Revealing and Concealing: A Qualitative Study of Young Women's Views of Dress Choices

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OFARTS

Dr. Marilyn R. DeLong

January, 2012

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my adviser Dr. Marilyn DeLong, for support and perspective and for suggesting the term "revealing and concealing" in the first place. I also would like to thank my committee, Dr. Joanne Eicher, committee chair, Lin Nelson-Mayson and Dr. Paul Rosenblatt.

I also would like to thank Marlys McGuire for her help with search terms relating to my topic

Finally, I would like to thank my participants, whose time and insights made the completion of this thesis possible.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, who have been unfailingly supportive of my academic endeavors.

Abstract

Few studies have addressed why contemporary women use dress to reveal and/or conceal their own bodies. The scant literature on revealing and concealing focuses largely on historical dress, dress of Muslim women, and on women's views about women in general, rather than their views about themselves.

The purpose of this study was to investigate (1) whether or not young undergraduate women consider revealing and concealing their own bodies as relevant to their clothing choices and (2) what young women say influences their choices regarding revealing and concealing their bodies. Eight young Caucasian women at a large Midwestern university were interviewed separately. Data were analyzed qualitatively.

The themes that emerged suggest that many factors interact to form an individual's perspective on revealing and concealing her own body. The three main themes are: 1) socialization and appropriateness, 2) fitting in and standing out, and (3) self-focused dressing motives. Socialization considers how the participant learned values concerning revealing and concealing her body. Appropriateness is concerned with how participants evaluated revealing and concealing as fitting themselves and/or situations. Fitting in and standing out relates to the use of dress within the women's social group or a particular social scene. Self-focused dressing motives are concerned with choices that an individual makes with herself as the focus. The main factor in self-focused dressing motives was comfort; a secondary factor was self-expression. Implications are drawn for the marketing of clothing to this demographic. Specifically, marketers should describe how clothing items fit particular body types and work for particular situations.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

The idea for this study started during my first semester of graduate school, in 2009, as I observed the range of clothes that undergraduate women wore to class, from sweatpants or leggings to short dresses or shirts that showed their bras. Initially, I was interested in the idea of dress appropriateness, which evolved into modesty. However, the term modesty did not seem quite right, as it was evocative of morality. My adviser suggested the idea of investigating revealing and concealing. As I researched this topic, I was surprised how little research I found dealing with my specific interest. Given how much women are critiqued by others in common discourse regarding the degree that they show or hide their bodies, I was curious as to why this topic had not been pursued by more researchers.

Justification

While there have not been many recent studies that relate to this issue, the idea of revealing and concealing has begun to receive attention in popular press. In *The New York Times Style Magazine* Weber (2010) briefly traced the history of the interplay between flesh-colored clothing and revealing actual skin. She cited the idea that clothing functions as a second skin and wrote that clothing becomes fashion "Whenever aesthetic considerations (what effects does it produce by revealing and concealing different body parts) override practical ones (how well does it insulate those body parts from the elements?" (p. 20). *Bazaar* featured a piece that addressed the current fashion for going without a bra, suggesting that sheer and braless is not a good combination (Sohn, 2010).

Some pieces in the press also addressed the desire to be more covered up. According to the *New York Daily News*, members of cheerleading squad at a high school in Connecticut requested uniforms that were less revealing because they were uncomfortable wearing uniforms that exposed so much skin (Hartenstein, 2010).

As will be elaborated in Chapter 2, the literature that I read prior to conducting my research served less as a methodological guide and more as background understanding of how other researchers had approached this issue. Revealing and concealing is a topic that has been addressed peripherally by many researchers, but has been the central focus of very few studies. Due to the dearth of prior research, I wanted to approach the topic with an open mind and to ground my analysis in my participants' words.

I believe that this subject is important to study for two main reasons. First of all, it is an issue that has come to the attention of the popular press, which suggests that it is a topic that resonates with people. Second, despite attention in the press, this issue has not been addressed directly in many recent academic studies. The press discusses the topic, but does analyze not possible reasons for women's decisions regarding revealing and concealing their bodies.

Research Questions

People dress for many different reasons, as Entwistle (2001) pointed out: "Dress does not merely serve to protect our modesty. It *embellishes* the body" (p. 33). In some cases, dress serves both to cover *and* decorate the body. My research questions were: Do young women between the ages of 18 and 24 consider whether (or not) they reveal or

conceal their bodies as relevant to their clothing choices? What do young women say influences their views on revealing and concealing their bodies?

Participants

I embarked on this project with the goal of understanding more about why some young women make the decisions they do about dress. The word "some" is important, as this study does not attempt to cover all of the possible factors and also looks at a narrow group of young women—Euro-American, women between the ages of 18 and 24 who are enrolled at a public university in the Midwest. However, I should note that these young women's opinions are embedded in cultural expectations of a Western point of view of dress. Their views represent a contemporary example of Western views of women's dressing the body.

I wanted to understand how particular women talked about revealing and concealing their bodies and I imagined that there would be differences even within a small, fairly homogenous group. I selected my participants because I needed a group of individuals who were reflective and verbal about the choices they made regarding dress. I attempted to ground my study in the voices of the young women with whom I spoke.

Definitions

During the initial phases of my research, I developed three working definitions. I used the definitions in constructing my questions and considered them throughout the research process. These definitions served as my starting point.

Modesty: dressing in a manner which does not reveal too much of the body due to visible skin and/or tightness. Modesty also has to do with dressing appropriately for a given situation within a given culture.

Revealing to concealing is a spectrum from completely naked to covered from head to toe. It relates to how much skin is exposed as well as to how form fitting a person's clothing is. Whether or not a person is considered to be revealed or concealed also is culturally defined.

Provocative dress is: "dress that defies contextual norms of modesty" (Sterling, 1995, p. 90). That is, provocative dress is dress that is considered immodest by a particular culture and/or is immodest for a given situation.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter 2, I provide a review of literature specifically related to revealing and concealing the body. I present literature that is relevant both in terms of topic and methodology. I found that there was little research that addressed this topic specifically, especially in terms of 20th and 21st century dress. There was more research that addressed the topic peripherally. In most of the literature, the perspectives of women's choices regarding revealing and concealing their own bodies was not the focus. I also address the methods used in the studies I cite.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology I used from the initial development of my study through the analysis and writing of drafts. It also addresses the demographic I interviewed and explains why I chose this particular group.

My discussion section is divided into three chapters. In, Chapter 4, Socialization and Appropriateness, I begin with considering the idea of socialization and how my participants developed their perspectives. I also discuss the concept of appropriateness, which participants alluded to frequently.

Chapter 5, Fitting In and Standing Out considers dressing for an audience. Participants primarily talked about other young women (rather than themselves) dressing for attention from the male population. They put greater emphasis on revealing and concealing their own bodies in terms of fitting in with or standing out from others.

In Chapter 6, Self-Focused Dressing Motives, I address how participants framed their motives for revealing and concealing their bodies with themselves as the focus. They discussed being comfortable, both physically and psychologically, as well as dressing to express themselves.

In Chapter 7, I present my conclusions. I also draw implications for the study.

CHAPTER TWO:

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There have been very few studies concerned with revealing and concealing the body in contemporary western society. Scholarship on revealing and concealing the body throughout western history briefly addresses this issue in modern dress (Harvey, 2007; Hollander, 1976; Ribeiro, 2003). Goffman (1963) wrote about attitudes regarding body exposure and other scholarship has addressed definitions of provocative and modest dress (Arnold, 2001; Duits & van Zoonen, 2006; Hendrie, Mannion & Godfrey, 2009; Lynch, 2007; Sterling, 1995) and modesty in the context of conservative values and/or religious affiliation (Arthur, 1998; Chico, 2000; Duits & van Zoonen). Rugh (1986) addressed revealing in concealing within the context of contemporary Egypt. Studies have examined how people evaluate women based on how much of their bodies the women reveal or conceal (Duits & van Zoonen; Lennon, Lennon & Johnson, 1996; Lynch, 2006; Williamson & Hewitt, 1986). Particularly lacking are studies that ask respondents about their personal meanings of dress, although there are some exceptions (Guy & Banim, 2003; Holland, 2004; Woodward, 2007).

