one that matched their personal style and therefore produced a positive aesthetic response.

However, the examples of classic garments participants brought to the interviews and for which they indicated an initially positive aesthetic response still needed to perform in all the ways classic design is supposed to function. Therefore participants' initial aesthetic responses were closely followed (before purchase), in most instances, by a practical assessment of the garments' utilitarian features. Most notably what formal attributes would allow the garment coordinate with their current wardrobes and how many different ensembles could they foresee forming with this new garment were evaluated before acquisition. Participants also considered how long they might be able to keep the garment in their wardrobes or would it be a style that has longevity, both in stylistically and physically. These utilitarian concerns were a determining factor in the decision regarding if a garment was or was not classic and therefore, a good or wise purchase. Still, while function was essential in the perception of classic-ness, it was the



positive aesthetic evaluation that tipped the balance towards acquisition. The combination then of a positive aesthetic response, or does it complement the style and personality of the wearer, and an assessment of the garment's utilitarian benefits to determine will it function effectively in their wardrobe, are both fundamental factors used in when evaluating a classic design.

There were two exceptions to a positive aesthetic response upon acquisition, 1) one participant received her dress as an offhand hand-me-down from her sister and thought it was boring and 2) the other begrudgingly accepted, as gift from her mother, a Burberry trench coat that she perceived as "stuck-up". These participants, however, still perceived some utilitarian benefits in the garments that made them accept them. However, they did not wear them instantly but rather wore them after an extended period (several years) as a need arose for a garment or ensemble perceived as classic. It was at this point that their initial aesthetic evaluation of the garments changed to a more positive one. This change was based in part by compliments they received about their ensembles and appearance from others and a sense of looking "nice" and "appropriate" in a more formal setting. Still, these two participants were more focused on the utilitarian benefits of classic design but more inclined to wear it again based on the positive aesthetic responses of others if not their own.

Participants who responded first to the utilitarian benefits of their examples of classic garments were fewer. These participants tended to be shopping for a classic garment primarily to fulfill a specific need. For instance, Participant #17 needed a dress that would work for all the sorority functions she is required to attend as well as for work

and occasionally class presentations. She remembered thinking at the time of purchase, “I can wear this [black dress] with everything” and further clarified during the interview, “it’s perfect in the way it fits so it makes you feel good...I can accessorize it. I can just...make it my own.” Her initial assessment of the dress was based in attributes she perceived as classic, its versatility and its ability to showcase her personality while still being appropriate to the occasion.

A positive aesthetic response, though somewhat secondary in her reasoning was still part of her final evaluation that the dress was “perfect” for her needs. She said, “it fits so it makes [her] feel good”; this is an aesthetic benefit, an emotional well-being, resulting from a utilitarian benefit, the fit, of the dress. The other participants who indicated that their acquisitions were firstly based on utilitarian benefits indicated that they followed similar processes in deciding to buy their examples of classic garments. So, though these participants initiated their decision process by looking for certain utilitarian (functional) benefits to decide if a garment was classic, they still ended up assessing at least some aesthetic benefits before finally acquiring the garment. For all the practicality participants who cited utilitarian as primary expounded they still required a positive aesthetic response in order to decide amongst many other similar garment options in the marketplace. In other words, both aesthetic and utilitarian are essential in the decision to acquire a specific example of classic design but without certain identifiable utilitarian benefits, i.e. versatility, simplicity, a garment cannot be classic no matter how much it is liked by the wearer.

### *Attributes of classic design sought by participants*

Even though each example was unique, the presence of the broader attributes such as versatility and flattering to the wearer, were cited as integral in the decision making process for garments identified as classic upon acquisition. In order to determine the presence of these attributes participants focused on how specific formal attributes imparted these qualities or attributes to the garments. Color, silhouette and embellishments of cut, line, or surface decoration with varying degrees of emphasis were all mentioned as supporting evidence for these broader attributes of classic design. Unsurprisingly then, these broader attributes, as participants clarified when discussing the coats, are the result of the proper combinations of layout and surface structure within a design.

Many participants discussed that versatility was an attribute they actively sought by intentionally purchasing a classic garment. By versatility they typically meant that a classic garment could be combined with a multiplicity of other garments or accessories to form wide range of ensembles. They further explained that because classic could be combined with so many different garments it was possible to create ensembles that were suitable for a wide range of contexts, activities and occasions. For instance, about a cream blouse, Participant #12 stated,

I can wear it with a lot of different things. It is easy to pair with different outfits and different styles, whether you are going for casual or dressier, more of a traditional look or more of an edgy look.”

Participant #12's statement was echoed in other participants' experiences with their examples of classic design. Some participants in explaining how wonderfully versatile their garment was, specifically described the various ensembles they had created, where they had worn them and even recited the compliments they had received. The compliments served to reinforce not only the versatility but also the perception that classic is always flattering and well-received in any situation.

The other commonly discussed broader attribute of classic design was also connected to the formal attributes through versatility. It is the ability of classic to express the personality of the wearer. Explanations of this attribute took two primary forms both related to explanations of balance from the first part of the interviews. The first explanation is that because classic is neither too ordinary nor too extraordinary, but rather has a proper balance of a limited number of unique attributes (one or two) combined with a majority of more familiar ones, it is in a position to highlight the wearer's personality. The function of the unique formal attributes in the balance of a classic garment is perceived to be what are actually expressing the wearer's personality. The more familiar, sometimes described as traditional attributes keep the garment, itself, from having a personality that potentially overwhelms that of the wearer. The second form the argument about classic's ability to express the wearer's personality takes is that the formal attributes of classic design are simple enough for it to easily be accessorized or worn with items that *do* express the personality of the wearer. Both of these allow the wearer to be the focus and not their ensemble, which was another desired attribute participants associated with classic clothing.

### *Method of acquisition*

Most of the examples were purchased new by the participants, from a variety of retail establishments, both those considered to be bastions of classic designs and others seen having product assortments dedicated to rapidly changing trends. Garments were purchased at online only stores, department stores, small specialty boutiques, fast fashion stores, like H&M and Forever 21, and higher end chain stores, like the BCBG Max Azria, Hollister, and Anthropologie. Additionally, some garments were not acquired new (by the participants) but were purchased at resale or vintage stores. A number of other participants received their examples of classic as a hand-me-down from a relative.

### *Purchase*

When describing their purchase of the examples of classic design most participants were not specifically looking for a classic garment though often they were looking for a type of garment, i.e. a coat or blouse. However, some participants were not only actively seeking a specific garment but also a classic example of that particular kind of garment. For instance, a participant described her search for the perfect, classic, white button down shirt as a hunt. She said she looked for three years before she found, at Hollister, the one she brought to the interview. She expressed surprise that Hollister was where her search finally ended because she did not really like or perceive their clothing as typically classic in nature. There were a few other participants who described similar searches for garments, the goal of which was to find a garment that was both classic and expressed their personality.

Through participant stories about the hunt for the “perfect” classic shirt or coat or some other garment, the ability of classic to, through a few unique attributes, express the personality of wearer is reinforced. If classic were created with only standard, traditional formal attributes, then participants would not have needed to search, sometimes for years, for the perfect example. If every classic garment was so standard that it was perceived as more of a uniform rather a simple design that was vehicle for the individual’s aesthetic identity it might not have been so popular among the participants. Certainly, there would be no need an individual to search for three years for a perfect example.

#### *Resale and Hand-me-downs*

Though most of the examples were purchased new some were acquired differently either from resale or vintage stores or not purchased at all by the participants. Three participants brought examples to the interviews purchased at resale, secondhand or vintage stores and three brought examples acquired as a hand-me-downs from relatives. The six garments were a pair of shoes, two coat/blazers, two dresses and a sweater. All of these garments were given an extended or new, second life. These examples give weight to some participants’ descriptions of classic as being timeless; that it can be worn over a long period of time and still be viewed as in fashion or at least not out of fashion.

Participants who acquired garments in non-traditional ways were universally pleased with their acquisitions (though not all thought they were classic initially). For example, Participant #13, who brought a cream cashmere sweater, had long admired it on her mother and was anxious to accept her offer to give it to her. She explained,

I liked it on my Mom. It fits her a bit differently than me. I still feel like it was a flattering item on both of us...I wear it all the time. I feel like you can wear it with just about anything...and I can keep it for years if I take care of it.

So not only had she liked the sweater for years but considered it versatile too; it looked good on different figures and could be worn with anything. The sweater was something she anticipated wearing for as long as possible. Another participant recounted finding her one of her classic examples, a pair of Chelsea-style short boots in a resale store, Buffalo Exchange, in Minneapolis, MN. She described how she snatched them up right away because she loved them and knew they were classic which meant she could wear them forever (or as long as they physically lasted). Both these examples demonstrate that classic has the potential for longevity; it is never considered completely out-of-date.

#### *Influence of family members*

In describing the purchase or acquisition of their examples of classic some participants mentioned the involvement and influence of their mothers. A number of participants had mentioned, in their discussion of the coats, the influence of their mothers' and grandmothers' influence in determining classic in a similar way that they referenced Audrey Hepburn or Jackie Onassis (Participants #2, #3, #6, #9, #11, #13). However, when discussing their personal examples of classic design it was their mother's influence and advice upon which they reflected in the acquisition process.

Mothers generally persuaded their daughters that they needed classic garments because in college and after graduation they would face many new challenges and opportunities, such as internships, interviews, and eventually careers. For these, mothers

argued they would need more professional clothing i.e. classic clothing. Participant #11 and her Burberry trench coat is a good example of this type of interaction. She was in Hong Kong with her mother, shopping at the Burberry store. In Participant #11's words, her mother explained that "it's okay to buy...many things that are trends and you think are cute and unique but [it is] also important to have something that will look good in any other time. That will go well with most things..." At the time Participant #11 was resistant because she did not entirely see the usefulness of what her mother was advising or even like the coat very much but her mother bought her the coat anyway. (She also did not think it was classic at this point.) However, by the time she brought it as an example to the interview her opinion had altered. She had experienced, firsthand the usefulness and versatility of the classic-ness of the coat. In another example speaking of her black blazer purchased from BCBG, said Participant #2 said she chose it "with the help of [her] mother who definitely saw it as something that would be useful in professional situations" and then purchased it for her. Unlike Participant #11, she always liked the blazer and considered it classic. In both situations, the mother performed the roles of personal educator, advisor and financier for classic design. In these instances purchasing classic design was almost a rite of passage into adult appearance and wardrobe management choices for the participant.

### **The role of classic design in participants' wardrobe and appearance choices**

There are numerous formal, expressive, and symbolic attributes associated with classic designed garments. The formal attributes were more difficult for participants to describe than the expressive and symbolic. One reason for this might be that classic is



perceived more as a symbolic and/or expressive attribute related to certain combinations and types of formal attributes, i.e. simple or versatile attributes. Therefore asking participants to explain what formal attributes make a design classic was asking them to work backwards; to start with the symbolic and/or expressive attributes and explain which formal attributes caused them to think of “classic”.

Identifying expressive attributes seemed to be more straightforward than identifying symbolic. Participants were generally able to clearly explain why certain formal attributes contributed to classic design’s expression of, for example, sophistication, confidence, or prestige. Some of the expressive attributes of classic design also seemed to be symbolic in nature. For instance, sophistication, is expressed by in part by the simple or conservative formal attributes found in classic design but the concept of sophistication also seems to be embedded in the cultural meaning of classic. Participants’ discussions of the expressive and symbolic attributes of classic design reveal the highly interrelated nature of these two attributes. This dependent relationship is reflected in the roles classic design plays in participants’ wardrobe and appearance management choices, where the expressive and symbolic attributes are key, but built upon the foundation of formal attributes.

***Do you like to wear classic design?***

Fifteen of the 19 interview participants indicated that they did like to wear classic design in their everyday lives (Figure 30). Several of these 15 participants even indicated that classic played a significant role in their described personal styles. The rest did not discuss classic in their personal style descriptions but perceived classic clothing to be an

extremely versatile and flattering addition to their wardrobes. It provided longevity and quality to balance out the trendier garments that were often very quickly discarded, for reasons related to poor construction and/or appearing outdated. Buying classic was always perceived by these 15 participants as money well spent because classic “is an investment” or something that brings positive returns both currently and in the future.

Another two participants, who did not necessarily like classic for everyday dress, found it beneficial for certain occasions or roles in their lives. They saw a need in their lives that classic filled, to look as Participant #11 explained “nice and civilized” and “different” from their “usual style.” Participant #13 further clarified the need for classic even when it does not particularly suit the wearers’ personal style. She explained that she would wear classic for a “job interview or if [she] was at a family gathering...so that [she] would not offend anybody...” However, she did admit to mixing classic items into her wardrobe as staples, to create ensembles with trendier items but that she preferred the impression of her overall look be trendy rather than classic. So while both participants did not “like” classic per se they both found it useful in a number of ways, but primarily to meet perceived societal expectations regarding an appropriate and inoffensive appearance.

Only two participants did not really like to wear classic design at all. Of these two, one explained that it was because it was not really compatible with her personal style but the other participant’s reasoning was a little less strongly against classic. She seemed surprised, more than intentional in her choices to not wear classic. She explained in answer to whether she liked to wear classic clothing, “I guess not because when I was

looking through my closet and...was trying to find things that I considered classic...I didn't really find too much that spoke to me as classic" (Participant #9). She also admitted to being an impulse shopper, who bought clothing on a whim rather than through careful deliberation about how each garment fit into her wardrobe and thought this might be the reason behind her lack of classic clothing. The dress she brought as an example of classic was a dress given to her by her sister and worn only once to a work event for her internship in London. So even the classic garment she owned was not the result of choosing it but was rather accidental; her sister just gave it to her thinking she might need it.

***When would you not wear classic clothing?***

While most participants liked to wear classic clothing either because they perceived that it was flattering and/or versatile, providing stylistic balance in their wardrobes there were still some contexts in which participants did not prefer to wear classic design. For instance, since classic design's formal attributes produced certain perceived formality participants indicated that wearing classic was not preferred in more casual or active contexts. Some examples given by participants of contexts where classic design was not preferred included, attending class, working out, hiking, and running errands (Participants #4, #6, #8, #9, #11). It would actually be inappropriate, and uncomfortable, for some of these activities, according to a few participants (Participant #8, #9, #11).

Another context where participants did not prefer classic design was when engaged in social activities with peers, or people of a similar age. Since classic design

was perceived as a more mature and dignified form of clothing, used to make a good impression in professional or any situation involving a wide of people with different demographics, it was not seen as necessary or even desirable for activities with friends (Participants #8, #9, #12, #13). Participants indicated that when “hanging out” with friends they might want their appearance to be perceived as more “fun” or even “quirky”; they wanted clothing that, unlike classic design, more overtly expressed their personalities (Participant #8, #12). Similarly, other participants indicated that when they desired their appearance to be “adventurous”, “artsy” or “fancy” they would not wear classic design (Participants #1, #2, #18). These examples of when classic design is not preferred coincide with many participants’ assessments of classic design as simpler, not unique or innovative, and expressing maturity and sophistication. Finally, five participants indicated that there was not a context in which they would definitively reject classic design. According to these participants, classic design always works, in any context, because it of its simplicity and subsequent versatility.

### **Formal attributes**

This last section of the interview was focused on the role of classic design in wardrobe and appearance behaviors. The questions focused on how, when, and why participants wore and used classic clothing in their personal wardrobes and appearance behaviors. As a result participants’ responses were mainly related to expressive and symbolic attributes; e.g. what do participants think classic design says about their abilities, personalities, goals, or personal style and fashion sense. However, participants perceived that simplicity, versatility, and neutral colors, which they identified as essential

formal attributes of classic design were instrumental for the function and roles of classic design in the wardrobe.

These three attributes are interconnected. Simplicity affects the versatility of a garment; a simpler garment, one with a limited number of outstanding features, will blend or coordinate with a greater number of other garment types and styles. Neutral colors are considered less of a statement and therefore simpler and more versatile. A garment most likely to be considered classic by the most people is, according to participants, one that is simpler, made with less obtrusive colors, like neutrals and therefore, extremely versatile or as Participant #15 explained, “minimal design details...makes it versatile.” As a result, participants viewed the role of classic in their wardrobe, as it pertained to classic design’s formal attributes, in two primary ways, 1) owning classic is future-oriented and 2) classic provides a solid foundation for an effective wardrobe.

### ***Classic is future-oriented***

When discussing their examples of classic garments, participants commonly mentioned that the perception of a garment having a future in their wardrobe was essential. Classic, according to participants, always has the potential to be functional, or versatile in the wardrobe, forever. This perceived longevity in participants’ examples of classic design is intimately connected to the concept of classic as a style with a combination of formal attributes that will not go out of fashion. Therefore, in looking for classic garments participants desired a belief that their garments would last for an extended period, through various fashion trends and even shifts in their personal styles

and appearance needs. Since classic was also perceived by many to express both professionalism and sophistication, participants often linked it more to their future wardrobes. Participant #1 explained this future-orientation related to her emerald green, sheath dress, when she said, “this kind of style and color is where I would want my future wardrobe to kind of look like” because it had a “professional feel to it and the color applied” to her style. In other words, it expressed both professionalism and her unique personality; thus she perceived it as a desirable garment to aid in an effective self-presentation for her expected future roles. Other participants, also like Participant #1, perceived that classic design constituted a wise investment into their future, guaranteed to produce positive aesthetic and utilitarian returns related to their presentation of self.

Participants perceived classic design to be future-oriented or have the potential for longevity in the wardrobe because its formal attributes are simple. One of the ways simple or simplicity was described in terms of classic design was through having a lack of details or formal attributes that could potentially date the garment, or obviously link it to the time and place of its origin. Garments where the point of origin could easily be determined were not considered classic according to participants. Such easily dated garments would only work in the wardrobe for a limited time before they needed to be replaced by newer, more up-to-date garments, whereas classic garments take a (much) longer time to appear unfashionable, if they ever entirely do. This means that classic garments do not need to be replaced as frequently and can be used continuously with whichever newer, trendier garments are introduced into the participants’ wardrobes in the future. This future-orientation of classic design, or timelessness means, according to

participants, that it provides a solid foundation upon which to build a cohesive and coherent wardrobe.