History of Revealing and Concealing

Harvey (2007), whose historical analysis investigated how women and men have revealed and concealed their bodies throughout history to the present, wrote that: "Contemporary discussion of 'the Body' often has the effect of suspending the Body alone in space—naked, anonymous, isolated" (p. 66). As Harvey pointed out, clothing also can emphasize that which it covers. He continued that how much clothing conceals

has become the main focus of clothing. The clothing that we wear is something of a paradox, as it can be almost a part of the body, but it also hides the body. Historically, western women's dress has tended to reveal more skin than men's, although this has not always been the case (Harvey). Ribeiro's (2003) work illustrates that women have been castigated for the clothing they wore no matter what decisions they made. For example, women were criticized when their gowns were too tight, but loose gowns also have been called "immodest," as have women who wore clothing that appeared masculine, even if it covered most of the body.

The Concept of Revealing and Concealing

The meaning of women's clothing vacillates between two opposing *raisons d'être*: the need to be covered and modest and the need to be uncovered, immodest and objectified (Sterling, 1995). Sterling wrote that types of dress project different archetypes: "sexy, professional, virginal, chic" (p. 89). For example, androgynous clothing can be a way to distance oneself from overt sexuality (Arnold, 2001). A long skirt could be considered both feminine and very modest, whereas a mini-skirt might be considered both feminine and immodest. Lynch, (2007) who studied flashing behavior on a college campus, argued that men tend to sexually objectify women and may focus on specific parts of a woman's body, as opposed to looking at women as whole individuals. Lynch went on to say that men also may view sex as a conquest, which implies that young women who are present at particular events on campus and/or exposing their bodies are viewed as willing participants even if they are not actually willing, which is similar to arguments made by Lennon, et al. (1993) and Sterling (1995). Harvey (2007)

suggested that women's sense of identity has been affected by a male dominated society. Women have displayed their bodies because it has been desired by men, but, at the same time, many of the diatribes against immodesty also have come from men (Harvey). Duits and van Zoonen (2006) wrote that: "Girls' bodies function as carriers for much wider discussions about decency [and] feminism . . . ." (p. 114). The authors explained that the female body is seen as passive, which can keep young women from defining their own actions.

Moral Evaluations

People make moral judgments about women based on how much of their bodies are exposed (Arnold, 2001), and standing out too much can be considered problematic if people perceive it as drawing too much attention of a sexual nature. An article published in Dutch explained that G-strings were blamed for gang rapes that took place in France (van Beemen, 2003 cited in Duits & van Zoonen, 2006). Lennon, et al. (1993) described a kidnapping and sexual assault case in which the jurors referred to the clothing that the victim wore. The authors explained that the jurors' statements exemplify the stereotype that: "Women invite their own rapes, sexual assaults, and sexual harassment by the manner in which they dress" (p. 392). Women's character is more likely to be judged based on how revealing or concealing her clothing is (Lennon, et al.; Ribeiro, 2003; Sterling, 1995). Lennon et al. referred to a rape case in which a judge said that women should "stop teasing" and that women should dress more modestly, implying that if they do not they are to be blamed for men's behavior. This case illustrates that dress that is perceived as immodest can lead to inaccurate, negative judgments about women.

Sterling's (1995) study examined semiotic and evidentiary meanings of women's clothing in rape trials, but the statements she made about clothing are relevant in general. She pointed out that: "Clothing covers the body. In doing so, it describes the body" (p. 92). The act of wearing clothing draws attention to what the clothing covers as well as what it reveals. People who believe that women's bodies are irresistibly tempting to men argue that a woman is responsible not only for herself but "for man's sexual behavior too: if a man succumbs to sexual temptation in thought or deed it is considered her fault for dressing provocatively" (Entwistle, 2000, p. 150). Yet, almost anything can be construed as sexually provocative, which makes it easier to place the blame on the victim rather than the perpetrator.

Decency

While certain types of clothing may represent different archetypes within a culture, they do not have an objective meaning, and their significance will be interpreted differently depending on the individual characteristics of the observer (Lennon, et al., 1993). For example, one person might interpret a woman's outfit as being sexually explicit, while another person might think that she was dressed appropriately for a night out. The terms "decency" and "modesty" are framed in everyday usage as concepts that are defined clearly and generally agreed upon, when in reality there is no clear definition of what it means to be decent in modern society (Duits & van Zoonen, 2006).

Modesty often is associated with a more religious and/or conservative perspective, but even so, there is variation within more conservative groups. Arthur (1998) completed a qualitative study of college women who were members of sororities.

She found that the women tended to dress in a manner that was more conservative and tailored than did women on campus who did not belong to sororities and that brands that are considered more conservative and tailored, like Ann Taylor and J. Crew, were favored by sorority girls who wished to emphasize a more traditional, feminine appearance. A statement made by a participant in Arthur's study implies that modesty is related to a more traditional and conservative viewpoint. Shalit (1999) defined a "modestynik" as a young woman whose family is secular (but presumably Jewish) who suddenly decides to dress in long skirts, which Shalit equated with modesty. In both Orthodox Judaism and some forms of Islam women cover their heads to preserve sexual modesty (Chico, 2000), and, in Islam, covering the head sometimes is seen as a way of protecting women from the gaze of men (Duits & van Zoonen, 2006). Duits and van Zoonen suggested that the headscarf may be viewed by others as too modest.

Circumstances of Wearing

Beliefs relate to an individual's perspective on modesty, but context is also important. The idea of context ranges from the cultural context to more specific circumstances of wearing. Sterling (1995) described how she alters what she is wearing based on where she is. She compared workplace and cocktail attire and explained that, if she wore workplace attire to a cocktail party, she would be dressed too conservatively, but if she wore cocktail attire to work she would feel too revealed. Lynch (2007) explained that context plays a role in what is considered provocative and gave the example of a young woman wearing a bikini top to the beach versus to a bar. At the beach, this top would be considered appropriate, while at a bar it would be considered

provocative. Hendrie, et al.'s (2009) research suggested that it was the percentage of skin showing that related to attracting attention from males in a night club, rather than which parts of the body were exposed. The line between immodest and modest occurred at about 40% body exposure. Hendrie, et al. pointed out that other research has found that night clubs are dark, crowded and very noisy, which means that physical display is more important than it would be in other situations. They suggested that these are the reasons that exposure garners more male attention. Thus, going to a club in conservative clothing might make it more difficult to interact with others given that it is very difficult to talk, and dress may be considered to express personality more than it might in other settings. In Lynch's (2007) study a participant stated that girls at homecoming were supposed to dress in clothing that was very revealing, which as Lynch pointed out, suggests that provocative dress may be associated with revealing the female form.

Fitting In

Fitting in relates to both fitting in with one's peers and fitting within society as a whole. In some cases, young women may choose to reveal or conceal their bodies depending on whether their peers reveal or conceal their bodies. O'Neal (1998) studied inner-city students' attitudes toward dress. She found that one issue her participants discussed was conforming to the dress of their social group. Two of O'Neal's female participants suggested that being well-dressed is important because it allows an individual to fit in with everyone else. Similarly, Sterling (1995) argued that women feel compelled to fit into the norm. Thus, the objectifying imperative makes women feel that they must dress in revealing clothing: "They *as a group* are compelled to dress both

modestly and immodestly, and what results is a limited spectrum in which the majority of women lean toward modesty" (p. 103). However, Duits' and van Zoonen's (2006) study suggested that revealing clothing is marketed even to young girls, so it is possible that revealing clothing has become normative. Thus, it may be that some young women do feel compelled to dress in clothing which reveals a large portion of their bodies. Shalit (1999) argued that young women may feel pressured to dress provocatively because they feel they will be ostracized if they do not. Her statement suggests that what is considered normal is immodest. However, it is important to note that Shalit's book is a religiously based attempt to convince people to dress more modestly, not a study published in a peer reviewed journal. Lynch's (2007) respondents cited lack of self-esteem as a reason why other young women would dress provocatively and engage in flashing behavior, which Lynch pointed out implies that the respondents assumed they could gauge others' self-esteem accurately. Similarly, a female participant in O'Neal's (1998) study suggested that showing a great deal of skin advertised lack of self-respect.

Methods

Most of the studies included in this literature review were based on qualitative interviews or syntheses and analyses of other texts, although two studies used quantitative methods: Hendrie, et al. (2009) conducted observations in a nightclub and quantitatively analyzed what they observed. Williamson and Hewitt (1986) had their subjects compare and rate the attractiveness of photos of two models wearing clothing that revealed varying degrees of their bodies. Lennon, et al. (1993) and Sterling (1995) both analyzed legal cases and laws regarding dress and sexual assault. Duits and van

Zoonen (2006) reviewed contemporary literature relating to discourses about young women's dress, with a specific focus on particularly revealing clothing and headscarves. Chico (2000) reviewed literature relating to head covering in Judaism and Islam. Arnold (2001) addressed 20th century fashion in relation to society. Entwistle (2000) and Harvey (2007) both gave historical accounts regarding fashion and the body in western society, and Ribeiro (2003) analyzed dress in western history in relation to morality, which also relates to the body. Arthur (1998) collected data through observation, field notes and interviews, as well as through an open-ended survey to which 50 participants responded. She addressed how sororities used dress to promote traditional gender roles. Lynch (2007) carried out fieldwork and interviews, some of which were recorded and some of which were exploratory and unplanned. She used a grounded approach to analyze her data. Lynch studied definitions of provocative dress in relation to female flashing behavior at homecoming. To study high school students at a less affluent urban school system, O'Neal (1998) used semi-structured questions in focus groups and showed slides of individuals wearing fashionable dress.

In order to better understand women's clothing choices, Woodward (2007) conducted an in-depth ethnography, which took place in women's bedrooms so that the participants could show Woodward the clothing in their closets. She conducted both formal and informal interviews with the participants and spent time with them over fifteen months. She documented each item in each woman's closet, conducted semi-structured interviews, recorded life histories, read participants' clothing diaries and observed how they selected what they wore. She photographed all of the clothing in their

closets and took note of how they described their garments. In terms of topic and methodology, Woodward's research is the most related to goals of this thesis. However, her scope was much greater than mine and covered clothing in a broader sense, given that she was interested in all of the reasons that her participants considered when getting dressed. She interviewed groups of women across different ages all of whom lived in England, rather than in the United States. One topic she discusses is how women consider clothing in relation to how the clothing feels against the body and whether or not it reveals too much or too little. Several of the participants in her study talked about revealing and concealing their bodies (though not necessarily using those words), but this topic was not the focus of her study.

In *Alternative Femininities* Holland (2004) considered how a particular group of women, who dressed in so-called "alternative" styles, conceptualized their choices about what they wore and how this related to their identities as women. Holland conducted semi-structured interviews based around four main questions. She explained that the general framework was the same for each interview, but the order and specific questions asked were not identical. She chose this method in order to understand each woman's narrative. All of her participants were different, although she did find common themes across interviews. Although our subject matters are different, her approach is similar to mine.

The present study will address women's views regarding revealing and concealing their own bodies, which has not been the central focus of any research.

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

The method for this study I used is grounded and primarily based on methods developed by Charmaz (2006), although I am not attempting to construct grounded theory. In *Constructing Grounded Theory* Charmaz developed a methodology that also is applicable to other types of qualitative research. She described how to gather and analyze data in order to do research that is grounded in the voices of one's participants. I also used Kvale's (2007) *Doing Interviews*, which addresses how to plan, conduct, transcribe and analyze interviews.

The data were collected between January and April 2011. As part of my recruitment efforts, I informed potential participants that I was conducting a study on revealing and concealing the body. So that the conversation could be guided by my participants' stories and opinions rather than by my preconceived notions, I used semi-structured interviews. Please see Appendix II for the question schedule. In an effort to put the participants at ease, the first questions I asked each participant elicited information regarding how she dressed in different situations. Later questions introduced the terms "revealing and concealing." I ended with questions that addressed other factors I thought might be important, in case participants did not bring them up on their own. Respondents were asked about revealing and concealing in the context of parts of their bodies they feel good about, what and who guides their clothing choices regarding revealing and concealing, how their views of revealing and concealing have shifted over time and whether they prefer skin-revealing or form-fitting clothing. Participants also were asked

to describe a time when she and a significant other disagreed about something she was wearing.

In this chapter, I will address: 1) the framework, 2) my positionality, 3) the construction of questions, 4) respondents and interviews, 5) transcription and 6) analysis.

Framework

The methodology for this study was exploratory and qualitative. I chose to complete interviews because: "Interviews are particularly suited for studying people's understandings of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding and clarifying and elaborating on their own perspective on their lived world" (Kvale, 2007, p. 46). I followed many of the steps laid out by Charmaz (2006).

There were two books specifically related to dress that were particularly helpful in exemplifying qualitative methods for researching dress. Woodward (2007) talked to women about their clothing choices and spent time with them as they picked out clothing from their own wardrobes. Holland (2004) investigated why women continue to wear "alternative" styles of dress after adolescence. Both studies were a much larger scope than mine, but were helpful in providing specific examples about how one can conduct qualitative studies in relation to dress.

Positionality

I became interested in this topic during my first year in graduate school while I was working as a teaching assistant. I noticed that some young women would show up to class wearing very low-cut shirts, short skirts and/or very tight clothing, such as leggings with shirts that only came down to their hips. As someone who tries to conceal more of

my body in academic settings, I was curious as to why other young women chose to dress however they dressed. I should note that there was a wide range of ways that different young women chose to reveal or conceal their bodies. Clothing I observed ranged from baggy sweatshirts and sweatpants, to tight shirts worn with leggings, from jeans and tee-shirts to dress shirts and wool pants, and from vintage day-dresses to very short skirts.

I tried to approach this project as neutrally as possible, while remaining cognizant of my own biases and my own personal preferences in dress. I am at the upper-range of the ages I was interested in interviewing (18-24), so it seemed that I would be able to relate to my participants in that way, at least. I wanted to remain open to their understandings about dress.

Constructing Questions

I began by writing out questions that would help guide me through my interviews. My primary goal was to elicit my participants' thoughts regarding revealing and concealing their bodies, although some of my questions brought up the topic of dress in general. I constructed my questions partially because I wanted to see if the participants would talk about revealing and concealing the body without my asking them about it directly. The reason I wanted to know if they would address revealing and concealing without being asked about it was to see whether or not the topic resonated with them. Of course, this method is not perfect because they knew what my overall topic was when they agreed to be interviewed. My other reason for asking more general questions was because I was unsure which questions would elicit responses relating to my research question, and I knew I could ask follow up questions. According to Kvale (2007),

exploratory studies generally are open, while hypothesis-testing studies tend to have more pre-planned structure. Kvale also wrote that: "The interviewer is the research instrument, and the quality of the knowledge produced in an interview depends on the skills, the sensitivity and the subject matter knowledge of the interviewer" (p. 49).

I ended up with fourteen questions, which were constructed primarily to facilitate discussion, but also to guide the direction of the interview. The first few questions related to how participants dressed for different activities and settings. I then asked participants to describe situations in which they were concerned with revealing and/or concealing their bodies and to tell me about a time when they felt too concealed and a time they felt too revealed. I asked about when they wanted to blend in and when they wanted to stand out. I also asked about satisfaction with one's body, as this seemed to relate to their attitudes toward revealing and concealing their bodies. Finally, I asked questions aimed to elicit responses about what they believed had influenced their views.

Respondents and Interviews

I decided to interview young women between the ages of 18 and 24 who were enrolled in college because observing young women in this age-range within this setting inspired my original research question which related to why young women make particular choices regarding revealing and concealing their bodies. This question evolved into the following two questions: Do young women consider whether (or not) they reveal or conceal their bodies as relevant to their clothing choices? What do young women say influences their views on revealing and concealing their bodies?