***Classic is a foundation***

Closely related to participants' view of classic design as future-oriented is their view of it as a foundation upon which to build an effective wardrobe. Classic design is desired in the wardrobe because it makes it more functional, not only does it impart longevity but it also provides a base for creating ensembles geared towards a variety of self-presentation needs. In essence, by using classic garment, participants perceived that they could reconcile their personal styles with the specific and oft times prescribed needs of particular social and professional interactions and settings. Again, classic does this because the simplicity of its formal attributes allow for great versatility or as Participant #2 stated, "classic... designs... are a good foundation for turning other things... adopting other things and... making it appear as something new."

The aspect of simplicity that is integral for creating a wardrobe foundation is related to balance in the formal attributes. Balance, according to participants, means that no attributes of layout or surface structure stand out from the others; it is the whole that is perceived rather than the parts or rather the parts blend cohesively into the whole. As a result of this lack of extreme formal attributes in classic design, the entire garment can be perceived as simple. Participants explained that this type of simplicity makes classic design more of a background piece than a foreground piece in the wardrobe. One participant even called classic a "blank canvas" for this reason (Participant #14). Simplicity can be thought of like a neutral color that participants identified as important

in classic design because they allow a garment to go with almost anything. So, too, participants explained, does restraint and simplicity in all the other formal attributes even the ones seen as more complex and less simple allow the classic garment to go with almost everything else in the wardrobe. It also allows classic garments to express the wearer's personality while simultaneously expressing through the wearer's self-presentation or appearance culturally desirable and appropriate attributes.

### **Expressive attributes**

The expressive attributes associated with classic were for participants an important motivation for the inclusion of classic into their wardrobes. The expressive attributes, like the formal attributes, contributed to the functionality of classic and as a result to its desirability in the wardrobe. In general, participants perceived classic design's inclusion in their wardrobe as a major contributor to the success of their social and professional interactions and relationships. Participants liked classic design's ability to express culturally positive traits; it was a good thing about classic design, a helpful attribute for navigating the world and interacting with other people.

Classic was perceived to have the ability to express many things through its versatility and simplicity, which allows it to move an ensemble from traditional to trendy and back again. Participants, however, more often referred to classic's inherent formality and how that contributed to the expression of more conventional and decorous cultural traits when discussing the role of classic design in their wardrobes. Classic design was perceived to be more a mature type of clothing, something an adult wears but not a child or teenager. This association of classic with adulthood may be partially because of its



perceived formality but also because of its longevity in the fashion system. This longevity means that a younger person is likely to first encounter classic design on someone who is their senior in age, and indeed many participants explained that they were introduced to the functional and expressive attributes of classic design through their elders. However, this was likely not participants' only source of information about the cultural functions and expressions of classic design given the prolific nature of fashion and style-focused media readily available on the internet and in print.

### ***Formality***

Participants correlated the simplicity, inherent in classic design's formal attributes, with formality. The formality expressed by classic design makes it, according to participants, pertinent for contexts with perceived prescribed, though often unspoken self-presentation requirements. One of the primary roles participants described classic design as fulfilling in their wardrobes is based upon its perceived expression of formality and related attributes subsumed under that expression. Classic design's formality, according to participants, enabled the wearer to meet others' expectations for their appearance through the expression of culturally positive and desirable traits, such as sophistication, confidence or professionalism, and appropriateness or social acumen. It accomplishes all of this while still enabling participants to express their individual personality. Working together, simplicity, versatility, and the cultural perception of formality inherent in classic design, create options for multiple and varied presentations of self, dependent on the needs of a particular social or professional occasion. Classic

design is perceived by participants to fulfill a very necessary role in the wardrobe through its expressive attributes.

### ***Sophistication***

Participants explained that classic design expresses sophistication. It does so in part through its well-conceived design, or the balance and integration of its formal attributes. A thoughtful design, with simple and balanced formal attributes does not require excessive embellishments or details to mask or artificially create what is not present in the design itself. Participants interpreted excessive details of surface and layout structure as indicative of a trendy design. A trendy garment, as participants explained, cannot easily express sophistication, at least not what is appropriate for formal occasions because of its excessive or extreme attributes. Participants often associated trendy designs with youth, in relation to both the consumer and the length of their perceived fashionableness whereas classic designs were perceived as timeless and mature, both in their design and associated stereotypical wearer, the mature woman. This maturity was not perceived, by participants to be age related, but rather lifestyle related; the mature woman expresses sophistication in her demeanor and appearance. Wearing classic design, according to participants imparts or expresses this same type of sophistication even to a younger (age) woman. Classic design in its expression of sophistication implies style savvy-ness and effort on the part of the wearer in any social situation.

### ***Confidence***

Most participants discussed classic clothing's expressive role in their wardrobes in relation to professional contexts, because in addition to sophistication, classic design is

commonly perceived to express confidence. Classic design expresses confidence in two ways, according to participants. The first way is directly related to the perceived importance conveyed by participants to express sophistication in professional contexts. When they wore or wear classic design participants perceive that their appearance expresses sophistication, a trait considered positive and desirable. Because they perceived sartorial confidence expressed by wearing classic design, they also perceived professional confidence at least as far as the presentation of self. Participants explained the expression of confidence through classic design is the result of a lack of worry regarding their appearance and its appropriateness to the context.

The second way classic design expresses confidence is associated with the lack of worry about their appearance when wearing it, as Participant #10 stated, “With classics its more like, ‘Okay, this is something that I know for sure that people will accept.’” This expression of confidence is a result of the integration of formal attributes and their perceived expression of sophistication, but also according to participants because it is perceived as an appropriate choice for most social and professional contexts. The confidence participants perceived they express when wearing classic design is the result of theirs’ and others’ evaluations of their presentation of self as it relates to their choice of ensemble. Many participants, but especially those who indicated that they really liked classic clothing, perceived that classic design expressed confidence because it could never be a wrong choice, or in other words participants perceived that others would never perceive them as unattractive or out-of-date while wearing classic clothing. It always makes a good impression as Participant #8 explained about her example of classic, a

black dress. She said, “I would wear it to...a higher exposure event...or a...fancy family event...or something where I am going to be seen in it or there’s going to be pictures taken and...I don’t want to be remembered as the girl [who] wore the crazy something.” This comment also highlights the participants’ perception that classic design will continue to make a good impression well into the future.

Classic’s ability to express confidence and make a good impression through a perceived appropriateness, participants explained, is related to idea that classic will not offend anyone either. Not offending any potential audience is not quite the same thing as making a good impression according to participants, though certainly not offending someone is necessary to make a good impression in the first place. Classic design was inoffensive because of the simplicity and non-extreme aspects associated with its attributes of layout and surface structuring, which included such traits as not showing too much skin, being too tight, or having too bright a hue or too much surface embellishment. According to participants, classic design’s not too extreme formal attributes produced a more conservative bent to its design than might be found in a trendier garment of the same type, i.e. classic dress versus trendy dress. This conservatism produced emotional comfort for the wearer regarding others impressions of their appearance, they had limited worries about their presentation of self being perceived as incorrect or inappropriate. Participants were confident of making a good impression when wearing classic design and thus, they perceived classic design as expressing the situational and sartorial confidence that they felt.

### *The wearers' personality*

Participant #7 described her example of a black blazer as “not a carbon copy” but a classic garment that expressed her unique personality and style while simultaneously expressing classic design’s attributes of sophistication, confidence and appropriateness. Classic design’s perceived ability to express the unique personality of the wearer is its ultimate expressive attribute. Participants’ responses seemed to indicate, that without this ability, any interest in owning and wearing classic design on their part would be severely diminished. They liked that it could express sophistication and provide confidence in their appearance by virtue of its formal attributes but desired that it almost always express their personality and individual style as well. Without the ability for personal expression, classic design would not be as relevant to participants’ experiences within the current fashion culture, which emphasizes individuality and aesthetic identity above prescriptive societal dress codes (Postrel, 2003).

### **Symbolic attributes**

Fewer participants discussed symbolic attributes of classic design than did those who discussed formal and expressive attributes. They seemed to have the easiest time discussing the expressive attributes followed closely by the formal attributes and the most difficult time identifying symbolic attributes. However, there were some common symbolic associations made with classic design by participants. These associations, in participant discussions, were observed through the lens of the expressive attributes, though since participants identified expressive attributes based in part on formal attributes, the symbolic can be traced, if desired, back to that physical foundation. It is

merely that participants did not often directly discuss formal attribute(s) in their explanations or descriptions of symbolic attributes.

Classic design's expressions of sophistication and confidence carry with them culturally embedded symbolic connotations or meanings. These aesthetically based meanings relate to a desire for socio-historical cultural capital transmitted through consumption, i.e. the wearing of classic garments, as postulated in the last part of Ward's (2011) model. Ward (2011) proposed that authenticity is part of the meaning or value, which according to McCracken (1988) is transferred via consumption from the good to the consumer. This then is pertinent to classic design, perceived to unchangingly over the years, express sophistication and confidence, and thereby signify cultural ideals of status and 'good taste' primarily because it has in participants' view remained relatively unchanged by "cultural texts, fads, fashions..." (Ward, 2011, p. 156).

The most common symbolic meanings participants associated with classic design were 1) good taste 2) luxury and quality and 3) status. All three of these meanings are highly interrelated, based on participants' explanations so it is difficult to discover or understand where one symbolic meaning ends and the other begins, so the divisions I have imposed are somewhat artificial and were made in order to facilitate a more precise discussion.

### ***Good taste***

The concept of 'good taste' or 'having good taste' in terms of dress, carries with it connotations of a person having a very discriminating fashion palate and resulting in always being appropriately and stylishly attired for any occasion. Style in this instance is

defined as having a continuous or persistently similar look, usually with the connotation of quality. This should not be confused with a good fashion sense which can vary per each individual but something for which there is an unspoken immutable societal standard that must be met in order to be considered as ‘having good taste.’ ‘Good taste’ also implies that a significant amount of energy and careful thought is invested into the daily appearance. The descriptor ‘good taste’ also has historically-based associations and applications to members of a given society with high social and/or economic status, so participants who used words like “prestigious” and “elevated” to describe classic design are included here. So, since, according to some participants classic design symbolizes “good taste”, “prestige” and “elevates” the appearance, it is unsurprising then that participants also perceived that classic design expressed a sophistication and confidence linked to contextual appropriateness. A design that culturally symbolizes ‘good taste’ could not possibly derail efforts to make a good impression, through dress, because it carries with it the implications of an unspoken but immutable cultural standard of self-presentation that anticipates a positive aesthetic response on the part of the viewer.

### ***Luxury and quality***

Classic was also perceived to symbolize luxury and quality according to participants. Participants explained that because classic design has longevity or durability in the fashion system, it also requires physical durability. Quality construction and materials are perceived as the primary way for classic design to obtain physical durability and in actuality often a constitutive part of classic, but not always. For example, interview participants brought examples of classic design from H&M, Mango and

Forever 21, all fast fashion retail chains, as well as higher-end designers such as BCBG Max Azria or Rebecca Taylor. Regardless of the actual quality of the fabrication the formal attributes of classic design, related to simplicity and balance, have come to symbolize quality and even sometimes luxury regardless of the actual circumstances of a classic design's fabrication. Classic design's symbolism of luxury and quality are closely linked to its symbolism of 'good taste'. Someone with 'good taste' is perceived to be more likely to desire luxurious designs with high quality in their materials and fabrications.

### *Status*

Finally, classic design's symbolic association with 'good taste' and 'good taste's' implied promotion of quality and luxury are foundational in symbolically conferring classic design with high status, a supposition verified by participant responses. That classic design symbolizes high societal status is most apparent in the associations participants made between classic design and iconic fashion figures, like Audrey Hepburn and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Both of these women, when alive were admired cultural figures with great amounts of fashion capital that has not diminished since their deaths both more than 20 years ago. It may be because they now both only live in photos, film, and memories that their perceived symbolic association with classic has only increased in the minds of the public. There is no more opportunity for either to make a fashion faux pas, which might effect their associations with classic design and 'good taste' in dress. Both women's styles also focused on simplicity in the formal attributes, which according to participants is a primary attribute of classic design. The reality is that



Audrey Hepburn and Jackie Kennedy Onassis symbolize the very best, or deepest essence of classic design in the fashion culture. Classic design becomes symbolic of such icons of ‘good taste’ by emulating the spirit of their individual styles, thus conferring similar status and symbolic ‘good taste’ to the contemporary wearer.

## **Summary**

### **Classic is cultural**

Participants commonly described classic design’s formal, expressive and symbolic attributes and their knowledge of them as originating from cultural sources, such as their mothers, references to past eras, and iconic fashion figures. Participants understood classic design as a part of both past and present fashion cultures. The origins of classic design’s attributes were often difficult for participants to specifically identify; they just seemed to have an understanding of the nature of classic design, which they then applied to their wardrobes and examples of classic clothing. However, classic design’s culture foundation, according to participants, is not a set of detailed rules of required formal attributes but rather more of a set of guidelines that govern the selection of classic design’s formal attributes so that they display simplicity, versatility, and/or formality in the entire design. The successful application of these guidelines then allows classic design to express culturally positive traits, of sophistication and confidence, and symbolize ‘good taste’ and status.

### **Classic is personal**

Participants also described classic as personal. Classic design can be interpreted through the lens of personal needs, desires, experiences and preferences. This is due, in

part, because of the simplicity and versatility imparted by its formal attributes.

Versatility, in particular, allows classic design to not only express its culturally embedded attributes of confidence and sophistication but also the personality of the wearer. Classic design can be combined with many other types of garments and accessories, from trendy to traditional or unique to familiar. Through such potential variety participants indicated that they adapted classic design to their personal styles and yet still perceived their appearance fell within the bounds of cultural appropriateness required in most contexts.

The other reason classic was perceived as personal is that the cultural guidelines related to its formal attributes are just that, guidelines not proscribed rules. These perceived cultural guidelines indicate that classic design should have balance in its formal attributes, which can be interpreted as simplicity. What the guidelines do not insist upon is that all the attributes must be familiar, traditional or ordinary to create this overall simplicity in classic design. Therefore, participants always perceived a range of choices, with variety of formal attributes, in examples of classic design that could express their own uniqueness and not interfere with an overall expression of classic-ness in their appearance or clothing choices. This sense of ‘unique’ to the wearer classic is most clearly expressed by participants who searched, found, and/or described their examples of classic as the “perfect” example of a given type of classic, i.e. ‘little, black dress or white button-down shirt. These participant examples invariably had one or two formal attributes interpreted as unique or “not” necessarily classic, in and of themselves, but within the entirety of the garment, were still acceptable and even desirable. Participants perceived

these unique formal attributes as indispensable for creating an example of classic design that was not an exact replica of every other example. Thus, these classic designs expressed participants' personal styles and personalities while still expressing and symbolizing the culturally desirable attributes of classic design.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this research was to examine classic design through the three interrelated aspects of the aesthetic response—form, viewer, and context. From a design standpoint, however, the form is the foundation upon which the other aspects are built. Thus, as a starting point to answering questions about how classic design might be created and subsequently influence viewer behaviors and contexts within the fashion system, the form of classic design was investigated through the viewer’s aesthetic response. The investigation included how the aesthetic response to the form, results in associated expressive and symbolic attributes and how those impact and inform classic design’s role in the fashion system.

This research addressed the following questions:

1. What are the formal attributes of classic design? What aspects of structuring within the form—layout, surface, and light and shadow—are most relevant to creating classic design and to consumers categorizing a design as classic?
2. How does the form, from the viewer’s perspective, impact the longevity of design or its potential for continued contextual relevance, emotional attachment and positive aesthetic response? And what role do these characteristics have in a design’s categorization as classic?
3. How do various contexts, personal, cultural and/or historical shape a design’s interpretation or application as classic in the fashion system and in individual usage?

This study investigated the nature of classic design, its formal, expressive and symbolic attributes, as understood and applied by a specific group of participants. In particular, this study focused on female, undergraduate students at Midwestern public university, with a high fashion involvement and knowledge based on their enrollment in a course dealing with assessment and investigation of the nature of fashion trends and their movements through society. This sample was chosen as a starting point in the investigation of the nature of classic design, since this demographic has in general, experienced fashion changes at exponentially higher rates than their predecessors and for whom fast fashion chains, such as H&M or Forever 21, are the standard bearers of such a high rate of fashion movement. These cultural and societal realities are in direct contrast to the nature of classic design as defined in the literature as long lasting or timeless; clothing made with quality materials intended to be worn for many years rather than discarded in the next season.

A series of pilot studies helped to refine language related to classic and not-classic utilizing six coats selected from the Goldstein Museum of Design's digital database and photographed three dimensionally on dress forms. Using the language and responses from Pilot Studies #1 and #2 final survey questions were developed and surveys were distributed to 55 undergraduate students enrolled in a course focused on the topic of fashion trends. The final surveys asked participants to comment and describe attributes they perceived in the six coats and considered classic or not classic. The final question in the survey asked participants about their willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. The purpose of the interview was to probe reasons for their survey responses,

and to consider the perception, use and roles of classic design (clothing) in their wardrobes and their appearance management behaviors.

The analysis of the survey and interview responses focused on the framework of formal, including layout and surface structure, expressive, and symbolic attributes described as part of and associated with classic (DeLong, 1998). In combination, these attributes form a more distinct picture of cultural guidelines that govern classic's formal attributes and how those formal attributes impact the perceived expressive and symbolic roles classic plays in appearance behaviors and in the larger fashion culture.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Formal attributes: The foundation of classic design**

##### ***Color and silhouette***

Throughout the surveys and interviews there were two formal attributes that were mentioned more than any others as essential for classic design: color and silhouette. One or both of these, were denoted as attribute(s) that initially influenced the assessment of which of the six coats and participant examples were finally chosen as classic. Both of these attributes constitute a visual imperative for the viewer; they are readily and easily perceived upon first glance, though color is more immediate than silhouette in participant responses. Color and silhouette are the most significant formal attributes in determining whether a garment is classic or not. If either silhouette or color fall within a certain prescribed range e.g. neutral colors or not-too-tight, not-too-loose silhouette, whereby as individual attributes they are considered classic in and of themselves, then the entire garment has a greater than average chance of being considered classic.

### *Color*

Research indicates that color, in particular, is one the first things a viewer/consumer sees and evaluates when considering a purchase (De Klerk & Lubbe, 2006; Yan & Watson, 2013). Color or hue as a principle indicator of classic, therefore, seems logical. Not only, was color visually prominent, most participants limited the colors that could be in a classic design. From the visual stimulus of the six coats to applications of participant examples they brought to the interview, neutral colors were always discussed in association with color and classic design. When a garment has a neutral color, i.e. black, grey, navy, cream, white, tan/camel its chances of being considered classic are greatly increased.

Still, while participants stated that hues of muted values and intensities are considered classic, i.e. grey, beige, black, navy blue, they do not make a coat classic alone nor are they the only colors, or hues that are considered classic. Some participants indicated that other hues could be classic, as long as they were not too intense or saturated, i.e. lower value or darker shades of green or purple, for example, forest green and eggplant, were perceived as suitable for classic design. These less saturated and lower value hues were often not initially considered classic but rather became classic as a result of personal experiences wearing a garment and then deciding that such hues functioned much like a neutral; they were versatile e.g. they could be successfully (attractively) coordinated with multiple other colors. The general guideline for the relationship of the surface attribute of color and classic design is that a neutral or muted color is essential. However, when considering how to design classic clothing that is

initially and immediately perceived as a classic the safer choice for the designer will always be a neutral. If a non-neutral color, that is not too bright or saturated, is selected for a garment intended to be classic then greater care must be taken by the designer in the choice of the other formal attributes in the garment.

### *Silhouette*

The main determinant of a classic silhouette is how it has potential for fitting the body, according to participants. Several silhouettes were specifically mentioned as being classic but it was less about classic requiring an A-line or hourglass or fit and flare silhouette and more about how those silhouettes fit the body. This was apparent in the coats but carried over into participants' personal examples of classic design. They explained that a classic, no matter what type of garment, is never extremely tight fitting nor extremely loose as it relates to the body of the wearer. The reasoning behind this is that the fit on classic design flatters the figure, thus creating a positive perception of the figure by skimming over the body curvature. Classic design disguises figure flaws and as a result emphasizes or creates a figure perceived as closer to the current cultural beauty standards. One of the perceived benefits of this kind of fit in a silhouette, because it subtly indicates the presence of the body without displaying any part overtly or in minute detail, is that it accomplishes this feat for a variety of figure types and different ages. This is also why participants would not say only one type of silhouette was classic because there are many kinds of figures and body shapes and A-line silhouettes might work better for one person while an hourglass shape works better for another.

### *The combined effect of layout and surface structure*



Individual formal attributes form the foundation of classic design and some attributes have greater weight in creating a classic design than others, such as color or silhouette. However, there are not strict criteria regarding the inclusion and exclusion of any specific aspects of layout or surface structure, even color or silhouette that always apply to classic design. Instead there are rules or rather concepts that govern how to choose appropriate individual formal attributes of silhouette, color, line, surface embellishment, that could be considered classic by viewers. These overarching concepts that expressed a classic design related to choosing formal attributes resulting in: simplicity, versatility and balance.

### *Simplicity*

Simplicity in the individual formal attributes is essential for classic design, according to participants. Simplicity in individual attributes generally creates a simple design overall, or what they considered to be a classic design. When discussing the particulars of the specific formal attributes that make a classic design simple, participants often cited a low amount of embellishment in surface structure and a lack of novelty of cut or line, in layout structure as important. For instance, the collar on Coat #2 was not considered simple and as a result it was a hindrance to its inclusion into the “most” classic category. Participants, when asked how they would change Coat #2 to make it more classic, frequently wanted to change the collar to something more standard or traditional, in other words something less complex and unique, or simpler. Participants wanted to make the individual formal attributes, like the collar and the color (black was most commonly suggested), of Coat #2 less likely to attract immediate (and possibly

disapproving) attention, because classic design, in its simplicity, is not perceived as a kind of design that attracts attention through overt formal attributes. The observer of classic design perceives understatement in the materials and their organization, which highlights the wearer, not the garment.

The concept of simplicity related to classic design merges a low level of complexity and a lack of brazenness in the choices of formal attributes, sometimes described by participants as creating a subtlety in the design. A subtle (classic) design, as explained by participants, is one that flies slightly under the fashion radar but is nonetheless very much present even if it does not command immediate attention in the moment. In doing so, the concept of simplicity as it is applied in classic design puts the wearer in the foreground and her clothing in the background. For classic to be a background piece rather than a foreground statement, the formal attributes must all be relatively simple. No single attribute should call attention to itself as a visual priority. The lack of a visual priority in any formal attribute because of their simplicity imparts another important trait of classic as described by participants, versatility.

### *Versatility*

Versatility, in relation to classic design, has two definitions or applications, according to participants. The first definition is classic design's ability to be flattering or wearable for a variety of body types and physical colorings. Classic is versatile because many people, of differing ages, find it an attractive and desirable design because it does not cause unwelcome fit or appearance issues. Participants commonly explained one of the benefits of classic design's neutral or lower value and/or saturated hues is that are that

perceived to look acceptable, if not well, with most physical colorings. Classic design should look good on most people or its not really considered classic.

Classic does this, as described by participants, through simplicity in its formal attributes, or more precisely the fact that the number of formal attributes potentially perceived as complex or extreme is limited. For instance, the non-extreme, not-too-tight, not-too-loose silhouette associated with classic design, ensures, according to participants, that a greater range of body types will be able to wear it and have their appearance interpreted as attractive and/or appropriate for their age or the context of wearing. Classic design then creates a desirable appearance for a range of potential wearers because the simplicity or balance in its formal attributes contributes to its perceived ability to disguise perceived flaws and create a positive aesthetic experience for the wearer.

The second, and more popular definition, of classic design's versatility is related to the fact that through its simplicity it is more of a background than foreground garment; classic design does not become a focal point either in relation to the wearer or to other garments. According to participants, classic design can combine with a variety of other garments and accessories in the wardrobe, to create ensembles that range from trendy to traditional and formal to casual, and this is one of the most desirable attributes of classic design. Many participants described in their discussions of their personal experiences with classic design how many outfits or ensembles they could create with just one or two of the classic garments in their wardrobe. Even in the discussions of the six coats, versatility was related to how many occasions or with how many ensembles a particular coat would aesthetically function.

The other benefit of this kind of versatility in classic design was the ability to express the personal style of the wearer. Participants' explanations of this definition of classic design's versatility centered around the perception that even though it was simple and not necessarily very expressive of the wearer's personality it could be made to be so through accompanying garments or accessories, which were more in tune with the wearer's personal style. This versatility increased desirability of a classic design in the wardrobe. Classic design was a "blank canvas" as Participant #14 called it, and like a blank canvas it could become and/or express whatever the wearer desired. Similarly, other participants called classic design a foundation, interpreted as classic extended and increased the stability of their wardrobe. They may not wear it everyday, participants explained but without it they perceived that they would be left with a group of discreet garments rather than a cohesive and coherent functioning whole. Versatility, or ability to go with many other garments, makes this foundational, blank canvas, attribute of classic design possible, according to participants.

### *Balance*

All of the formal attributes appropriate for classic design have an acceptable range or balance within which they are considered classic and as a result the entire garment may be considered classic. This balance means that some attributes in a garment can be more fashionable or unique and others can be more familiar and traditional and the whole garment can still be perceived as classic. The key is proper balance among the attributes. Generally, there must be more attributes considered traditional and familiar than fashionable or unique in the layout and surface structure of a garment for it to be

perceived as classic design. Attributes that are considered too novel or unusual cannot be classic because, according to participants, such attributes tend to immediately and insistently draw the eyes of the viewer or they clearly refer to their original context of time. Examples include one participant's association of Coat #2 with Mod designs from the 1960s and Coat #5 with the stereotypical housedress of 1950s television mother, June Cleaver (Participant #5). Producing a garment with all traditional formal attributes is safer when trying to create a classic than including attributes that might potentially be considered unique or fashion-oriented into the mixture; however, then the garment runs the risk of being considered too boring to the eye, which is not how classic is perceived either. A design that is too boring may be a versatile wardrobe staple in its simplicity but participants also perceived it as inadequate to express the wearer's unique personality.

Still, as with specific formal attributes, such as color, and the combined effect of formal attributes, such as simplicity associated with classic there is always subjectivity in their application. There is not a prescriptive list of specific formal attributes to be included, or a number of how many attributes it takes to be perceived as classic and how many of those can be unique, or even a precise way to determine which attributes are unique and which are not, that can be followed so that the end result is considered to be a classic design. The combination of the parts into a cohesive whole takes priority in classic design and it needs to be carefully considered with the end goal in mind; to create something recognizable as classic in spite of any unique attributes, to create a design that is recognizable as classic by the consumer/wearer.

### *Recognizable*

Participants often explained as a sense of (perceived) familiarity that permeated the discussions of classic design's formal attributes, whether participants were discussing the six coats or their own examples that they brought in because of their attributes perceived as classic. The need for a design to be recognizable or familiar is important for classic design and it is the formal attributes or the combination of them that creates this characteristic. Participants discussed a variety of ways that this occurred in classic garments. One method of creating recognizability in classic design described by participants is the use of familiar design formats, i.e. a traditional pea coat or menswear-style blazer and then updating it slightly by incorporating a few unique formal attributes. This supports Loschek's (2009) description of classic design as allowing (limited) modifications in the formal attributes while still being considered classic.

Another way a design becomes recognizable is through the symbolism associated with iconic styles, such as Burberry trench coats, which even when changed significantly are considered classic because of the implication of the brand and its long popularity. However, the most common explanation was merely an abstract and/or perceived reference in the formal attributes to the design of a past era. Even the specific era of reference was vague, i.e. 50 or 100 years ago. This type of recognition on the part of the participant is rather elusive. It did not even seem to be completely understood to the participants, they merely explained that the formal attributes were common or that they had always been designed in "that way" (Participant #7).

Even lacking a specific reference point or maybe because of it, the concept of being recognizable points toward some important aspects of classic design. First, ideas about what classic design looks like, how it is created or what formal attributes constitute a classic are culturally embedded. They are so embedded that sometimes it is difficult for participants to articulate exactly why a design is classic or why specific formal attributes are essential. Participants just seemed to know that when they perceived a design as classic they explained this by saying that it is because it is familiar (as well as simple and/or versatile.) Second, classic is easily understood. Participants knew how to wear it and who would look good in it and how it fit into a larger wardrobe. Classic design does not cause confusion or create extra cognitive work because it has enough familiar attributes combined with newer ones to create a positive aesthetic experience for the viewer/wearer (Bianchi, 2002).

**Expressive attributes: The experience of classic design**

***Classic design expresses the wearer/viewer's personality***

The need to express one's personality through dress is prevalent in fashion and in design of all types (Postrel, 2003; Featherstone, 1992). As Postrel (2003) explained, in the current aesthetic economy how something looks is almost as important as how it functions if not more so, and as such it is vital for each individual to define a specific aesthetic identity that is unique to them. Classic design is perceived to aid in the creation of such an aesthetic identity and this was cited as one of the primary reasons the participants wore classic design. The simplicity and versatility of its formal attributes enabled classic design to function in this manner. It forms the foundation of a versatile

wardrobe. Participants emphasized that classic can be dressed up or down. It can be accessorized and worn with trendy garments or other classic garments and look different each time it is worn. Classic is extremely mutable and so the wearer perceives that she has many options when she chooses classic design. Classic can express a different aspect of the wearer's personality on any given day or can always be worn as a consistent expression of the wearer. Its greatest attraction though is that it allows the person to be the focal point rather than her clothing becoming the focus in wearing. Classic design has authenticity as defined by Postrel (2003); it expresses the wearer's tastes; or it "...matches surface with substance, form with identity" (p.113).

The ability for a classic design to accomplish this also works when it is not necessarily the greater portion of the wardrobe. Those participants whose personal styles leaned more towards trends and fads were always able to find at least one example of classic design in their wardrobes to bring to the interviews. These classic examples, while not the principle or favorite garments in some participants' wardrobes, were still perceived as useful and necessary, in part because they were also perceived as versatile. These participants included a few classic garments in their wardrobes because they increased the range of the more liked, trendier pieces; they acknowledged they could create more ensembles with a few classic items in their wardrobes than they could with a wardrobe full of entirely trendy garments. Not only that, but they also sometimes perceived classic garments as able to decrease the faddishness of other garments in an ensemble, thus imparting a certain low level classic-ness to the whole look and making



the ensemble appropriate and inoffensive for a variety of contexts while still accurately expressing their personal styles.

### *Appropriateness*

Classic is also authentic in the more objective, traditional sense, as in “the way its always been done” (Postrel, 2003). As a result classic design is appropriate; it expresses the wearer’s personality but in a manner that makes the wearer feels “secure” or safe in her appearance or fashion choices. According to participants, classic design functions in self-presentation, as a means of being unique but not too unique. This correlates with Blumer’s (1969) theory of fashion, which indicates that the process of expressing individuality through fashion is subject to the more insentient motivation of using appearance and clothing choices to indicate a collective identity. Classic design expresses identity but in a discreet way, without putting individual identity ahead of a desired or aspirational group identity.

When wearing classic participants perceive that they will not offend anyone and risk rejection or not be accepted as either part of a current social group or when they aspire to a new group, such as when searching for a job. Classic with subtle but unique formal attributes allows room for personal interpretation in how to wear it and with what. But it still fills a need for information or advice about how to dress for more formal and/or culturally prescribed occasions. Classic is the “go-to” choice for such formal or more prescribed occasions such as job interviews, formal occasions such as weddings and church, gatherings outside of one’s particular self-designated social group, and events that will likely include a variety of individuals of varying ages, ethnicities and socio-

economic backgrounds. Classic is perceived as inoffensive attire for all such occasions. It is viewed so partially because of the simplicity of formal attributes required to create classic design. With its not-too-tight fit or lack of excessive embellishment or familiar collar shape, in a classic designed garment there is not focal point that would draw the eyes of potentially disapproving viewers. As a result of classic's perceived ability to express individual personality and not offend others classic design provides the wearer with a positive aesthetic experience.

*Classic design is a positive aesthetic experience for the wearer*

This positive aesthetic experience is linked to the expressive attributes of classic design: sophistication and confidence. Since, sophistication and confidence are perceived as culturally and socially desirable attributes because they are perceived to impart maturity and professionalism to the appearance, wearing classic design is positive for most participants. It is still primarily positive experience, even when classic does not really fit with the wearer's personal style. Classic design's perceived positive expressive attributes affect participants' understanding of its culturally-based appearance management role(s) and therefore, some participants were willing to wear it, even if it did not fit with their style, given the proper context and need. Additionally, even though classic design did not match their personal styles, these participants did not perceive a negative aesthetic experience wearing it, because they believed that through classic design they were meeting appearance expectations and thus increasing the likelihood of achieving their professional and personal goals (according to the particulars of the situation). The perception that wearing classic design helps ensure that others experience

their appearance in an aesthetically positive way is, according to participants, part of their analysis of their own positive aesthetic experience with classic design. In fact, classic design may be as much about others' perceptions as it is about the wearers' perceptions of their appearance. Wearing classic design increases the likelihood, according to the participants, that the two perceptions will match.

The positive aesthetic experience of classic design was also about how classic allowed and facilitated the presentation of the self in all situations in a way that subtly accented the personality of the wearer. This experience was again connected to situations where classic design was perceived by participants to be appropriate and necessary for an effective and inoffensive self-presentation. Participants experienced a positive aesthetic response while wearing classic design, because they were still expressing their individual aesthetic identity, while meeting expectations. The positive aesthetic response was linked more heavily, according to participants, to their expression of an individual aesthetic identity but they were pleased to be able to do so, through wearing classic design, in such a quiet way. This is not to say that participants always wanted to express their aesthetic identity quietly, but rather that they greatly appreciated their perception that classic could do so and thus, wearing classic was reported as a positive aesthetic experience for most participants on a number of levels.

### **Symbolic attributes: The role of classic design in the fashion culture**

#### ***Classic is symbolic***

The symbolic attributes of classic design were more elusive in participants' discussions of classic design than the expressive and formal. A potential reason for this is

that symbolic attributes, defined as associated meaning perceived in a designed object, are in their very nature abstract, when compared to the other two types. However, participants' responses revealed another potential reason for their struggle to define classic by its symbolic attributes: they perceived classic *to be* a symbolic attribute applied to designed objects, in this instance clothing. Therefore, when asked their opinions about symbolic attributes of classic design examples, either regarding the coats or their personal garments, they were already working from a place of symbolic meaning. For instance, many times participants seemed, often unconsciously, to assign classic-ness to a garment immediately, without any in depth evaluation until after their initial assignment. They did not seem to argue with their thoughts that this coat has an A-line silhouette and neutral color so it must be classic but rather stated, "This coat is classic", and then asked "Now, why do I think that?".