Respondents were solicited in classes and by word of mouth. I spoke in three Apparel classes and asked for volunteers. However, I obtained most of my participants through casual conversation outside of the classroom, for example when I mentioned my thesis and a young woman expressed interest in participating. These conversations all took place on campus. My eight participants ranged in age from 20 to 23 years. All were undergraduate students at the time of the interviews. They will be referred to by the following pseudonyms: Adrienne, Emily, Helena, Jennifer, Leah, Nina, Rose and Stella. All of the participants except for Emily and Nina studied apparel in some capacity, either as designers or in retail merchandizing. I am not providing more demographic information about my participants because part of my agreement with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) is that I will not provide information that makes my participants recognizable.

I recorded the interviews, which lasted between 40 minutes and 100 minutes, with a digital recording device, with permission from participants. Prior to beginning the interview, participants were given a consent form to read (See Appendix I) and were asked to consent verbally. I told them that they did not have to answer any question they were uncomfortable answering and that they were not obligated to the finish the interview. The interviews were semi-structured, so I asked the same general questions but different follow-up questions depending on how the participants responded. Sometimes I skipped a question because a participant answered the question before I asked it. I used semi-structured interviews in order to explore "complex meanings around identity through personal narratives" (Holland, 2004, p. 184). According to Kvale, it is important

to be open to sequence changes in order to: "Follow up the specific answers given and stories told by subjects." (p. 51). My interviews generally followed the same order, but there were times when a participant's response addressed unanticipated ideas.

Transcription

I transcribed the interviews verbatim, although I did leave out filler language such as "um", "like" and "you know" in order to streamline the process and make the transcripts more readable. If I had questions about what I had typed, I went back to the interview and listened to that section again in order to make sure that my transcriptions were accurate.

Analysis

I analyzed one interview at a time, using Charmaz's (2006) coding methods. According to Charmaz, there are two main phases of coding: "1) an initial phase involving naming each word, line, or segment of data followed by 2) a focused selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data" (p. 46). A third step is theoretical coding, which leads into memo-writing. I utilized the first three coding steps one individual at a time. For each step, I printed my transcript with a wide margin so that I could either code or write notes. After I had coded each interview, I wrote initial memos about each individual, which I then re-coded. Then I began constructing memos for the overarching themes that encompassed the interviews.

Line-by-Line Coding

Charmaz (2006) argued that the researcher should "stick close to the data" (p. 47) for initial codes. She suggested that the researcher use gerunds, which imply action, to keep the researcher from attempting to adopt theories too quickly. My coding primarily was line-by-line, but I sometimes coded sentence-by-sentence or by incident. As suggested by Charmaz, I wrote down whatever came to mind.

Focused Codes

I went through two stages of focused coding. First, I made a list of all of the initial codes and tallied them, given that focused coding entails: "using the most significant and/or frequent codes to sift through large amounts of data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). I began to correlate codes that were very similar such as "blending in" and "fitting in." Once I made a list of focused codes, I went through the interviews again and re-coded. I found that certain terms tended to overlap, so I combined codes in order to make themes that encompassed more concepts. With more narrow focused codes, I went through the interview again and noted how codes overlapped, generally ending up with between seven and ten codes that offered an analysis of the interview.

Theoretical Coding

After I narrowed my focused codes, I color coded them and read through the transcripts with a highlighter. The codes were broad enough and distinct enough that many sections were highlighted with only one color, but the places where colors overlapped showed how codes were connected. As I saw how the codes were interrelated I began to think about theoretical codes. According to Charmaz (2006): "Theoretical codes specify possible relationships between categories you have developed in your

focused coding" (p. 63). After developing initial theoretical codes, I took notes in the margins for each interview. After, I started to look across the interviews in order to understand how the codes overlapped across cases. Some of the codes had slightly different names such as "feeling at ease" compared to "being comfortable." I constructed theoretical codes that were broad enough to encompass the differences between cases and specific enough to be useful. I then typed up the notes that I wrote for each interview so that the quote was followed by comments and/ or analysis.

Memo Writing

Memo writing overlapped with the process of developing theoretical codes from focused codes. My earliest memos were the notes I took for each individual. The purpose of memos is to create a space for comparisons between data, codes, codes and data and larger themes (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz wrote that memos range from concrete to abstract, which was the case with my research. Some memos were observations or comments on what an individual had said, whereas others analyzed and compared between cases. As stated, I color coded my initial memos according to theme, but at this point each case was still separate. I noted where particular cases fit together and began to construct memos for each theme. I created a separate file for each theme and condensed all of my notes by theme. Eventually, I developed memos that had more coherence, which lead into drafts of my discussion section.

Advanced Analysis

I kept each section separate at first, although I did continue to look at the data and earlier stages of analysis to ensure that I was not becoming too distant from the

interviews. By this point, I had developed an order in which to discuss the themes: 1) Being socialized, 2) Being appropriate, 3) Being respected, 4) Avoiding/Attracting attention, 5) Fitting in/Standing out, 6) Being comfortable and 7) "An expression of my personality." I chose this particular order because I wanted to move from ideas that directly related to others, to ideas that were more concerned with the self. I decided later that "Being respected" fit better as a sub-section of "Being appropriate." I chose these particular categories because they were broad enough that each category related to the majority of my participants but specific enough that each category could be differentiated from the other categories. For example, I created the category "Being Socialized" after finding that many of my participants talked about how they came to have certain views regarding social norms about dress. The order of my analysis does not relate to the particular questions that I asked initially, as the questions were a point of departure.

I wrote a draft for each section and then combined the sections. I divided my discussion into three chapters. Chapter Four, Socialization and Appropriateness addresses "Being Socialized" and "Being Appropriate." Chapter Five, Fitting In/Standing Out, contains "Avoiding/Attracting Attention" and "Fitting in/Standing out." Chapter Six, Self-Focused Dressing Motives includes "Being Comfortable" and "'An Expression of my Personality."

CHAPTER FOUR:

SOCIALIZATION AND APPROPRIATENESS

I start by discussing how social mores are learned regarding revealing and concealing, which takes place both inside and outside of the home. Group membership ranges from smaller units such as the family to an individual's culture. According to Eicher, Evensen and Lutz (2000) family membership can impact both dress and behavior. Some participants regarded family as central to their views about revealing and concealing their bodies, while other participants were more inclined to discuss other individuals or situations that were particularly significant to their views. Cultural ideals are a major determining factor in relation to how we dress (Eicher, et al.), but participants were less inclined to discuss how culture at large impacted them. Socialization includes both the explicit and implicit ways that an individual learns particular values and norms. I also address the concept of appropriateness, which is an issue that all participants considered to be salient. The term "appropriate" or "inappropriate" was used by six out of eight of the participants.

Being Socialized

Socialization is defined as the process by which a person develops an identity and learns customs and norms (Kaiser, 1997). Without my prompting, some participants expressed that they were raised in families where clothing was discussed explicitly, while other participants did not discuss their parents' or other family members' perspectives at all. The participants who did not bring up their families may or may not have talked about clothing at home, but they were still socialized concerning dress, even if they are

not aware of it. For example, children are socialized through play, wherein they take on different roles and observe how others react (Kaiser).

Some individuals talked about the impact that family members had on the development of their views regarding revealing and concealing their bodies and upon their general perspectives. Helena spoke expressly and frequently about her family's influence on her development.

> I come from a large family and I would say that it's kind of a unique situation and that because of my personality and because of the way my family developed and because of the gaps between everyone, not only are my parents my parents, but I view them more as my friends now, than before. So, being quite close with all of my siblings too . . . .

Helena's relationships have shifted based on proximity and based on family members' growth as individuals. She was socialized by many people who were and are close to her and in a complex, dynamic environment. Helena's entire family influenced her perspective, but her mother was especially significant. In the 1980's, many mothers were the main decision-makers regarding what their children wore (Ruckner, Boynton & Park, 1986), so it may be that most decisions regarding dress were made by Helena's mother. Adrienne also brought up her mother many times throughout the interview, such as when I asked her in which situations she thought about revealing and concealing her body: "I probably think about that quite a bit actually. There's definitely a change between high school and college. It came a lot from my mom . . . ." Adrienne thinks of her mother as a positive influence who helped her become an astute dresser.