They had already been asked to respond by placing garments into a symbolic category: classic. Once designated as classic participants were asked to determine why they chose as they did and provide evidence in the formal and expressive attributes of the garments. The concept of familiarity is important here, for understanding that classic is symbolic because many participants explained that they "recognized" classic immediately and easily, based upon perceived cultural knowledge. Some participants even referenced the specific (and sometimes inaccurate) historical eras or famous fashion icons to provide a cultural foundation for recognizing classic; classic is symbolic because it looks to a cultural past considered to itself be symbolic of the formal expressive attributes of classic. Thus, even the design of the study was biased towards the belief that

classic is culturally symbolic and as a result was focused on discovering more about the formal and expressive attributes which underlie the symbolism.

### *Classic's symbolic meanings*

As stated, classic is a symbolic meaning attached to fashion or designed objects, but that does not mean it does not also have associated symbolic meanings that are culturally communicated when the word classic is applied to a garment (based on the formal and expressive attributes). The symbolic attributes of classic include luxury, quality, taste and iconic status. All of these attributes carry with them (mostly) positive associations of high status, style savvy-ness, and an appearance perceived as culturally attractive which will last far beyond the lifetime of any individual or era.

Classic design's timeless, culturally attractive symbolic meaning is intimately connected, according several participants, to its association with iconic fashion figures, both designers and/or celebrities, such as 'Coco' Chanel, Grace Kelly, Audrey Hepburn and Jackie Onassis, to name a few more commonly mentioned. The association participants made between classic design and these well-known fashion icons is, in part, because of their actual and perceived personal styles and/or designs, i.e. simple, neutral, versatile, balanced. These women's styles reflected participants' descriptions of the formal attributes necessary for classic design, or rather based on these women's styles or designs participants identified with the formal attributes in classic design. This reinforces the idea that ideas of classic are deeply culturally embedded and that classic is itself symbolic of 'good taste', quality, luxury and status all meanings perceived to be expressed by these iconic women and their dress.

### *Classic design is a personal interpretation*

Both the variety found in participants' categorization of the six coats in the survey as "most" and "not" classic and their introduction and explanation of their own differing examples of classic design in the interviews underpins the concept that classic is not a set point but rather a moving target. It does have a range within which it must operate, according to participants. Classic must be more traditional than unique and more familiar than new, though it can flirt with those sobriquets as long as it doesn't make any permanent commitments in those stylistic directions. Classic design must be the result of the appropriate balance within universally understood cultural guidelines, of both unique and traditional, familiar and new, formal attributes, which allow the garment as a whole to be assessed as simple and recognizable, yet ideally, slightly different, for example, from the next version of the classic "little, black dress".

The precise definition of such balance, however, and the distribution and appearance (within the preset cultural limits) of the unique versus traditional attributes, is very much based in personal viewpoints, contexts, and style preferences of the viewer; classic is therefore, extremely personal at the same time that it is culturally embedded. It is a paradox of sorts. This paradox can be seen most clearly when comparing participants' self-described personal styles and their examples of classic design brought to the interviews. There is a noticeable trend in the findings. Participants who described their personal styles as more eclectic, colorful, original, or statement-making, tended toward the more non-traditional examples of classic design. They were more likely to choose the less popular, more non-traditional, coats, as "most" classic. For instance,

Participant #17, who described her style as “original”, chose Coats #2 and #5 as most classic and Participant #5 who said about her personal style, “I am very much into a lot of color” brought a green dress with a unique back detail to the interview as an example of classic. This should not be taken as a hard and fast rule because there is still variation in participants’ perceptions of which attributes are unique and which are traditional. In the end, within the general cultural guidelines that participants perceived to govern classic design there is sufficient room for personal interpretation. The room for interpretation present in classic design is likely the greatest secret to its appeal as a concrete design and its longevity in the fashion system, though still an abstract concept. Classic design adapts with fashion, in small ways, rather than fighting against changes that come through belonging to a system predicated on continual change.

### **Classic Design and Sustainability**

In defining a research purpose related to examining the nature and essence of classic design, potential implications associated with sustainability in the apparel industry and consumer behaviors were raised. Scholarly definitions seemed to indicate that classic design had the potential to, in a small way, decrease consumption through its culturally associated attribute of timelessness. Timelessness in classic design was interpreted by scholars (Carter, 2003; Hawes, 1938; Loschek, 2009; McKinney-Valentin, 2010; Nystrom, 1928) as a design that allows the wearer to present an up-to-date appearance for an extended period, thus reducing the need and possibly desire to purchase new garments in order to maintain a fashionable appearance.

According to participants, classic design does in certain ways reduce their need to purchase new garments for two primary reasons related to its formal and expressive attributes. First, classic design's conscious simplicity, in the dispensation and organization of its formal attributes is perceived as extremely versatile. Participants explained that acquiring classic not only made their wardrobe more versatile, but because of this it was a "good investment"; they were willing to pay a bit more money for it. Second, since they paid more money for it participants also expected classic design to be durable both physically and stylistically. Classic design is (and should be made) with higher quality materials and construction techniques in addition to eschewing any formal attributes that bespeak a precise time period or season; it should be simple and/or neutral. Given the fulfillment of these cultural guidelines in both the coats and their personal examples of classic design participants visualized and anticipated (a bit more hypothetically in the case of the coats) enjoying and wearing classic garments for a sustained period, thus meeting Fletcher and Grose's (2008; 2012) proposed three-fold requirements of durability—physical, stylistic and then emotional—in the sustained positive aesthetic response associated with slow fashion.

### **Classic Design and the Aesthetic Experience**

This research was focused on examining classic design through the aesthetic experience. All three aspects of the aesthetic experience—form, viewer, and context—were considered essential and potentially relevant to the investigation of classic design, however in designing the study it seemed that the form was the foundation upon which the viewer and context, in the aesthetic experience, were built. It is to the form, of any



designed object, that the viewer reacts and responds based upon personal, cultural and possibly universal contexts. Thus, as a starting point to answering questions about how classic design might be created and subsequently influence viewer behaviors and contexts within the fashion system, the form of classic design was investigated through the viewer's aesthetic response using both a uniform set of garments, six historic coats, intentionally selected as representative of classic design set of garments, and a personal, subject set of garments, clothing from the participants personal wardrobes.

### *Form*

This research posed the following questions related to form: What are the formal attributes of classic design? What aspects of structuring within the form—layout, surface, and light and shadow—are most relevant to creating classic design and to consumers categorizing a design as classic?

This question was based on the assumption that since the form is the foundation of the aesthetic experience, there was the potential that a prescribed list of essential formal attributes of layout, surface and light and shadow structuring existed for classic design; a list that would ensure any potential viewer would assign classic-ness to garment designed accordingly. And in fact, participants did discuss many aspects related to layout and surface structuring, or the form, when they explained their evaluation of classic design in both the coats and their own garments. They frequently mentioned silhouette, color, and embellishments as influencing their choice or assessment of the classic examples used in the study. Sometimes, participants were even specific about what colors or silhouettes or embellishments were classic. For instance, among participants there was

a fairly uniform assessment that brighter or more saturated hues were not classic, while neutral colors were always classic. However, overall in participants' discussions of classic design's formal attributes there is no indication of completely universal definition of classic design's formal attributes. In other words, from the results of the study it is impossible to create a list of formal attributes that will guarantee that in the end any given design would be universally assessed as a classic design.

There is no prescription that will guarantee a design will be considered classic or for a designer to follow in order to create a classic garment. There are some guidelines that govern the form, such as simplicity and balance in the formal attributes. Participants perceived that classic design is design where the parts fit together creating a cohesive whole without the inclusion of too many trendy or complex features. In other words, as some participants explained, classic is good design. Designs that follow these guidelines have a better than average chance of being classic, in the final analysis, but following them is still not in any way an absolute guarantee of a classic designation because all good design is not classic design.

Participant responses support this supposition, especially when their evaluations of Coat #2 are considered. Coat #2 was considered by 76% of the survey participants and 18 of the 19 interview participants as "not" classic, but then nine of the interview participants, who thought it was "not" classic still really liked the coat and said they would personally wear it. According to these participants it was good design. It was an attractive and cohesive design; it just was not classic. Furthermore, five participants did see Coat #2 as a classic design; they did perceive that in its 'good' or cohesive design it

was also classic design. The reason for this lack of precision regarding the form of classic design and agreement about detailed and specific formal attributes is because, based on the results of this study, classic does not reside in the form, even though as part of the aesthetic response the viewer is still responding to the form.

### ***Viewer and Context***

The following questions regarding the viewer and context were posed in this study: How does the form, from the viewer's perspective, impact the longevity of design or its potential for continued contextual relevance, emotional attachment, and positive aesthetic response? And what role do these characteristics have in a design's categorization as classic? How do various contexts, personal, cultural and/or historical shape a design's interpretation or application as classic in the fashion system and in individual usage?

The most basic answer is that classic design exists primarily in the viewer and context portions of the aesthetic response or it resides in the wearer's cultural and personal contextual interpretations of the form. The form is important as the concrete, physical object of the aesthetic experience but a classic design is not the form it is the interpretation of the form. Classic design is the personal application of cultural context to the form of a designed object, in this case clothing. The aesthetic response as defined by DeLong (1998) is influenced by personal desire as well as collective knowledge of cultural contexts and this is what constitutes classic design; classic design is a personal interpretation of embedded cultural knowledge applied to the form of a particular design. Since it is a personal interpretation then it logically follows that the form does not have to

conform to an exact and precise definition or list of rules because even if it did it would still be subject to the interpretation of the viewer based on their cultural knowledge and experiences with the concept and application classic design.

Within the current fashion system, in which the participants acknowledged that they operate and make their personal appearance choices, the aesthetic experience of classic design, as expressed through the viewer and context portion of the participants' responses was more uniform. Participants explained and expressed many similar ideas, feelings and meanings they associated with classic design in general and wearing classic design in particular. Participants just perceived that different garments, and therefore, different formal attributes, could and did produce a similar aesthetic experience. The particular application of cultural contextual knowledge and its associated expressive attributes, or what classic design is perceived to say about the viewer/wearer, is where consistency in the aesthetic experience of classic is found not in the form. Based on participants' categorization of the six coats and their personal examples, the form of classic design varies and is somewhat unpredictable, but the participants' personal interpretations and applications of classic to all of these (slightly to significantly) differing forms demonstrates a trend towards universality, at least within the design's culture of origin; a universality associated with classic design in the literature but that was not found in participant explanations of the form itself. As a result, the questions related to viewer and context of the aesthetic experience addressed in this study were more pertinent to understanding classic design.

## **Implications for Future Studies**

In the design of this study this researcher used surveys, interviews, and extant historic and personal participant garments as data collection tools. In the surveys 55 participants were asked to assess and comment on classic design related to six, historic, designer wool, winter coats, from the Goldstein Museum of Design's professionally photographed, digital database. The images of the six coats were presented in a PowerPoint shown to the participants during their completion of the survey.

Nineteen participants volunteered for a follow-up interview. For the interview each was asked to bring an example of what she considered a classic from her wardrobe. Interview questions involved a further probe of their responses to the survey and an application from personal examples of classic into the discussion of classic design.

The vocabulary of the survey and interview questions was based upon an underlying framework of the aesthetic experience including the formal, expressive, and symbolic attributes of classic design, and the layout and surface structure of formal attributes as indicated by the results of two previous pilot studies related to the nature of classic design.

Choosing this specific demographic for a participant sample, as well as the choice of examples of classic design, both historic and personal, and the data collection method, including the choice of frameworks and vocabulary introduce certain limitations into the study. These choices also create areas requiring further and future research.

### **Limitations**

#### ***Sample demographic***

In this study of classic the importance of sample demographics is implied. In various ways, participants in this study mentioned older (in their 30s to 40s) women in their responses, particularly their mothers who set fashion examples by personally wearing classic design or advising them about the importance of their owning at least a few classic garments. As a result, participants anticipated needing and wanting more classic design in their future wardrobes and for their future professional and public roles.

Researching the role of classic design for women over 30 years could be the next logical step for further research and potentially instructive on several levels. Such research could investigate how women the age of the participants' mothers (and even grandmothers) obtained their knowledge and understanding of classic design, and more specifically how they perceived it in terms of the formal and expressive attributes. It could also examine the validity of participants' assumptions regarding the need for classic as they aged and the accuracy of their perceptions of the cultural role of classic, e.g. did it convey sophistication and professionalism and still express their personality, by focusing on women in their 30s.

#### ***Use of photographic images for examples of classic design***

The surveys and interviews used photographic images on slides as the means to introduce participants to the six coats as examples of classic clothing. These medium, while convenient for presenting garments to a large group of participants, simultaneously introduced limitations into the study. First, the coats are 3-D objects. They are intended to be worn to be fully experienced. The photographs did display the coats on mannequins with head shapes, but they still only provided 2-D visual exposure. Also, the coats were

various sizes but the mannequins were all the same size, so quality of the fit, e.g. was the coat the same size as the mannequin, both a female size 6 or 8, on some or all of the coats might not provide accurate or similar fit. Participants were not able to touch them or try them on, both of which if experienced might have influenced their answers in different directions. These were limitations apparent during the interview process because more than a few participants mistook details especially of fit, texture, material, and color, both in their survey answers and their clarification of why they perceived certain coats were or were not classic.

Another limitation of photographic images was that once the six coats were chosen, the images for each coat was further limited by the number and type of photographs available on the digital database. (The Goldstein Museum was unable at the time of the study to take any new photographs with the same professional quality as those available on the database.) While every effort was made to select coats with multiple views including front and back views, as well as several close-ups of layout and surface structure, it was impossible to make the views completely uniform among the coats, both in size and type. The bias for selecting the images for each coat was on providing a front and back view and as many close-ups photographed as would fit into the slide comfortably and showed the major details close up, such as collars, closures, and cuffs.

#### *Use of historic garments for examples of classic design*

Carefully selected historic garments were used as examples of classic design and then piloted for validity. Then interview participants were asked to apply their idea of classic to their wardrobe by selecting a piece or two to bring to the interview that they

considered to be classic. In this way verification of classic was defined in terms of both artifacts and personal examples. However, there could be other means to identify classic design, such as starting with the abstract concept and asking for verbal applications.

Still, the application of concrete artifacts in the investigation of the abstract cultural concept of classic design was beneficial as a learning tool. Participants overall responded positively to the exercise as it focused their thoughts and subsequent responses. They also gained knowledge and language as they looked closely, become aware, and considered the relation of their ideas as well as cultural concepts of classic to the formal attributes in historic coat as well personal examples of classic design. For example, during the course of the interviews some participants' perceptions of what was and was "not" classic shifted based on the application of their ideas of classic to actual examples. A few times they even changed their minds about the classic-ness of items in their personal wardrobes. (This did not occur with the examples participants brought, which remained categorized as classic, rather they reevaluated other items in their wardrobes, previously considered "not" classic, typically mentioned as further examples in their discussions of the functions of classic design in the wardrobe.)

### ***Surveys***

Surveys were chosen as the first data collection tool as they allowed a larger number of participants, to answer more questions about a set group of classic garments, in a short amount of time, in the same classroom. However, because of the number of participants (n=55) and the size of the classroom, it was necessary to show images of the coats in a PowerPoint presentation rather than having actual examples. Views and



perceptions of the coats may have been different based on where the participant sat in the room and this may have affected their responses. Survey responses may have been also affected by the time constraints imposed: the survey needed to be completed by the end of the class period, which may have artificially shortened or limited participants responses to the open-ended questions (though most participants were finished well before class was over.)

### ***Interviews***

Interviews were used for 19 of 55 participants to verify their responses to the surveys. This was considered an important technique to probe and apply their concept of classic further, and the dual use of survey and interview was considered necessary for this study. However in future studies the methodology might be shortened as more is learned about the consistency in the nature of classic design.

### ***Participant vocabulary***

Participant language or vocabulary was a limitation of the study. Participants used a wide variety of terms to describe the formal, expressive, and symbolic attributes of classic design in their responses in the surveys and interviews. Without consistent vocabulary throughout it was necessary to decipher connotations of the participants' responses and decide which terms were communicating similar ideas.

The survey responses for the 19 interview participants were further clarified in the interview process but still presented a range of explanations and vocabulary applied to classic design. While the diversity in the survey and interview responses was itself informative about classic design it also made organization and analysis more likely to

have inaccuracies related to the researcher's biases in interpreting of the precise connotations of vocabulary and organizing the answers into categories and themes. During the interviews some participants expressed their frustration with their knowledge of the proper terminology for discussing garments' attributes. Participant answers were then also limited, based on their personal knowledge of garment, fashion and construction terminology.

### ***Research framework***

The chosen frameworks to examine the nature classic design included formal attributes, including layout and surface structure, expressive attributes, and symbolic attributes all considered part of the aesthetic experience of dress. These frameworks provided a foundation for the organization and focus of survey and interview questions and eventually the analysis of the data. They were selected because they provided a structural lens through which to view the nature of classic design from its concrete physical manifestation to its more abstract culturally embedded meanings. As well, this framework allowed for the relationship between the concrete and abstract to be examined. However, this is only one of many valid ways that might have been chosen to examine the nature and essence of classic design. The results of the study are then limited to the conceptual focus, which is the aesthetic experience, of these frameworks.

In Pilot Study #2, participants frequently employed the opposite terms presented in the semantic differentials in their descriptions of classic and not classic. Therefore, the semantic differentials used in Pilot Study #2 were used again for the final study, but this time not as a data collection tool but simply to introduce participants to descriptive

terminology that might aid their answers to the survey questions. The results were similar. Participants again commonly used terminology from the differentials in their survey answers. However, this choice also introduced a limitation to the study by possibly artificially narrowing the terms participants might otherwise have applied to classic. Still, this limitation must be balanced against the fact that some participants expressed frustration at the limits of their own applicable vocabulary.

### **Further Research**

The following avenues for further research into the nature of classic design are suggested based on the inherent limitations of this study and the questions raised by the results and findings.