Some participants grew up in more structured environments where their parents set explicit standards about what was permissible. For example, when Helena was growing up there were clear rules regarding what she and her sisters were allowed to wear. Now that she is an adult and no longer lives at home, she has made choices that her mother disliked but no longer could forbid. For example, Helena bought a two piece swimsuit and explained that when she was growing up: "two piece swimsuits were just out of the question, like it was something we just didn't do." After Helena bought a two piece swimsuit she talked to her mother about it: "We had this conversation of her being like, well 'I'm not really proud of you buying that,' and I was like, 'okay, but I bought a two piece swimsuit, you know, and for me, whether or not I wear the two-piece swimsuit very much . . . I'm making my own decision not . . . just [to] piss you off.'" Her mother's use of the word "proud" implies that, whether knowingly or not, Helena's mother was employing shame to influence her daughter. The idea of pride suggests that dress is indicative of something significant, rather than simply stating that she wished Helena would not wear a two-piece because she finds two pieces inappropriate.

For others in this study, rules shifted over time and were not as rigid. For instance, Adrienne's mother set boundaries that were based on age rather than specifically associating styles of dress with what kind of person one is. I asked Adrienne if her mother explained why Adrienne was not allowed to wear certain styles of clothing. She responded:

Yeah, she explained. Also I think I knew—I was testing the limits, but [she] explained to the point where it's like, "no you're 16", or "you're 14. No, you're

too young to do that. You're too young to stay out until one, you're too young to wear a push-up bra with a tiny shirt. Certain things aren't appropriate for your age."

She implied that her mother imparted that both push-up bras and staying out until one may be acceptable once a person reaches adulthood. Her mother did not seem to talk about how others would view Adrienne. Rather, Adrienne's mother focused on teaching her how to dress in a way that was appropriate for her stage of life.

Erikson (1950) developed the idea of eight developmental crises, the 5th of which is *identity versus diffusion*. In order to achieve the stage of identity, one must undergo a crisis. Hoegh and Bourgeois (2002) suggest that Erikson's theory still is applicable in the 21st century. While undergoing this identity crisis, some teenagers will try to challenge their parents' values and this limit-testing may be expressed through dress (Kaiser, 1997). Because Helena had to figure out for herself whether or not she agreed with her parents, there were points when she dressed against their wishes:

I felt like I was just taking my parents' word for it and it was just like: "Well, gee, are you just telling me I shouldn't dress that way?" And I think that change has taken place and I think part of it too has been, you know, I've been, I've been in a position where I've been encouraged by guys who say, I really appreciate how you dress, so that's part of it too, like having that feedback, making, I think that's part of it. More too just getting to a point where I do care about other people.

Helena seems to have internalized many of the values of her significant others. She is herself, but she is very aware that she is not herself in isolation. Yet, she remains aware of who she is and how she differs from her family. Part of growing up was pushing away, although now she finds that her sensibilities are not so different from those of her parents.

While Nina's experience growing up was very different from Helena's, they both described how they rebelled against their parents only to find that as adults that they agreed with their parents more than they would have imagined as young teenagers. Nina's parents were quite flexible with what she wore and her mother has been an especially significant influence: "She's an artist, so she's always kind of like, 'invent yourself, don't conform to anybody.'" At the same time, Nina's mother also enjoyed dressing her up: "When I was younger, it was kind of like, I had my rebelling stage and it was kind of like I wouldn't want to wear what my mom wanted me to wear and now . . . I want to wear what she wore when she was my age." When she was young, Nina rebelled against her mother's style, but now that she is an adult she appreciates it more. By being allowed to actively make choices, she came around to the ideas her mother had demonstrated while she was growing up. Following Erikson's (1950) theory, one could argue that Nina has achieved identity regarding her style of dress. Even though Nina is very independent, she appreciates that her mother influenced her both in terms of style and perspective.

Parents can influence their children by reinforcing positive choices and/or by telling them what they should *not* wear. Nina recalls that her mother tended to

compliment her when she liked what Nina was wearing, rather than criticizing the outfits she disliked:

> I wore something that she thought was really cute she would praise me for it. She would be like "Oh my gosh you look so beautiful today" and I'd be like "Oh!" What every girl wants to hear every single day from [her] mother. . . . It seemed really subtle at the time, but now it's like, oh you like what I'm going to wear, I'm going to wear this again, thank you very much, so it was mostly just the subtle push toward the right clothing choices.

Nina's positive view of herself seems to parallel the way that her mother influenced her. Rather than being critical, her mother tended to reinforce good choices with praise. This technique seems to have been effective with Nina, who likes to feel beautiful, both in general and in her mother's eyes. Her mother did not employ shame and even when she really disliked what Nina was wearing it seems that she was very gentle in her reproach: "She'd just be like 'Oh honey, no.' And I'd just be like 'But why not?' and I'd get all emotional. . . . She was usually really gentle and now she's kind of become more blunt as I've aged." When Nina's mother thought something was *very* unflattering, she would say something, but she was kind. The lack of shaming seems to have led to Nina's positive view because her mother refrained from personal attacks, thus allowing Nina to develop independently without conflict.

Some parents influence their children's opinions by pointing out what they did not like in other people's children. Helena's parents pointed out when they thought young women were dressed inappropriately: "I remember sometimes hearing them express

negativity or disapproval when other people would wear certain things or somebody's daughter would go somewhere in a really short mini-skirt when it was just not an appropriate setting for a mini-skirt." Hearing evaluations of others is less personal than having one's own style reprimanded, but sets parameters for what is acceptable and what should not be worn in a particular setting or in general. Nina said that her mother would comment on how other girls dressed, but: "She's never used it for us, because of course since we are her children we know how to dress, but there were some prom dresses where she was like 'That girl looked really skaggy.'" Nina was unsure what the term "skag" means, but according to Urban Dictionary.com one definition of a skag is "a really ugly woman that is somehow also a slut." Nina separates how a person appears from his or her behavior, so perhaps her mother simply meant that the person was dressed in a way that was unflattering and could lead someone to an unfavorable impression, not that he or she was actually engaged in any particular behavior.

Not all parents set clear limits for their children, which may mean that their child is allowed to wear absolutely anything, but more often probably means that their child did not attempt to wear anything that would be completely unacceptable, such as, for example, a swimming suit to school. Some parents may even encourage their child to push boundaries, especially during stages where their child just wants to look like everyone else. For instance, Leah said: "[My mom] would always encourage me to be more creative and I didn't want to be more creative. I just wanted to look like the other kids." At the time, her mother's advice may not have been welcome, but in retrospect it may have influenced Leah to dress how she does today. Stella described her parents as

very flexible and said: "My family is fantastic and they had very few rules for me growing up. Unless I wanted to run out of the house naked I could pretty much wear whatever I wanted to." Because Stella was allowed to wear almost anything her style may have developed more organically. As an adult, she often is willing to wear unusual clothing.

Children may receive complex information if they are raised in a family with a variety of perspectives. Nina had a range of possible responses to dress based on her parents' views and the opinions of her extended family. According to Nina: "I've always been extremely independent, and I do what I want. I wear what I want. I mean, my mom is okay with it. . . . I feel like I dress appropriate enough that I can wear it in front of my grandma with some exceptions, where my grandma will be like 'Nina! Your dress is too short!'" She went on to say: "I think the length that would be appropriate for her in a dress would be to my ankles. . . . My other grandma on my dad's side would be like 'Oh you're so cute! Look at how you're showing off some leg. I love it!'" While Nina refuses to dress to please others, she is cognizant of their opinions. Her parents provided flexible guidelines for appropriate dress, perhaps because she did not push boundaries or perhaps because they figured that, ultimately, dress was not the most important concern. Her grandmother may have thought her outfits were a bit risqué, but from the way Nina described her grandmother's response, it does not appear she was entirely serious. Nina and her maternal grandmother may have different sensibilities, while her paternal grandmother seems to encourage her to have fun. Thus, Nina learned there is not just one correct way to dress and that appropriate dress often is a matter of opinion.