#### **Cultural knowledge as a consideration**

Participants frequently discussed familiarity of the formal attributes of classic design and this indicates a reference to some type of cultural or social knowledge about classic in their assessments and explanations. Sometimes participants even had specific reference points in mind; cultural and fashion icons such as Audrey Hepburn or Jackie Onassis while others pointed to historical periods, or even what their mothers or grandmothers wear now or in the past. Other participants discussed finding classic garments with the help of their mother's advice about their future appearance needs. Generally, though where information about classic was obtained or ideas originated, regarding what classic looks like, expresses or symbolizes and how it functions is rather vague. That its meanings and forms are disseminated from cultural reference points to the wearer via the methods proposed by McCracken (1988) is likely. However, where, when

and how these notions of classic appeared and evolved in the fashion-focused media is equally vague.

Future research into classic design would benefit from a historical or content analysis of sources of fashion information and advice over the past 50 to 75 years related to participants perceptions of the symbolic nature of classic design. Such a study could potentially unearth origins of the symbolic attributes of classic originate and how the concept has it evolved to be a recognized cultural standard of sophistication, appropriateness and prestige, to name a few more popularly associated attributes.

#### **Cultural attachment as a consideration**

Participants' responses signified a deep level of embedded and potentially cultural understanding of classic design and its formal, expressive and symbolic attributes. As part of this cultural knowledge they indicated that classic design often symbolized 'good taste' and status, both of which seem to have underlying 'class' (as in social class), connotations, potentially associated with being a member of a predominate cultural or socio-economic class within a larger society. If classic has such associations it could potentially mean that groups who do not always or primarily identify with what they perceive as the predominate socio-economic class(es) don't necessarily like classic or at the very least do not perceive similar expressive and symbolic benefits resulting from classic design's formal attributes. Then it follows that differing cultural groups, within the larger society, may have differing responses to both the abstract concept of classic design and to concrete examples, i.e. the six historic coats. Different ethnic or cultural

groups may also potentially have their own version of classic or corresponding symbolic and expressive fashion concept with its own unique and accompanying formal attributes.

Future research into classic design would benefit from investigating such potential differences among cultural and ethnic demographics. As effects and influences of globalization grow in the fashion and design industries, solutions including those related to emotionally centered design, sustainability, and therefore classic design cannot be perceived or applied in a one-size-fits-all manner.

Participant	Personal style (in their own words)
1	I am still kind of trying to find it to be honest. I really like form-fitting kind of pieces. I like classic design mixed with modern so maybe elements like bright colors or different textures and embellishments but still keeping simple silhouettes. That is kind of my design aesthetic in general, keeping something streamlined but then within it having lots of interesting details. That's what I really like.
2	Eclectic; there is kind of boho-chic-ness but then I also...there is also like a certain edge to that but then there is totally this kind of urban like urban-ness...[or]... specifically sneakers and beanie hats and...I don't really wear a lot of things that have text...there is a lot of urban revival type...kind of like making a statement or having an opinion. I would say that I do like to...not necessarily have an opinion in my clothing but make a statement in some way. ...It is just ...where my mind is at when I am getting dressed...who I want to be for the day. Recently I have been seeing my clothes as more costume than...and it is just a way to costume my feelings of the morning but also like my mood or who I want to be...
3	I would say my personal style is casual but also with a little bit of a flare. I'll wear a tee shirt and a cardigan but I'll also wear a scarf for, some accessories. I don't like to go over the top looking I'm trying too hard, but I also don't want to look too casual or too lax. I don't have a lot of different elements in my wardrobe. I have a lot of basics that I pair together and make them a little different. I do a lot of combination of basics and adding accessories and different elements into those.
4	I don't think I have a personal style, it just varies, depends on my mood but I guess my go-to is black leggings and a dressier shirt, obviously longer and a little bit flowy, not squared, it still gives you a little bit of a figure. I like wearing accessories a lot.
5	I am very much into a lot of color...I really like Betsey Johnson. I don't have a ton of classic items in my closet. My classic items would be my more simpler [sic] looks. I have a pair of Miu Miu shoes that I love. I like embellishments. I like bling. I like color. I like print. I just love it to be bold and strange and out there.  I'm really into Meadham Kirchhoff and Betsey Johnson, Jeremy Scott. I love his tennis shoes, because they're wild. I just love wild and out there looks. I'm not as classic, as I consider these looks to be, but I would wear them. I have such a wide range, a variety that I like.
6	Personally when I'm shopping, as a college student, I don't have a ton of money so when I do shopping, I look for things that I can still wear in the spring or it's not something too flashy or too stylish but it has function, it's comfortable. I could dress up or down.  For example if I buy a simple light sweater. I could wear that with a collared shirt underneath or I could pair with a scarf over it or I could tuck it in with a skirt so I just have different options. I usually go for more simple and not too flashy and like neutrals

7	I would say my personal style is kind of preppy, edgy. I wear a lot of girly pieces but throw in some type of edge in there. So for instance I am wearing pink with gold but I am wearing leather boots or I like to wear all black with a brown fur vest or something like that. I have girly elements but I like to get a little edgy, too.
8	I don't really know. I guess for a while I really like simple. I didn't like too much. I hate jeweled, beadwork. I work at David's Bridal and I hate all the dresses that have so much bling on them. I think it makes them look cheap. Obviously I would never tell that to the bride that's wearing that gown. I would tailor it so it's beautiful. I find that I like the designer Valentino because they mix really simple ideas with really ornate things. I went to the Italian Style Exhibit and there was some gowns that had really rich lace and details on it but the silhouette was really simple or they mixed really big design features, with a simple something or other.
9	I definitely follow the trends. I kind of...now I actually have to think about what I have been wearing. I like to wear a lot of bold colors. In the winter I find it harder to do that just because of the layering that you have to do but I like to stand out in some way. Whether that means wearing a bright color or a statement piece, a large piece of jewelry. Those aspects. I like to wear...although I am a college student and I don't have a large budget...I find myself shopping at more pricier [sic] places because I value quality of garments. I wash them a lot so they need to be able to withstand that. So I don't really find myself shopping at Forever 21 although they do have a lot of current trends. I like to kind of put my own things together
10	I would say if you opened up my closet it's mostly black or a lot of blue and I think that's just based on what I like and what I think I look good in and what people have told me I look good in. I really into a lot of leather and furs and I don't know if that's just based on what I've seen a lot lately or what's in style in fashion but definitely something that is...people know me for. I tend to be a bit unique but not super out there. I still stay with what...mainly what department stores are selling...like mass market...it's nothing like too extremely unique. That's kind of my style.
11	<p>My personal style has changed a bit throughout the past 4 years in college because I went to a boarding school. I went to a private boarding school in Sumner, Minnesota for high school. It really didn't give me any freedom to think about clothing because everyone wore a dress code. It's just a polo and skirts or pants every day. But I guess...from there my first year of college I was very into vintage and retro. Vintage and retro. I guess I was sort of into the classic back then. I really like the fit of the '50s and the '60s. But that was just freshman year and then it started changing to still classic but more like, more adolescent and whimsical.</p> <p>And then came a life-changing trip and then I think I started just going hippy and getting more, and becoming more and more hippy now... kind of bohemian, ethnic prints and drapey silhouettes, sometime I can be like, like Alaskan inspired if its winter. I didn't, I haven't thrown away lots of the stuff that I got from freshman and before because I can still work around them. Its not like I have abandoned my old style entirely. It's just my</p>

	lifestyle and dress style is going more hippy now.
12	I'd say I like kind of classic silhouettes but with some interesting details. For instance I am wearing a classic sweatshirt but it has little sequins on it, which make it more unique to me. So I just like little unique details because I do focus on the parts a lot. Yeah, I like edgy details or glamorous details, rich colors or sparkles or studs or...
13	It's almost like a weird hybrid between preppy and boho. I work at Anthropologie but one of my favorite sources is also J. Crew. It's I like to wear both types of clothes I consider more eclectic. J. Crew is generally more preppy and bright, polka dots and stripes and Anthropologie is more boho, eclectic, unique pieces that you're not going to find just at any store. I like to combine the two and form my own style out of that.
14	I guess I try and maintain a baseline of classic or recognizable. Maybe silhouettes or just a baseline of classic and recognizable but then I try and incorporate trends or new pieces or things that I find really novel to add, maybe personal touches or novelty. I also appreciate appearing feminine but playing the balance between femininity and more masculinity, masculine silhouettes and shapes and I wear almost completely neutrals just because I think it's easier to pair things that way.
15	My personal style's pretty random. My wardrobe, I'd say, is a pretty good mixture of classics. I have a lot of neutrals, a lot of Katherine Hepburn-type things.... Then, to go along with that, I also have a lot of fun prints, t-shirts with cats on them, just funny things like that. I like to mix and match classics with fun stuff. I like color, I like things that are silly and fun... I have a lot of polka dots: polka dot leggings, polka dot blouses, dresses.
16	Comfort is huge for me and that has to do with just how fabrics feel, textures. I like neutral colors. There are a few colors that I like to wear on me and I think are better like rust orange. I'm trying to think of colors I actually like on me. I usually stick to neutral monochrome like grays, whites, blacks, brown, beige. Then I usually wear pretty basics. I don't like to wear fitted feminine shapes, like nothing really fitted in the waist.
17	I like to be original. I have a lot of different staples that I like to wear that are original. I try...I work at boutiques and different things like that so anything that makes me more distinct I like to wear. So, I really love...right now I really love massive statement necklaces, dresses. I am obsessed with leggings right now just because they are super, super comfortable and I am all about comfort-ability [sic] also but also looking cute. I am just trying to think of other outfits. I like big scarves, cozy scarves now, in the wintertime. I like to keep updated but also be original to a point and also keep classics going that I own...I like keeping things as much as possible and so I love quality instead of quantity. So I'm not a huge fan of Forever 21 and things like that. I like other places that are a little higher up there, like Anthropologie, JCrew, things like that where I can keep them for a really long time and have them still be updated.



18	Its quiet but its...I try to make sure its modern but comfort is a really big part of it. I don't want to wear something that's like...even if it's cute and kind of my style if its not comfortable then it doesn't seem like something I'd want to wear
19	I am a little bit of a mix because I can switch things up a lot. I do...I've been lately trying to switch out more colors in my wardrobe but mainly I wear black, navy, grey and an occasional purple. Purple's kind of like my other, not neutral color that I wear and I like wear that a lot. I tend to wear a lot of skinny jeans with oversize sweaters...I do or [have] a lot of oversize cardigans. But at the same time, there are certain days, too, where I will look full on preppy and wear colored pants, the tucked in shirt and...pearls and...Sperry's and...the whole look but I tend to do mainly boots and the skinny jeans and the oversized cardigans.

Table 1: Participants' personal styles

Participant	Garment	Color	Time owned	Where	Classic
1	Dress	Green	2-3 years	H &M	No
2	Blazer	Black	3-4 years	BCBG	Yes
2	Boots (Chelsea)	Black	1 month	Buffalo Exchange -resale	Yes
3	Peacoat	Black	5 years	Target	Yes
3	Pencil Skirt	Black/Blue plaid	1 month	Target	Yes
4	Leather Jacket (biker style)	Black	2 years	Zara	Yes
4	Dress	Black		Macy's-Rebecca Taylor	
5	Dress	Green	3 years	Betsey Johnson	No
6	Dress	Black	5 years	Amova Boutique- Sioux Falls, SD	No
7	Blazer	Black	5-6 years	Forever 21	Yes
8	Dress	Black	2 years	Modcloth.com	Yes
9	Dress	Blue (Navy)	5 years	Handed down from sister-BCBG	No
10	Blouse	White	Didn't say	Gap	Yes
10	Dress	Black	3 years	Online	No
11	Coat	Tan	3-4 years	Burberry- Hong Kong	Yes
11	Scarf	Plaid	4-5 years	Burberry	Yes

12	Blouse	Cream	1 year	Kohl's	Yes
12	T-shirt	Black	2 years	Herberger's	Yes
13	Sweater (cashmere)	Cream	3-4 years (15 yrs. old)	Handed down from mother	Yes
13	Scarf (cashmere)	Camel	5 years	Unknown	Yes
14	Shirt	White	3-4 months	Hollister	Yes
14	Jeans	Blue	3 years	Anthropologie	Yes
15	Blazer	Black/White Herringbone	2 years	ReWind- Vintage store	Yes
15	Dress	Black	4 years	Store selling secondhand or damaged goods	Yes
16	Coat	Black	2 years (but 8 years old)	Hand me down from sister-H&M	No
16	Jacket	Blue (denim)	2 years	Levi's	Yes
17	Dress	Black	3 months	Bag Lady boutique	
18	T-shirt	Black/White striped	1 week	Target	Yes
18	Sweater	Camel or tan	4 months	Unknown	Yes
19	Dress	Black	3 years	Mango	Yes
19	Shirt	Blue (denim)	1 day	J.Crew	Yes

Table 2: Participants' personal garments

*Fashion as Cycle*

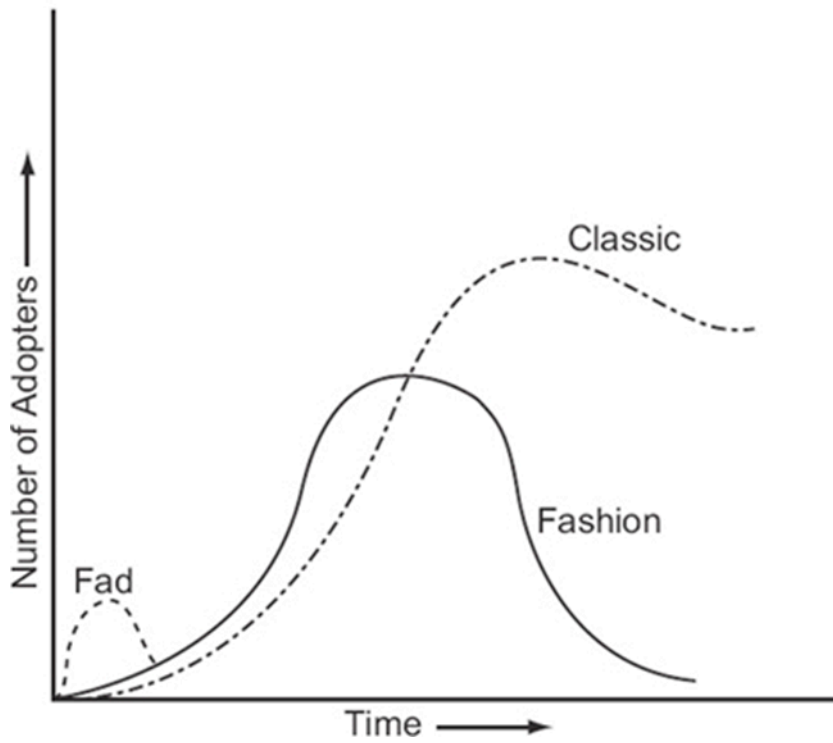


Figure 1: Nystrom's (1928) fashion curves

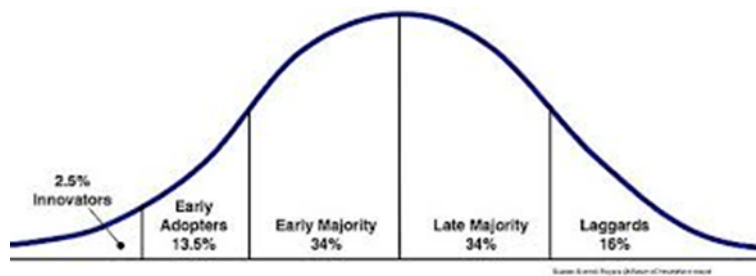


Figure 2: Rogers' (1995) diffusion of innovations' curve

**FIGURE**  
MOVEMENT OF MEANING

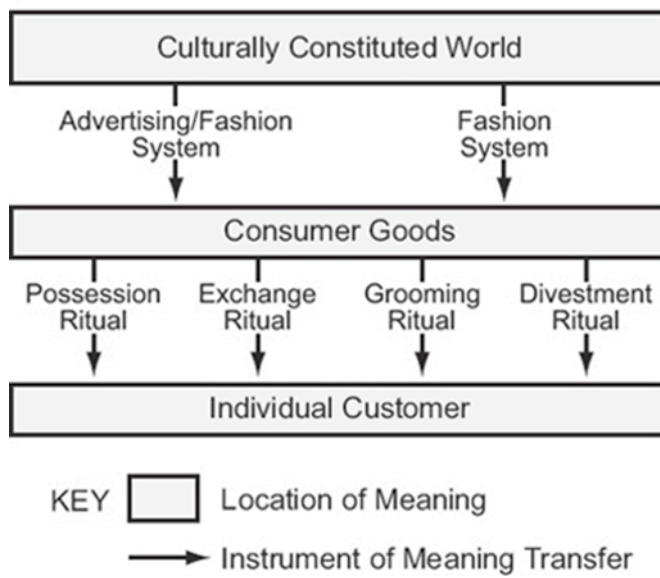


Figure 3: Meaning transfer framework (McCracken, 1988)

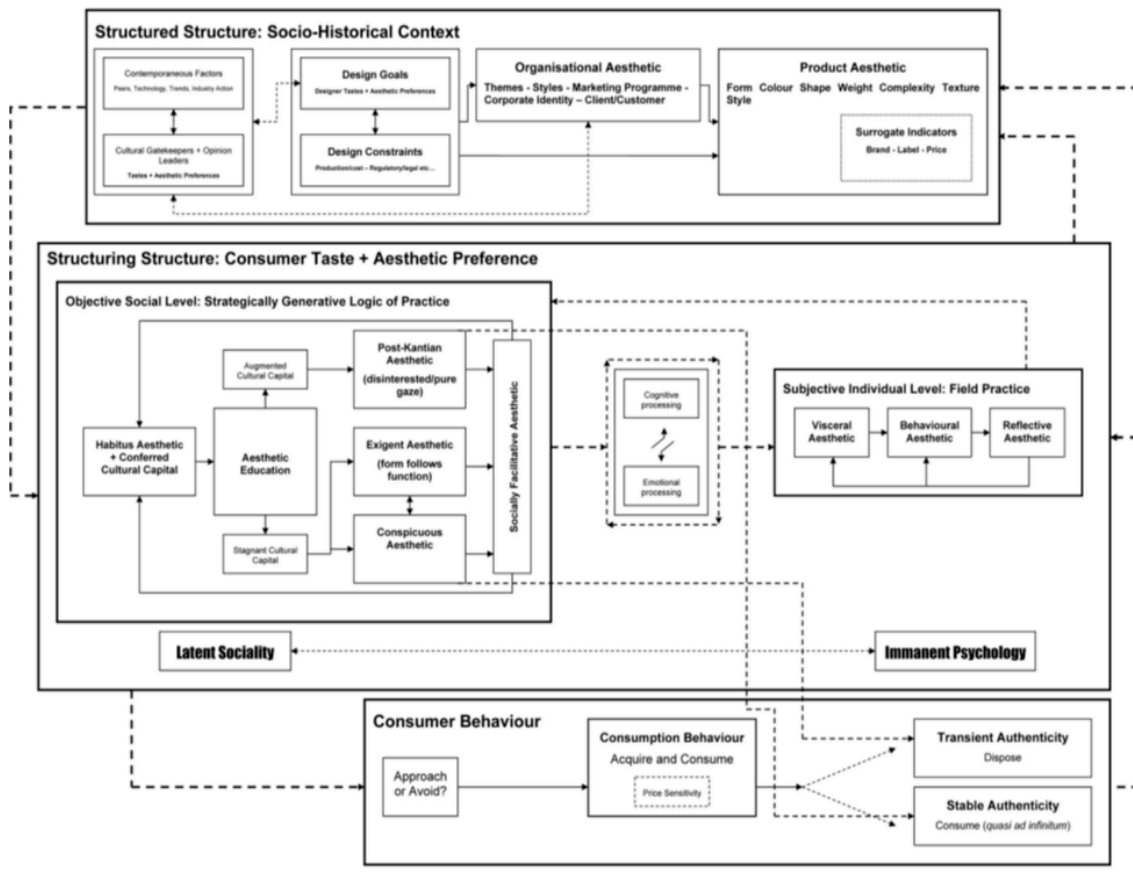


Figure 4: Model of process of the aesthetic evaluation of consumer products (Ward, 2011)

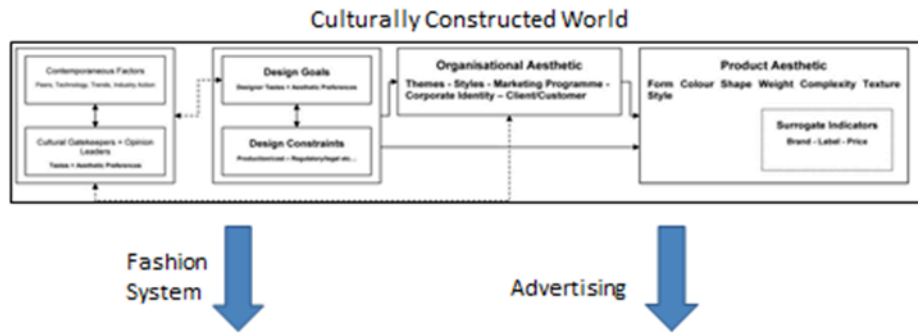


Figure 5: Integration of Ward's (2011) with the first part of McCracken's (1988) model

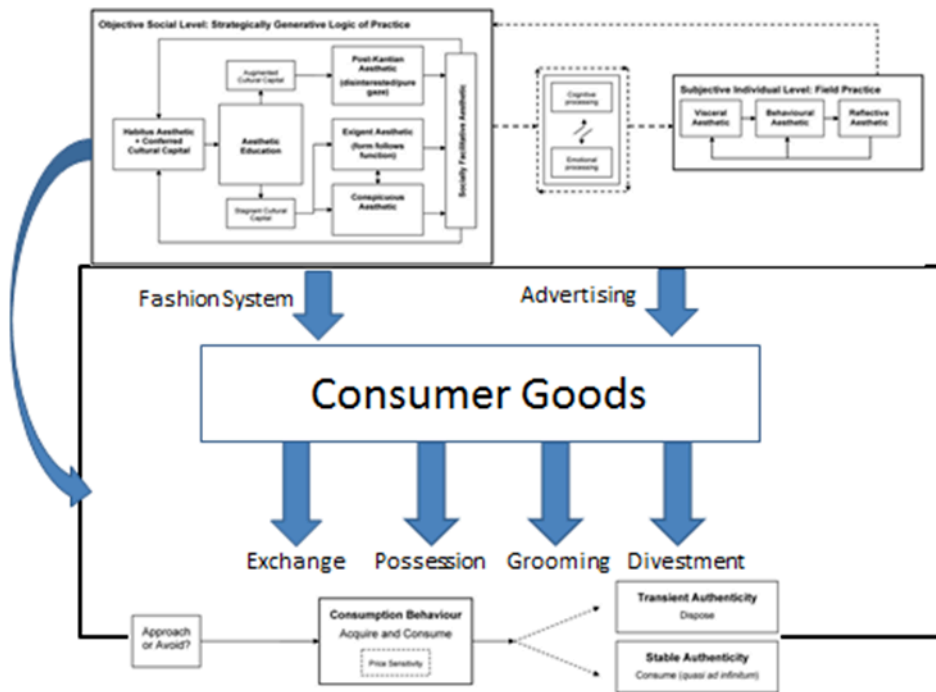


Figure 6: Integration of steps 2 and 3, Ward's (2011) and McCracken's (1988) models



Figures 7a-c: Examples of Participant #2's use of scarves and belts to accessorize



Figure 8: One of Participant #1's denim jackets



Figure 9: Participant #1's Chanel jacket





Wool winter coats dating from 1928 to 1969

Figure 10: 10 coats assessed in Material Culture course (Courtesy of GMD)



Figure 11: Final 6 coats used for Pilot Study #2 (Courtesy of GMD)

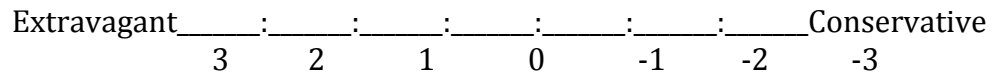


Figure 12: Example of a semantic differential

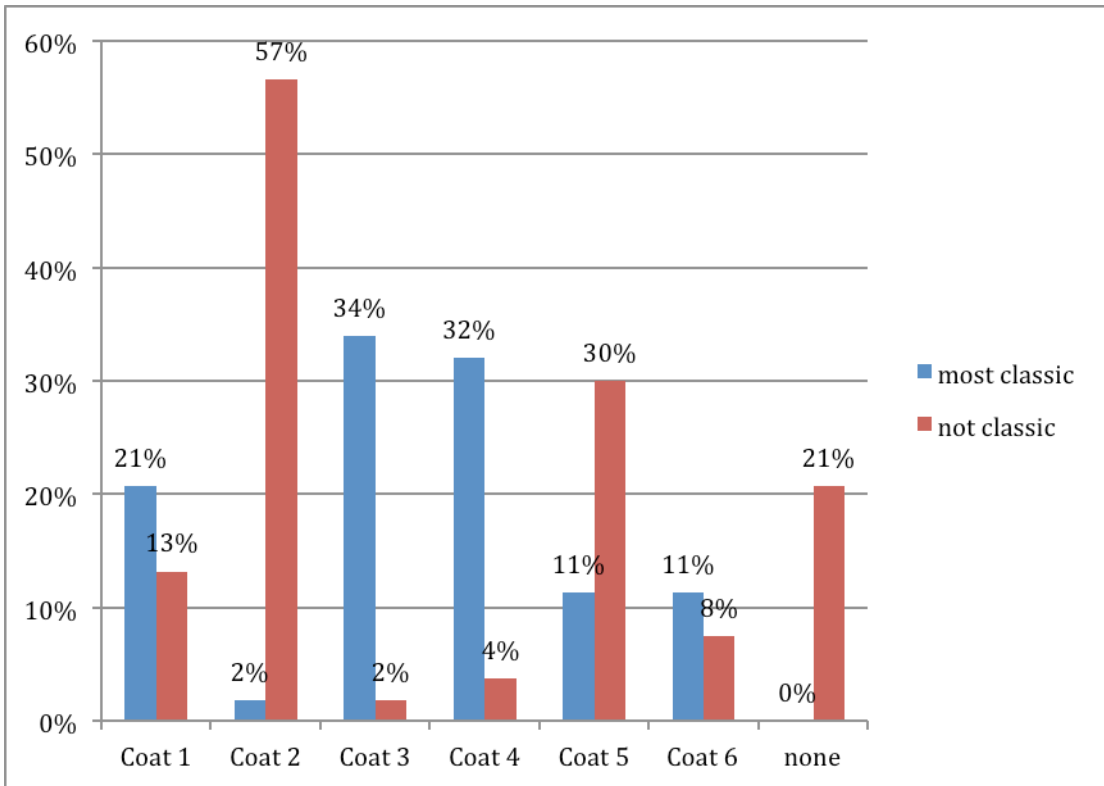


Figure 13: Percentage of participants

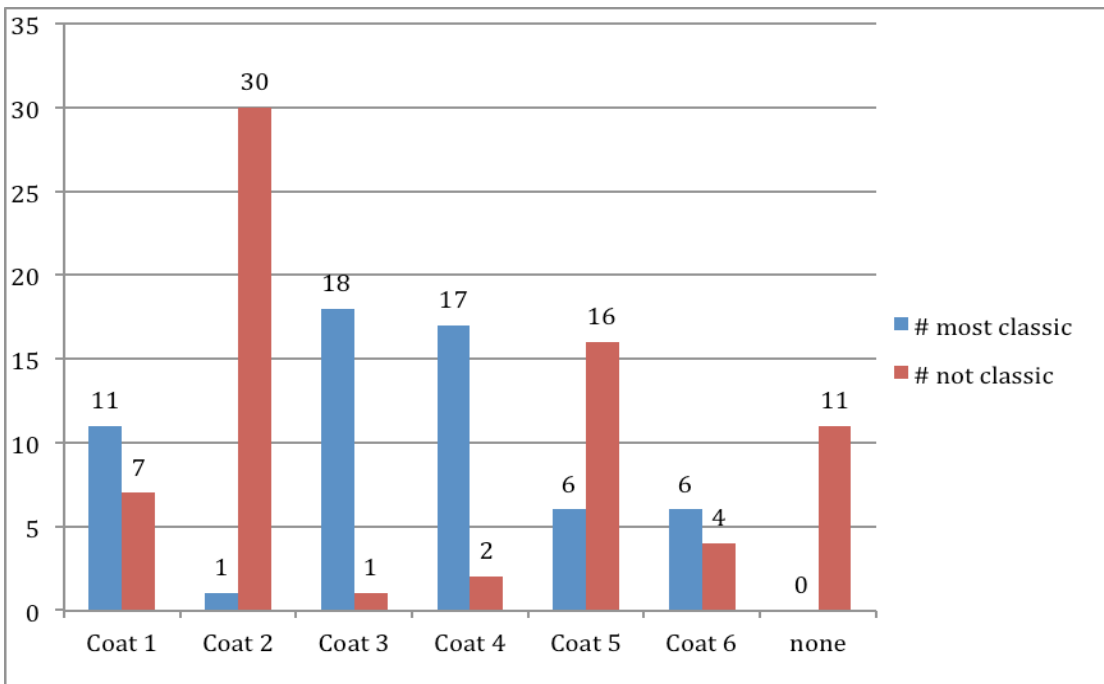


Figure 14: Number of participants

Coat #1	Term	Mean	StDeviation
<i>extravagant-conservative</i>	extravagant	0.79	2.09
<i>Embellished-Plain</i>	embellished	1.51	1.70
<i>unique-ordinary</i>	unique	1.00	1.95
<i>Awkward-Elegant</i>	elegant	-1.19	1.26
<i>High Quality-low quality</i>	high quality	1.19	1.29
<i>timeless-trendy</i>	neutral	0.28	1.56
<i>Beautiful-ugly</i>	beautiful	0.81	1.33
<i>Modern-traditional</i>	traditional	-0.62	1.39
<i>like-dislike</i>	like	0.79	1.71
<i>wearable-not wearable</i>	wearable	2.00	0.89
<i>distinctive-common</i>	distinctive	0.58	1.66
<i>complex-simple</i>	simple	-0.70	1.13
<i>authentic-inauthentic</i>	authentic	0.57	1.22
<i>Unfashionable-fashionable</i>	fashionable	-1.21	1.29

Figure 15: Coat #1 scores

Coat #2	Term	Mean	StDeviation
<i>extravagant-conservative</i>	neutral	-0.19	1.53
<i>Embellished-Plain</i>	plain	-1.25	1.18
<i>unique-ordinary</i>	unique	1.57	1.09
<i>Awkward-Elegant</i>	neutral	0.23	1.71
<i>High Quality-low quality</i>	high quality	1.06	1.34
<i>timeless-trendy</i>	trendy	-0.64	1.58
<i>Beautiful-ugly</i>	neutral	-0.08	1.71
<i>Modern-traditional</i>	modern	0.89	1.62
<i>like-dislike</i>	neutral	-0.21	1.97
<i>wearable-not wearable</i>	wearable	0.74	1.59
<i>distinctive-common</i>	distinctive	1.62	1.35
<i>complex-simple</i>	simple	-0.94	1.42
<i>authentic-inauthentic</i>	authentic	0.81	1.39
<i>Unfashionable-fashionable</i>	fashionable	-0.74	1.47

Figure 16: Coat #2 scores

Coat #3	Term	Mean	StDeviation
<i>extravagant-conservative</i>	conservative	-0.75	1.47
<i>Embellished-Plain</i>	plain	-1.04	1.23
<i>unique-ordinary</i>	neutral	0.34	1.50
<i>Awkward-Elegant</i>	elegant	-1.15	1.14
<i>High Quality-low quality</i>	high quality	1.38	1.25
<i>timeless-trendy</i>	timeless	1.08	1.50
<i>Beautiful-ugly</i>	beautiful	1.15	1.22
<i>Modern-traditional</i>	traditional	-0.55	1.51
<i>like-dislike</i>	like	1.23	1.45
<i>wearable-not wearable</i>	wearable	1.92	0.95
<i>distinctive-common</i>	neutral	0.23	1.53
<i>complex-simple</i>	simple	-0.83	1.45
<i>authentic-inauthentic</i>	authentic	1.09	1.14
<i>Unfashionable-fashionable</i>	fashionable	-1.30	1.17

Figure 17: Coat #3 scores

Coat #4	Term	Mean	StDeviation
<i>extravagant-conservative</i>	extravagant	1.30	1.16
<i>Embellished-Plain</i>	embellished	1.23	1.08
<i>unique-ordinary</i>	unique	1.00	1.18
<i>Awkward-Elegant</i>	elegant	-1.51	1.33
<i>High Quality-low quality</i>	high quality	2.00	1.15
<i>timeless-trendy</i>	timeless	0.81	1.64
<i>Beautiful-ugly</i>	beautiful	1.57	1.21
<i>Modern-traditional</i>	traditional	-0.66	1.50
<i>like-dislike</i>	like	1.36	1.47
<i>wearable-not wearable</i>	wearable	1.70	1.13
<i>distinctive-common</i>	distinctive	1.19	1.30
<i>complex-simple</i>	neutral	-0.30	1.21
<i>authentic-inauthentic</i>	authentic	1.25	1.18
<i>Unfashionable-fashionable</i>	fashionable	-1.68	1.06

Figure 18: Coat #4 scores

Coat #5	Term	Mean	StDeviation
<i>extravagant-conservative</i>	conservative	-2.02	0.98
<i>Embellished-Plain</i>	plain	-1.87	0.93
<i>unique-ordinary</i>	ordinary	-1.30	1.34
<i>Awkward-Elegant</i>	neutral	0.04	1.50
<i>High Quality-low quality</i>	neutral	-0.04	1.32
<i>timeless-trendy</i>	timeless	0.89	1.21
<i>Beautiful-ugly</i>	ugly	-0.43	1.43
<i>Modern-traditional</i>	traditional	-1.81	1.12
<i>like-dislike</i>	dislike	-0.60	1.73
<i>wearable-not wearable</i>	wearable	1.00	1.44
<i>distinctive-common</i>	common	-0.53	1.62
<i>complex-simple</i>	simple	-1.68	1.06
<i>authentic-inauthentic</i>	neutral	0.26	1.33
<i>Unfashionable-fashionable</i>	neutral	0.40	1.61

Figure 19: Coat #5 scores

Coat #6	Term	Mean	StDeviation
<i>extravagant-conservative</i>	conservative	-1.91	1.19
<i>Embellished-Plain</i>	plain	-1.57	1.38
<i>unique-ordinary</i>	ordinary	-1.23	1.50
<i>Awkward-Elegant</i>	neutral	0.06	1.35
<i>High Quality-low quality</i>	high quality	0.75	1.27
<i>timeless-trendy</i>	timeless	1.13	1.29
<i>Beautiful-ugly</i>	ugly	-0.26	1.35
<i>Modern-traditional</i>	traditional	-2.02	0.92
<i>like-dislike</i>	dislike	-0.64	1.52
<i>wearable-not wearable</i>	wearable	0.94	1.57
<i>distinctive-common</i>	common	-1.04	1.52
<i>complex-simple</i>	simple	-1.43	1.37
<i>authentic-inauthentic</i>	authentic	0.58	1.46
<i>Unfashionable-fashionable</i>	neutral	0.26	1.46