While most respondents gave their mothers' views primacy, some also mentioned that their father's opinions were influential. Helena used to believe that her father's view could stand in for the "male perspective" in general and described wanting a halter-top dress that her mother was unsure about, to which Helena responded: "How about we take it home and ask Father if you're concerned about this and in my head it was like, 'well, he's a guy and he's the one that knows.'" Helena's perspective has evolved since this incident, but even though it seems that her mother made decisions regarding her daughter's clothing, Helena thought her father could be the ultimate authority because he was male and might understand what men think. Other respondents took their mothers' views more seriously than the views of other family members. Adrienne talked about conversations she has with her younger brother regarding her clothes: "If I'm wearing something that I don't think is too short and my mom doesn't think is too short because we bought it together [my brother will] think it's too short because [he] is 17 and he's trying to be the 'older brother' and protective. It's actually really endearing." Adrienne considers others' opinions, although she doesn't take her brother seriously as an arbiter because he is younger than she is. It seems that many of her values were established by her mother as she was growing up, so her sensibilities have roots that her brother has little power to influence.

In Western culture, there is a great deal of pressure to conform to the "ideal" physical appearance (e.g. Fallon, 1990; Kaiser, 1997; Tiggeman, 2002; Wolf, 1991). Socialization may contribute to how one feels about one's body and how one evaluates oneself. Helena talked about how she internalized views about her body, even though her

access to pop culture was very restricted. She and her siblings did not watch much television and there were no magazines such as *Cosmo* available. She traced her view to the way her sisters talked about their bodies: "I think a lot of it's just like hearing them say, 'Oh I'm in shape' or 'I'm not in shape' and seeing how they looked and comparing myself to them and then, then [saying to myself], 'well I don't look like that [like my sister], so I must not be in shape either.'" Helena is aware that she absorbed the comments her sisters made about their bodies.

Self-criticism of one's appearance is not innate, nor is it present in every culture. For example, Shostak (1983) discussed a 12 year-old !Kung girl who saw her own reflection and unself-consciously commented on her own beauty. Shostak explained: "In contrast to the experience of many young women in our own [Western] culture, this feeling is not worn down by cultural ideals of 'perfect' beauty to which women are constantly comparing themselves" (p. 270). In contrast, in contemporary U.S. culture feelings of inadequacy may make a young woman uncomfortable with her body or more inclined to hide herself. For instance, Jennifer stated that in high school: "I was definitely more uncomfortable with my body, so I would end up wearing big sweatshirts." Partially because Jennifer grew up in a culture that disparaged people who were "overweight," she felt the need to disguise her body under loose clothing. However, even if someone likes her own body overall, she may still be impacted by what she considers to be ideal. At times, a woman's views will be shaped simply due to the tendency to compare herself to those around her. Nina said she wishes that the lower half of her body were shaped more like her sister's body: "I think I'm just jealous of my sister because she has just this

perfect heiney where it's like an apple bottom and it's perfect." Nina's style of dress is not greatly impacted by her desire to have a differently shaped bottom, but she does attempt to wear clothing that creates the illusion of a different shape.

Socialization also occurs in the workplace. For instance, some participants discussed being expected to follow dress codes for work, especially when working with children. Leah is a childcare worker, a job for which she is expected to follow a dress code:

> We dress pretty conservatively, too, like I wouldn't wear anything low-cut, or anything too short, I would probably wear long jeans and a tank-top with something covering it up. . . .It's not like they're there with you when you're going to these places and watching their kids, so it's not something that you really need to worry too much about, but I don't wear a lot of jewelry that could get in the way in case of an emergency sort of thing.

Leah has a sense of situation, but she pushes boundaries when she works, not because she wants to rebel but because she does not own any clothes that fit the exact dress code. Her main concern when she works is functionality and she does not expose too much skin.

Emily also worked with children, at a summer camp where they were prohibited from wearing two-piece swimsuits because staff needed to set a good example:

> Not that it would be a bad example to have exposed midriffs but at the same time if you show up in a string bikini that's probably not the best thing we want to show the kids, so I think that was just the boundary they had to set to make it standard.

Revealing too much of her body was outside of acceptable boundaries, especially around children. In the next section I will address how others can impact one's decisions regarding dress even if they do not actually say anything.

Consciously Dressing with Others in Mind

In some cases, one may dress as if significant others were there to offer their opinions. Helena talked about clothes in relation to the people who are important to her and how they might perceive her based on what she is wearing. While some participants stated or implied that they will wear almost anything around the most significant people in their lives, Helena is most conscious around family and close friends. She discussed a low-cut shirt she received as a gift that she would wear only in situations where she was certain she would not run into anyone who was important to her. She discussed her thought process regarding why she stopped wearing that shirt: "Why would I only wear it if I knew I wasn't going to see certain people, and so it was like, why am I even wearing this then? If I wouldn't wear it around people I really trust and respect and love, why am I wearing it?" Helena was embarrassed to wear this low-cut shirt around significant others because she felt they would judge her or think that she was not being herself. It was less problematic for strangers to see her because she did not have to have sustained interactions with them and because the shirt did not change her behavior in any profound way, but she perhaps thought the people she cared about would think about her differently. It is almost as if she has a Greek chorus in her head, representing the voices of loved ones.

Nina has a very different perspective from Helena: "Since they're my family, they shouldn't judge me and if they have a problem with what I'm wearing, I am fairly positive that they would come and say that that's inappropriate. Even though that's never happened to me." Nina feels that the people closest to her should not judge her. They already know her, so her dress should not impact what they think. She also said that if she were inappropriate they would let her know. When she talked about her immediate family it was apparent that they are very accepting, which has influenced her views about herself and others. She separates appearance from her judgments and her statements implied that she feels others should as well.

Being Inspired by One's Mother

Parents can simultaneously set limits for their children and inspire them to experiment with different styles. Most participants recalled feeling pressure to fit in, especially in junior high and high school and often this related to revealing their bodies. Adrienne explained:

> I really valued my mom's style and taste back in junior high and high school
> when there's all that pressure of looking a certain way and being a certain way
> and of course, being a teenage girl I was trying to fall into that, but my mom
> helped me a lot because it's like: "you're not going to wear that shirt. It's just not
> going to happen."

Her mother's clearly verbalized limitations provided structure and, in retrospect, Adrienne sees this limiting as beneficial. She also implied that she observed what her mother wore and saw her mother as someone to aspire to be like, rather than an

embarrassment to be avoided. Because she was close to her mother, she was less likely to fight against her mother's standards. Being told that she was not allowed to wear something because it was not appropriate for her age, and not that people would judge her, was a positive way of framing rules. Discussing one's dress relative to age does imply considering others' gaze, even if only implicitly, but it removes the implication that revealing clothing defines an enduring character flaw. Rather, revealing clothing is implied to be situationally inappropriate, or inappropriate for adolescent girls but not adult women.

Some young women were inspired by how their mothers dress, or more frequently in this study, by how they dressed when they were young. Some respondents related stories their mothers told them, but others described the impact of photos. Leah said: "I used to really like looking at old pictures of my parents when they were my age and I guess I always found inspiration from those and that whole retro sort of thing." Nina was also inspired by her mother's style, even though for most of Nina's life her mother's style has been "Plain Jane." Nina said:

> [My mother] will wear just a pair of jeans and a white v-neck tee-shirt with a big baggy sweater, which is where I get my big baggy sweater love, I guess, but she also saved buckets of her clothes from when I was in college and I got some of those pieces, so I'll wear those too.

Nina is influenced by her mother's current style and her past style and she gets a lot of pleasure out of wearing her mother's old clothes. Stella was also able to make use of her mother's old clothes:

My mom . . . had a really interesting young adulthood. She lived abroad and loved

traveling, so I was wearing some of her crazy garments as soon as I could fit into

them I was wearing them and so that was kind of inspiration for me and I think

that's when I started to dress unique[ly].

Stella had a period of wanting to conform to her peers, but it did not last long and her

mother helped her by showing her interesting things that she had worn in her youth,

which Stella started to wear as well. She is aware that being in an open environment

allowed her to explore and perhaps keeps her from passing judgment on others.

The following section will address being appropriate in relation to concealing and

revealing one's body.

Being Appropriate

The idea of "being appropriate" was something to which all participants alluded.

Although there is no one way to be appropriate or inappropriate, my participants agreed

that the concept exists, by which I mean everyone believed there are certain standards to

which everyone should adhere, even if no one can agree exactly on what they are. Even

participants who had specific ideas about what was appropriate for themselves tended to

acknowledge that there is a broader range of what is appropriate for others.