Figure 20: Coat #6 score

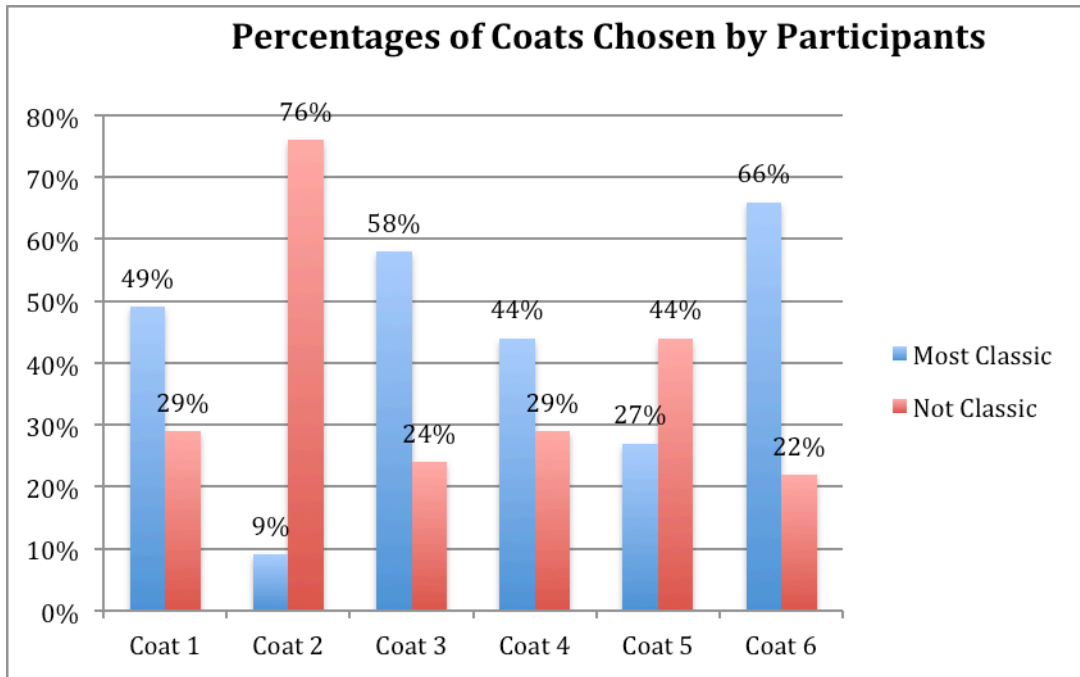


Figure 21: Percentage of final survey participants -“most” and “not” classic coats (n=55)

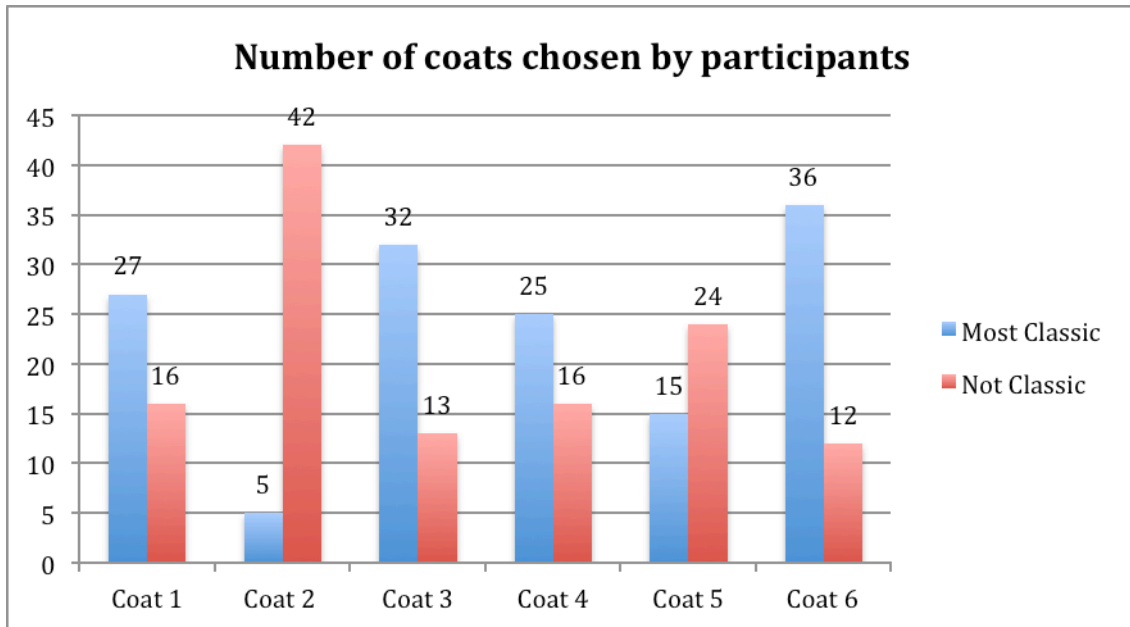


Figure 22: Number of final survey participants-“most” and “not” classic coats (n=55)

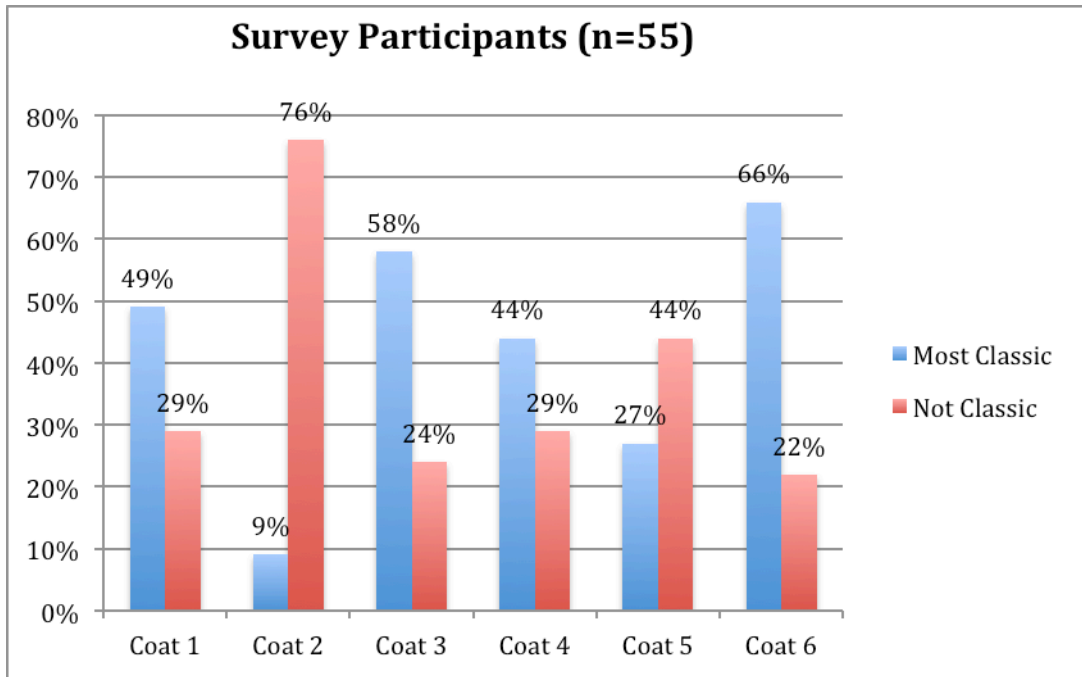


Figure 23: Percentages of “most” and “not” classic coats in survey

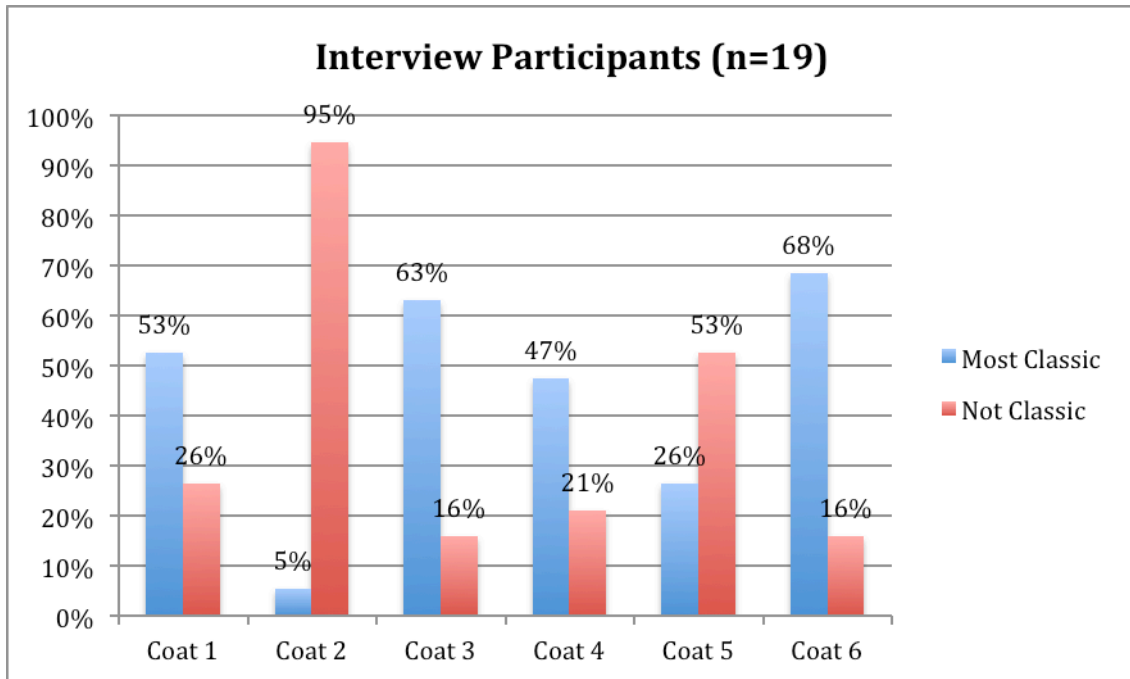


Figure 24: Percentages of “most” and “not” classic coats in interviews



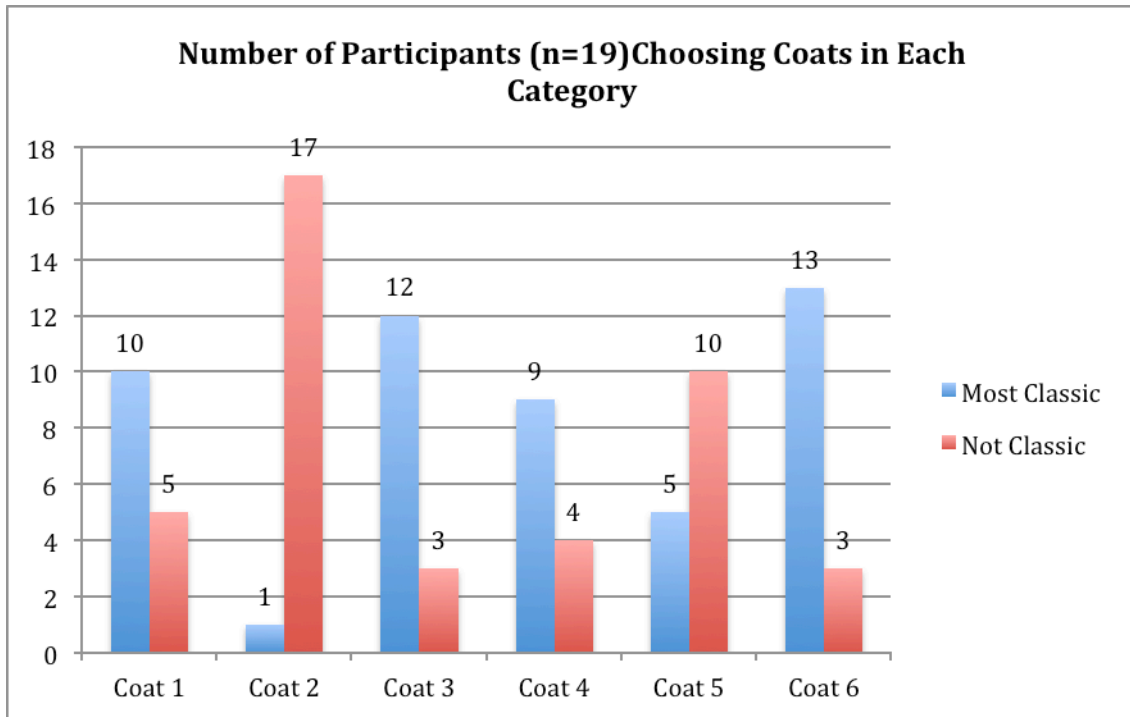


Figure 25: Interview Participants choosing coats as “most” and “not” classic

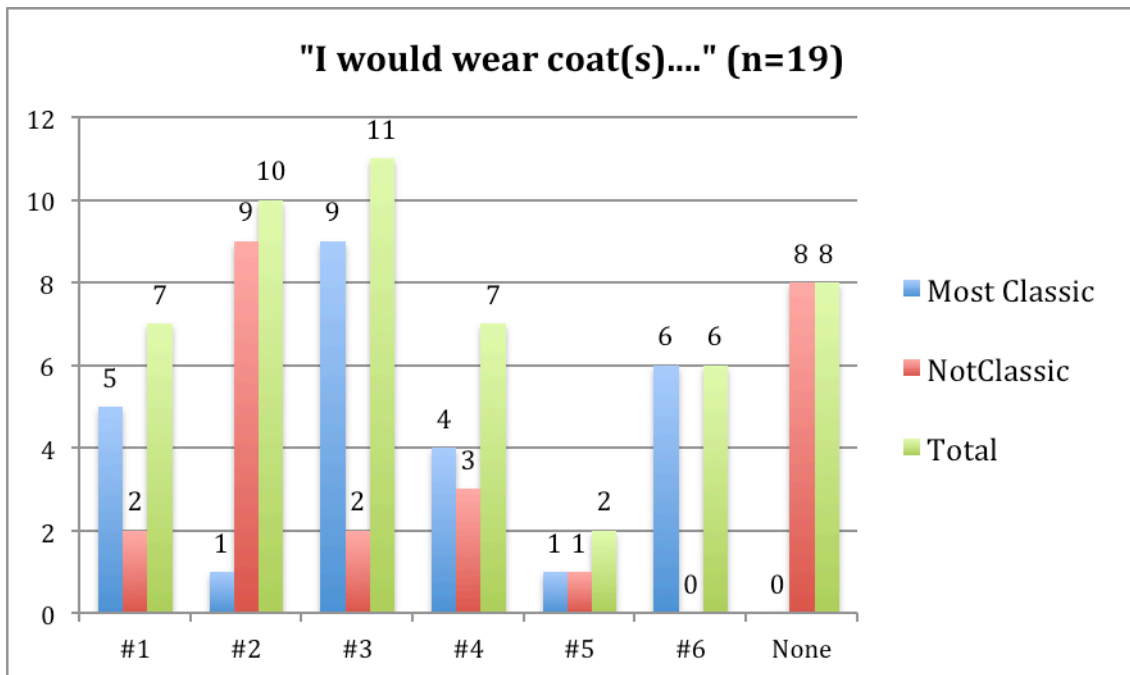


Figure 26: Number of coats participants “would wear”

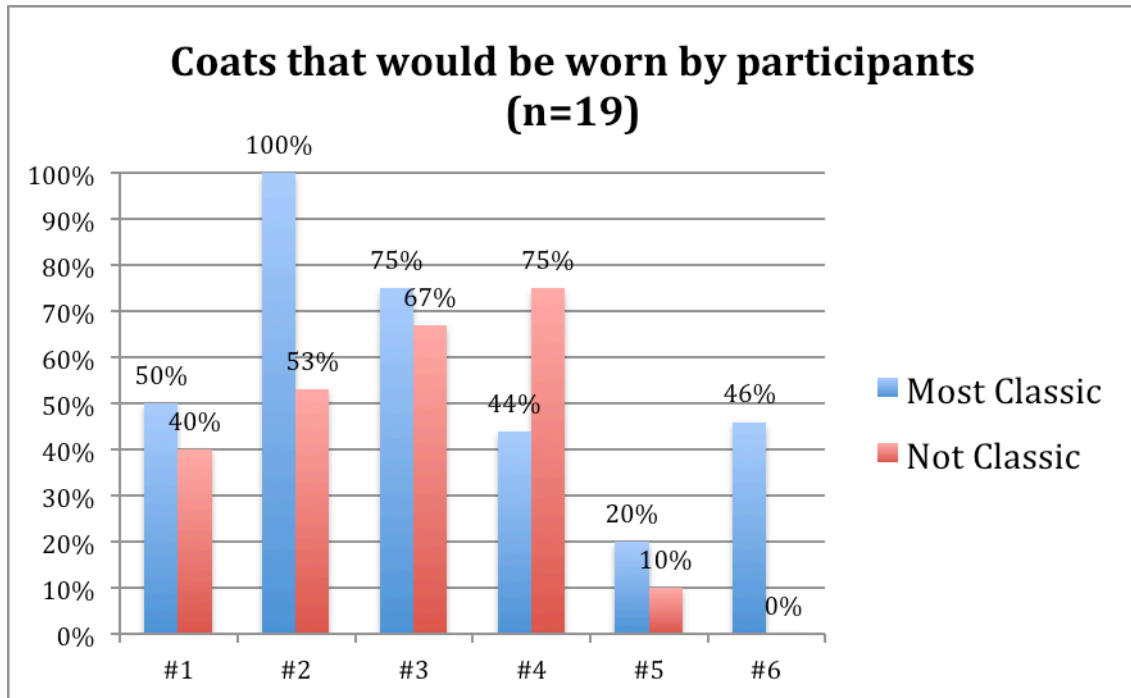


Figure 27: Percentages of coats participants “would wear”