Appropriateness varies depending on many different factors, which will be parsed

below. However, these factors interact with each other, so in many cases, decisions will

be made based on multiple factors that may be in tension. For example, Emily's response

to what she wears to school demonstrates that choices may relate to activity, temperature

and setting, to name three of the factors:

If I'm going to the studio I usually wear crappy clothes, but it's pretty much like this. Jeans, boots in the winter, usually I wear a tank-top and a tee-shirt and a sweater or a cardigan over the top . . . . I wouldn't probably wear anything lower than this to school. I might wear something more low-cut if I'm going out and a lot of times I also wear a scarf.

For every day wear, Emily's clothing choices are focused on practicality and comfort—if she is painting there is no point in dressing up, but most days in winter she wears a t-shirt, a sweater and maybe a scarf. She wears scarves because she feels that they add to outfits and because they cover up her chest. She does not wear a lot of low-cut clothing during the day because she feels it is socially inappropriate. The significance of her comment lies less in the specific choices she makes and more in how she conceptualizes her choices, as well as how different factors interact with one another to impact her choices. I will discuss appropriateness in terms of practicality, situation, the individual, and balancing competing factors.

Being Practical

An aspect of "being appropriate" includes wearing what is practical. Issues regarding revealing and concealing do not necessarily relate to being provocative or sexual. Sometimes how much one covers up relates to practical issues, such as weather. Rose explained that during winter: "Everything needs to be functional, which means there can't be too many layers of stuff between my armpit and my final layer because then I can't move my arm. It needs to be waterproof probably on the outside and I need to actually be warm." Rose stated that she wears clothing that allows her to move

comfortably. She explained why she is concerned with practicality more than any other factor:

> I'm not concerned about covering too much or too little based on social cues . . . and I don't know if it's just that I've had good enough luck or intuition that I don't usually find myself in situations like that anymore, where I feel like [I have] too many layers on or [am] wildly underdressed for an occasion . . . the main struggle that I still think about that requires actual thought is, am I going to be able to survive in this or not.

If she tended to dress in a manner that made her feel out of place, she might have been more concerned with whether or not her dress fit in with social expectations. However, Rose stated that she knows how to dress so that she *looks* appropriate, which has led her to focus on not freezing during Midwest winters and not roasting during the summer.

The concept of what is appropriate may shift from season to season, especially in places with temperature extremes where one can observe drastic shifts between what people wear from one season to another. Even people who prefer to cover up most of their skin and/or form tend to wear less clothing in a Midwestern summer than during winter. Nina felt that standards need to be different in the summer than they are other times of year: "Summertime is a little bit different, though, because you should be able to wear a tank-top and shorts and not be worried." Nina is aware of mores and her use of the phrase "you should be able to" suggests that she feels there are times comfort should take priority over propriety, or that propriety should not be absolute. Emily said, "in the summer I can barely get myself to put jeans on, so I wear shorts most often. And dresses

and I also usually have my arms free, so I would probably still wear the tee-shirt and the tank-top, or just the tank-top, but no sweater and also no scarf." Emily is more revealing in the summer by default, simply because she does not want to overheat. Her clothes are not necessarily any more sexy than what she wears the rest of the year. If she were to wear summer clothes in winter she would be much more revealed than everyone else, but in the summer she is still covered up relative to many of her peers.

In some cases it may be necessary to sacrifice personal style in order to dress practically. For instance, Adrienne said that she is more involved in what she wears when it is not really cold out: "I don't have to wear pants or something covering my legs . . . I love heels . . . for winter they're close-toed obviously." She often chooses to wear tights when she is not wearing pants: "When going out dancing I like to wear dresses or skirts, so definitely for the winter I usually pair them with some kind of stocking or tight." Once again, dressing in winter relates to coverage, probably for multiple reasons. In the summer, she tends to wear clothing that works for multiple settings: "Most of the things I would wear during the summer would just work in both settings [during the day and going out at night]." There is a clear demarcation, at least in winter, of what should be worn when. She would not wear a going-out dress to school and would instead dress up clothing from school to make it right for going out. In summer she wears dresses that she perceives as being more flexible, such that during the day she might wear a dress and just add heels at night.

Another concern related to appropriateness is activity. Stella is very physically active and takes part in pilates and climbing. When rock climbing she tends to wear jeans

because she is less concerned with them getting ripped up: "I can stretch in [baggy jeans] to climb, but they're comfortable for climbing in front of people too . . . . I've had a picture taken [while climbing] wearing yoga pants and . . . [I'm] never going to do it again." She went on to say that while rock climbing one is "exposed in many ways." It is better to be more covered up while climbing to protect oneself, but Stella also does not want to be observed from behind while climbing in yoga pants because of unflattering angles.

Next, I will address how dressing appropriately shifts depending on the situation.

Situation

Situation refers to both where one is and who will be there. When I asked Stella what she thinks about when getting dressed she said, "Who's going to be there is probably the first one . . . where it's going to be-slash-what are we doing." Her clothing choices are partially about her own comfort, but partially about being suitable. An outfit is suitable if it functions for a particular activity/ temperature and is not considered outré by others. After being asked what influences her choices about how much she reveals or conceals her body, Jennifer said: "Definitely the setting. Um, if it's more of a professional or casual, who I'm going to be around, if it's just with friends, if it's children, if it's elderly adults or middle-aged adults or peers." It seems that certain choices are acceptable with friends but with older or younger people she may dress differently. With older people perhaps she is concerned with being misread because their sense of appropriateness differs from hers. With younger people, she is concerned partially with what their guardians think, but also with providing a positive example of

how to dress. Leah gave a similar example about not wanting to be too exposed around certain people: "I wouldn't want to wear something tiny around my grandparents." I asked her what she would define as something tiny and she said: "A short skirt, or a I have a few crop tops that I wouldn't wear. Or like at school I wouldn't wear anything like that." With her family, Leah may dress a little more conservatively, possibly relating to what she imagines their standards of appropriateness to be. Likewise, she said that she does not wear clothing that exposes her at school, although at another point in the interview Leah mentioned a very short mini-skirt that she wears to school with tights, which suggests that someone's concept of what is appropriate may not always be consistent.

Some people are very conscious of distinguishing between how they dress in private and in public. For example, Stella described that she used to wear sweatpants out in public, but it never felt right: "I like differentiating being home from being in public, so things like sweatpants and gym pants I would never wear in public." At home, a sense of propriety may be less important, especially if one is alone or with people to whom one is very close, such as family or a roommate. Kaiser (1997) differentiated between the *private* context and the *public* context and explained that we tend to be more concerned with what others think of us when we are in a *public* context. However, one may still be judged for what one wears at home. Emily said:

> I always wear leggings and I don't really wear them to school or to work unless I
> have like a long sweater or a skirt or something, but when I'm around home I
> wear them a lot—they're just so comfortable. And my brother makes fun of me

and just rips on them, and I don't really care what he says because when I'm at

home I can do whatever I want.

Emily does feel wearing leggings, especially with a short shirt, is inappropriate in certain

settings, but at home she feels that comfort should take priority.

What is appropriate varies from situation to situation and how much one reveals

or conceals may be a conscious choice. Jennifer explained that she is more comfortable

with cleavage when going out at night: "I would be a lot more comfortable showing that

and expressing that when I'm going out dancing or just out with friends . . . in school it

feels [like a] more professional setting, where I'm not as comfortable showing that." It

seems that she sees a parallel between cleavage and sexuality, and thinks that sexuality

does not belong in professional settings.

Dressing for everyday situations. One way of dealing with dressing for everyday is

to wear more basic styles of clothing so that one does not have to consider whether a

particular garment is appropriate or not. According to Adrienne: "Day-to-day I kind of

have the same clothing and most of it is the same coverage wise, like tee-shirts—or long-

sleeved shirts, scoop necks, or v-necks, nothing too low . . . .Most of the time I'm able to

throw something on and not worry about it." Adrienne has a "uniform" that is not very

revealing so she does not have to worry about whether or not what she is wearing to

school is appropriate, suggesting that she feels there are certain boundaries that should

not be crossed in more professional/educational settings.