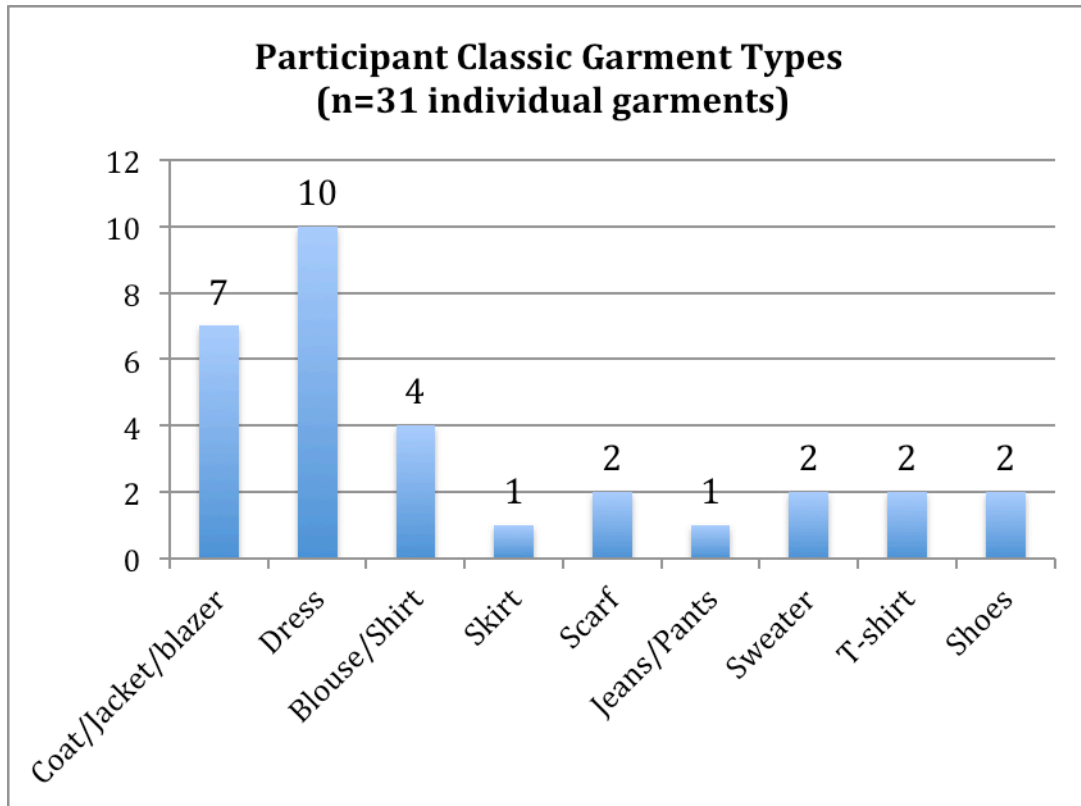


Figure 28: Examples of classic brought by participants

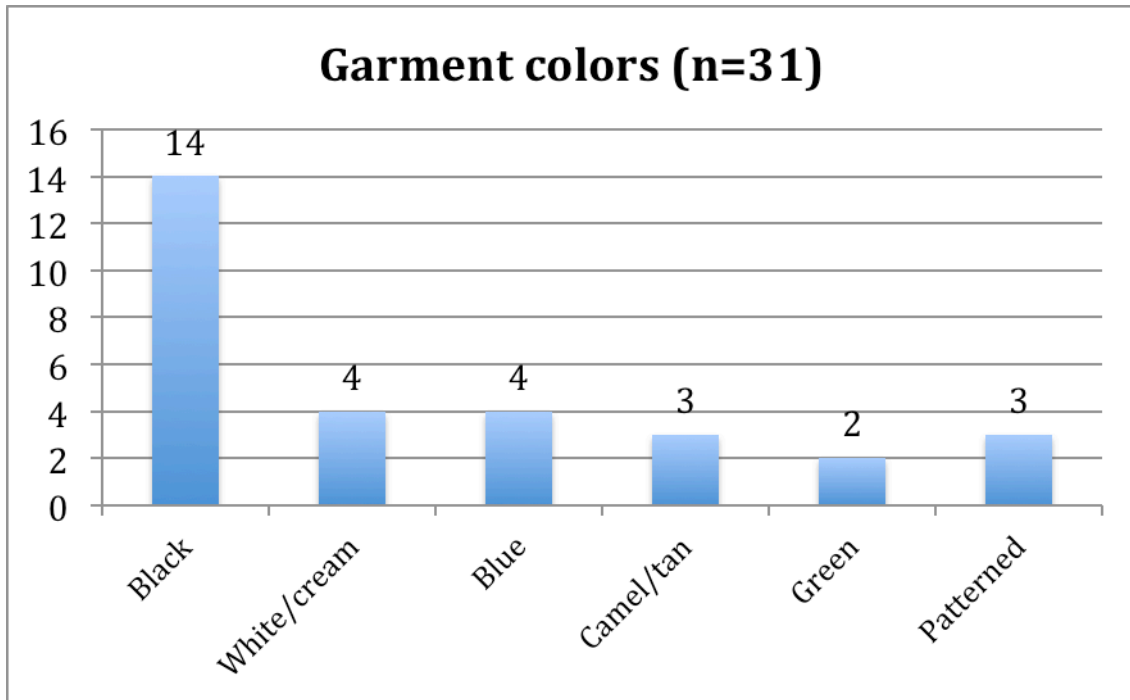


Figure 29: Colors of participant's examples of classic design



Figure 30: Participants who like to wear classic clothing

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## Appendix A

### Interview-Pilot Study #1

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Interview begins \_\_\_\_\_  
Interview ends \_\_\_\_\_

This study seeks to understand how the idea of classic design is defined and perceived as it applies to clothing and women's wardrobe decisions. The term classic is often used to categorize clothing. This common usage does not explain why or how something becomes a classic or if similar aesthetic experiences exist for items termed classic. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and includes sharing your opinions, experiences and examples of your wardrobe and mode of dress. All of the information you provide during the interview process will be kept entirely confidential and secure. This confidentiality includes the final papers and presentations that result from the study.

Please describe your personal style.

How would you dress for a public event versus a casual event?

How has your style changed throughout your life?

How do you define classic clothing? Can you give some examples?

You brought or wore an item(s) of clothing from your wardrobe you consider classic. Please tell me about them.

Why did you choose it?

How does it fit into your overall wardrobe?

When and how do you wear it?

When and why did you buy it?

When you are wearing it how do you perceive your appearance?

When do you like to wear classic clothing in your wardrobe?

How does this fit with your previous definition?

Is there anything else? Are there questions you think I should be asking that I have not?

Appendix B  
Survey-Pilot Study #2

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Year \_\_\_\_\_

I will be showing you 6 images of coats and I would like your feedback on each one. Place a checkmark on the scale where you think each coat falls between the two terms.

The middle space is neutral, so if you think neither term describes the coat, place your check mark in the middle space.

Each scale should be approached as a discrete assessment of each coat.

**Coat #1**

Extravagant \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Conservative

Embellished \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Plain

Unique \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Ordinary

Awkward \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Elegant

High quality \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Low quality

Timeless \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Trendy

Beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Ugly

Modern \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Traditional

Like \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Dislike

Wearable \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Not wearable

Distinctive \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Common

Complex \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Simple

Authentic \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Inauthentic

Unfashionable \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Fashionable

**Coat #2**

Extravagant \_\_\_\_\_ Conservative

Embellished \_\_\_\_\_ Plain

Unique \_\_\_\_\_ Ordinary

Awkward \_\_\_\_\_ Elegant

High quality \_\_\_\_\_ Low quality

Timeless \_\_\_\_\_ Trendy

Beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ Ugly

Modern \_\_\_\_\_ Traditional

Like \_\_\_\_\_ Dislike

Wearable \_\_\_\_\_ Not wearable

Distinctive \_\_\_\_\_ Common

Complex \_\_\_\_\_ Simple

Authentic \_\_\_\_\_ Inauthentic

Unfashionable \_\_\_\_\_ Fashionable

**Coat #3**

Extravagant \_\_\_\_\_ Conservative

Embellished \_\_\_\_\_ Plain

Unique \_\_\_\_\_ Ordinary

Awkward \_\_\_\_\_ Elegant

High quality \_\_\_\_\_ Low quality

Timeless \_\_\_\_\_ Trendy

Beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ Ugly

Modern \_\_\_\_\_ Traditional

Like \_\_\_\_\_ Dislike

Wearable \_\_\_\_\_ Not wearable

Distinctive \_\_\_\_\_ Common

Complex \_\_\_\_\_ Simple

Authentic \_\_\_\_\_ Inauthentic

Unfashionable \_\_\_\_\_ Fashionable

**Coat #4**

Extravagant \_\_\_\_\_ Conservative

Embellished \_\_\_\_\_ Plain

Unique \_\_\_\_\_ Ordinary

Awkward \_\_\_\_\_ Elegant

High quality \_\_\_\_\_ Low quality

Timeless \_\_\_\_\_ Trendy

Beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ Ugly

Modern \_\_\_\_\_ Traditional

Like \_\_\_\_\_ Dislike

Wearable \_\_\_\_\_ Not wearable

Distinctive \_\_\_\_\_ Common

Complex \_\_\_\_\_ Simple

Authentic \_\_\_\_\_ Inauthentic

Unfashionable \_\_\_\_\_ Fashionable

**Coat #5**

Extravagant \_\_\_\_\_ Conservative

Embellished \_\_\_\_\_ Plain

Unique \_\_\_\_\_ Ordinary

Awkward \_\_\_\_\_ Elegant

High quality \_\_\_\_\_ Low quality

Timeless \_\_\_\_\_ Trendy

Beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ Ugly

Modern \_\_\_\_\_ Traditional

Like \_\_\_\_\_ Dislike

Wearable \_\_\_\_\_ Not wearable

Distinctive \_\_\_\_\_ Common

Complex \_\_\_\_\_ Simple

Authentic \_\_\_\_\_ Inauthentic

Unfashionable \_\_\_\_\_ Fashionable





2.

3.

Are there any of the coats that you do **not** consider classic? If so, why?

Many of the terms in the scales have been used by others to describe classic design. Are there any terms that are missing?

Appendix C  
Survey-Final Study

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Year \_\_\_\_\_

I will be showing you 6 images of coats and I would like your feedback on each one. Place a checkmark on the scale where you think each coat falls between the two terms.

The middle space is neutral, so if you think neither term describes the coat, place your check mark in the middle space.

Each scale should be approached as a discrete assessment of each coat.

**Coat #1**

Extravagant \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Conservative

Embellished \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Plain

Unique \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Ordinary

Awkward \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Elegant

High quality \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Low quality

Timeless \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Trendy

Beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Ugly

Modern \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Traditional

Like \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Dislike

Wearable \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Not wearable

Distinctive \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Common

Complex \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Simple

Authentic \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Inauthentic

Unfashionable \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ Fashionable

**Coat #2**

Extravagant \_\_\_\_\_ Conservative

Embellished \_\_\_\_\_ Plain

Unique \_\_\_\_\_ Ordinary

Awkward \_\_\_\_\_ Elegant

High quality \_\_\_\_\_ Low quality

Timeless \_\_\_\_\_ Trendy

Beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ Ugly

Modern \_\_\_\_\_ Traditional

Like \_\_\_\_\_ Dislike

Wearable \_\_\_\_\_ Not wearable

Distinctive \_\_\_\_\_ Common

Complex \_\_\_\_\_ Simple

Authentic \_\_\_\_\_ Inauthentic

Unfashionable \_\_\_\_\_ Fashionable

**Coat #3**

Extravagant \_\_\_\_\_ Conservative

Embellished \_\_\_\_\_ Plain

Unique \_\_\_\_\_ Ordinary

Awkward \_\_\_\_\_ Elegant

High quality \_\_\_\_\_ Low quality

Timeless \_\_\_\_\_ Trendy

Beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ Ugly

Modern \_\_\_\_\_ Traditional

Like \_\_\_\_\_ Dislike

Wearable \_\_\_\_\_ Not wearable

Distinctive \_\_\_\_\_ Common

Complex \_\_\_\_\_ Simple

Authentic \_\_\_\_\_ Inauthentic

Unfashionable \_\_\_\_\_ Fashionable

**Coat #4**

Extravagant \_\_\_\_\_ Conservative

Embellished \_\_\_\_\_ Plain

Unique \_\_\_\_\_ Ordinary

Awkward \_\_\_\_\_ Elegant

High quality \_\_\_\_\_ Low quality

Timeless \_\_\_\_\_ Trendy

Beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ Ugly

Modern \_\_\_\_\_ Traditional

Like \_\_\_\_\_ Dislike

Wearable \_\_\_\_\_ Not wearable

Distinctive \_\_\_\_\_ Common

Complex \_\_\_\_\_ Simple

Authentic \_\_\_\_\_ Inauthentic

Unfashionable \_\_\_\_\_ Fashionable

**Coat #5**

Extravagant \_\_\_\_\_ Conservative

Embellished \_\_\_\_\_ Plain

Unique \_\_\_\_\_ Ordinary

Awkward \_\_\_\_\_ Elegant

High quality \_\_\_\_\_ Low quality

Timeless \_\_\_\_\_ Trendy

Beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ Ugly

Modern \_\_\_\_\_ Traditional

Like \_\_\_\_\_ Dislike

Wearable \_\_\_\_\_ Not wearable

Distinctive \_\_\_\_\_ Common

Complex \_\_\_\_\_ Simple

Authentic \_\_\_\_\_ Inauthentic

Unfashionable \_\_\_\_\_ Fashionable

**Coat #6**

Extravagant \_\_\_\_\_ Conservative

Embellished \_\_\_\_\_ Plain

Unique \_\_\_\_\_ Ordinary

Awkward \_\_\_\_\_ Elegant

High quality \_\_\_\_\_ Low quality

Timeless \_\_\_\_\_ Trendy

Beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ Ugly

Modern \_\_\_\_\_ Traditional

Like \_\_\_\_\_ Dislike

Wearable \_\_\_\_\_ Not wearable

Distinctive \_\_\_\_\_ Common

Complex \_\_\_\_\_ Simple

Authentic \_\_\_\_\_ Inauthentic

Unfashionable \_\_\_\_\_ Fashionable



Please answer the following questions related to the 6 coats as a group.

1.1) Please indicate the number(s) of the coat(s) you consider most classic. \_\_\_\_\_

1.2) Please explain why you chose the coat(s) as most classic:

2.1) Please indicate the number(s) of coats that you **do not** consider classic. \_\_\_\_\_

2.2) Please explain why you **do not** consider these coat(s) classic:

2.3) What and how would you alter specific design attributes in each of the coat(s) **not** considered classic to make them classic?

3. What defines classic for you? Please list and explain 3 attributes.

A.

B.

C.

Please indicate if you would be willing to participate in a follow up interview on the topic of classic design and its role in your wardrobe.

## Appendix D

### Interview-Final Study

Survey follow-up questions:

You chose coat(s) # \_\_\_\_\_ as “most” classic.

1. What are the primary or overriding reason(s) and/or formal attributes that you believe make it (them) classic design?
2. Please prioritize the attributes you listed. Explain the order.
3. If more than one coat was chosen participants will be asked this question: What do you see as the common formal attributes among all the coats you chose?
4. Can you see yourself wearing this coat? Why or why not?

You chose coat(s) # \_\_\_\_\_ as “not” classic for these reasons \_\_\_\_\_.

5. How would you categorize the design of this coat(s)? How does this categorization relate to specific formal attributes?
6. How would you change or redesign the coat(s) formal attributes so that you would consider it (them) classic?
7. Can you see yourself wearing this coat? Why or why not?

Interview questions (Participants will be asked to bring 1 or 2 items from their wardrobe that they consider classic and photos will be taken of the items with the permission of the participants):

1. Please describe your personal style.
2. You listed 3 attributes of classic design in the survey. How do these apply to your wardrobe? How do they apply to the item(s) you brought to the interview today?
3. Describe and explain the formal attributes in your item(s) that represent the expressive and symbolic attributes you listed.
4. Please tell me about the item(s) you brought today.
  - a. Describe your initial aesthetic evaluation of or response to the item(s).
  - b. How did you select it?
  - c. What initially attracted you to this garment?
  - d. What attributes—*aesthetic and instrumental*--determined your purchase decision?
  - e. How does it fit into your overall wardrobe?
  - f. When and how do you wear it?
  - g. When and why did you buy it?
    - i. Did you believe it was classic design when you bought it?
    - ii. Why or why not?
    - iii. If not, when did you decide it was classic design?

- h. When wearing it how do you perceive your appearance? How do you think others perceive your appearance?
- 5. Do you like to wear classic clothing?
  - a. Why or why not?
  - b. How do you incorporate it into your appearance and/or wardrobe?
  - c. When and for what occasions do you wear classic clothing?
  - d. When would you not wear classic clothing?
- 6. What purpose does classic design serve in your general appearance and/or wardrobe management choices?

## Appendix E

### Recruitment Email

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

You indicated on the survey that you completed in ADES 3217 on classic design that you would be interested in participating in the follow up interview. The interview will be focused on classic design in your personal experience. Additionally, you will need to bring 1 to 2 items of clothing from your personal wardrobe that you consider classic design to the interview. The interview should take approximately 30-40 minutes.

Overall, this study seeks to understand how the idea of classic design is defined and perceived as it applies to clothing and women's wardrobe decisions. The term classic is often used to categorize clothing. This common usage does not explain why or how something becomes a classic or the nature of the aesthetic experiences--form, viewer and context--of classic design.

If you are still interested please contact me at this email address: [casto036@umn.edu](mailto:casto036@umn.edu) to schedule a time. Professional participation credit will be given for ADES 3217 for you participation in the interview process.

Regards,

Mary Alice Casto