Rose feels it is very important to be dressed appropriately for the wide variety of

situations that she encounters in a day, so part of her solution is to dress in a manner that

is very flexible:

I want to get dressed in the morning and I don't really want to change my outfit

until I go to bed at night and I want to be doing a lot of different things and I want

to be appropriate for school or work, but comfortable, so relaxed but appropriate,

I want to be able maybe change my jacket, add a scarf and suddenly my entire

color-story has changed, suddenly like the tightness of my wardrobe, like maybe

it's something tighter and then items get layered on top that are looser, looser,

looser, so depending on the situation you could shed down to your body layer,

like, I'm cute to go out dancing because that just happened to be what I guess I'm

doing tonight . . . and because my wardrobe is not very large, all of my pieces

have to be pulling triple duty in outfits, I do not have anything that I only wear

one place.

Versatility is very important to Rose as she wants her clothes to work for many occasions

and she does not want to have to change her wardrobe during any particular day. She

wears interchangeable clothes, which means avoiding more extreme pieces, thus allowing

her to focus on other aspects of her life.

Some people have a stricter sense of what is appropriate at school, whereas others

have more fluid boundaries between what they wear, or would wear, from one situation

to another. About showing cleavage at school Emily said: "I just don't feel like it's

appropriate, I mean, it's, there's not, people just don't walk around with cleavage at

school, maybe some people do, but, I don't know . . . and there's just no real need for it. "
Emily viewed cleavage at school as inappropriate and did not seem to notice that some
people *do* show cleavage. Perhaps she implied that it is so incongruous that everyone else
must think it strange as well. When she said that there is "no need" to show cleavage, she
presumably meant that there are situations in which showing cleavage is more
appropriate. For Nina, situation will alter what she wears somewhat, but she dresses
mostly for herself:

> I would dress relatively the same, what I wear to school as with what I wear out. I
> mean maybe I would ditch like if I was wearing a grandma sweater and wear a
> cropped blazer or something like that. But I do have [a dress that is] just covered
> in sequins . . . that I will wear to class and I have really shiny, pretty, shimmery
> semi risqué things that I will wear to school just because I like how I feel in them,
> I like them, I love it . . . . I like to be classy, or I like to think that I'm classy. I
> have different kind of views [than others] on what is okay and what is not okay.

Dress is very personal for Nina and her choices relate to how clothes make her feel in a
very conscious way. While she may reveal a little more when she goes out at night, she
does not feel compelled to dress differently during the day. She is conscious that others
may perceive her outfits as "risqué" or inappropriate, but this awareness does not bother
her, as she is not dressing to please or surprise others, but to make herself feel good.

Some individuals make a clear distinction between what they wear every day and
what they wear when they go out. For instance, Jennifer's comments suggest that as she
transitions from day to night she tends to show more skin, although it is unclear if this is

by design or simply because the kinds of clothing designed for going out (at the stores where she shops) tend to be more revealing. If Jennifer had to go out at night without changing from what she had worn to school she would wear: "a tank-top or a nicer top underneath and during school I'd probably throw a sweatshirt or a cardigan or something over it that I could just take off later." She has a clear sense of what she wears if she is going out after school. She will cover up what she would rather wear out, meaning that going out implies wearing less.

Going out. The common perception among my participants is that it is normal for women to wear more revealing clothing when going out at night. When comparing what she would wear at night to what she would wear during the day, Stella said: "It would probably be shorter, cleaner, less wrinkled . . .," but later on she said: "Now that I'm thinking about it, I'm wearing kind of a short skirt right now." Stella's perception is that she wears more revealing clothing when going out at night than she wears during the day, but in reality she may not change that aspect of her style very significantly. Helena said that: "I think that sometimes, depending on the venue, you do become more revealed when you go out, but not necessarily always." I asked her when she would be more revealed and she replied that, most of the time even when she is going out, which does not mean going to bars and clubs, she wears clothing that she would be comfortable wearing to school, but:

> I think in summer, there's like events that I would go to, like a dance or
> something in summer, where like there's been time where I will wear spaghetti
> straps or something, like a summer   wedding, then I think I am more revealed

probably, just in terms of neckline being lower, like halter-top dress sort of thing

and the back is open . . . . I think sometimes it's because other people are doing it,

and it's one of those things that's socially acceptable.

There may be certain situations when it is appropriate, or expected, to be more revealed,

but Helena does not usually end up in such venues. In the summer, she might wear

something more revealing than what she would wear to school, but that also seems

related to context and what she thinks others will be wearing. It seems like she may be

more likely to spend time with other people with a similar aesthetic to herself, but not

always. She seems to have a strong sense of herself, but at the same time she remains

conscious of others.

Sometimes, shifting from day to night may involve altering how much of one's

body is visible, but some people have other ways of changing their style. For example,

Adrienne explained that, for her, going out does not necessarily involve wearing more

revealing clothing. Rather she said: "I'll bring a belt or a necklace to school to kind of

dress it up . . . ." Yet, at the same time, in some situations, Adrienne does not want to

reveal a lot of skin, but in others she feels that it is necessary to reveal some skin: "I

don't like to reveal a lot of my body in certain situations. I feel like… where you're going

out or something, some higher [shorter] skirts or something are needed." Adrienne's

comment reflects current fashion trends. I have observed that at some stores selling

clothing marketed to young women for going out at night sometimes is shorter than skirts

marked to be worn during the day.

For individuals who prefer basic styles during the day, going out may require more thought and effort, partially because they believe that there is a wider range of acceptable garments. Adrienne explained that she thinks more about how much she is revealing and concealing when she is going out:

> I tend to think about it and I think about where I'm going and if I'm going to a dance club versus some friend's house for a party, depending on who's going to be there. If I'm going somewhere in public, like to a club, I'm not going to wear something that's more revealing because there are going to be people that I don't know and people that I don't want to know seeing me like that. Versus, if I'm going to a friend's house and I'm probably going to know everyone there I might be more inclined to wear something that's a little more revealing, if I'm in that mood.

It may be fun to wear more revealing clothes sometimes, but Adrienne prefers to dress this way when she will be with people who already know her and are less likely to misinterpret her dress or make her feel uncomfortable. Going out wearing revealing clothing may mean getting more attention and that attention may not always be wanted, especially from strangers. Therefore women may feel safer wearing more extreme clothing when more sheltered from the public eye.

Sometimes it is challenging to differentiate between what is appropriate for the setting versus what is appropriate for the individual. Jennifer described a woman she saw in a restaurant who she felt was inappropriate:

This middle-aged woman wearing these black, really tight black pants with this really tight, lace black shirt, it was long sleeved, but it was lace and you could obviously see through it and she didn't have anything underneath it but her black bra. I thought that was pretty inappropriate for the setting and just for her age.

It is unclear if the woman in this example was inappropriate because of the setting or because she was not young and a sheer shirt implied sexuality in a way that made Jennifer uncomfortable, or because she did not have a nice enough body to pull it off. In all likelihood, the setting and the individual overlapped.

In the following sub-section, I will address appropriateness relative to the individual.

Individual

Dressing appropriately can relate to the individual in terms of whether what she is wearing is right for her appearance (overall shape, height, weight) and who she is (her age, her social class, her current role). Thus, what is appropriate for one person in a particular situation may not be appropriate for someone else, even in the same situation.

A particular garment or style can be inappropriate if a person is "too old" or if she is "too young." Adrienne explained that, when she was growing up, her mother monitored what she wore based on age: "There was an instance in seventh grade where I tried on a bikini and my mom was like 'absolutely not. You are 12' or 13 or whatever I was. 'That's not going to happen.'" At the time I was kind of bummed out about it, but now I'm glad I didn't grow up that fast." What it is acceptable to wear may shift over time. Dressing like an adult when one is too young can be seen as becoming more like an

adult, perhaps because it changes how others may behave toward us, not because it actually changes who we are. That is, people may assume that someone is older than she actually is and treat her accordingly if she is dressed in a manner usually reserved for older individuals. Adrienne described a v-neck shirt that she used to wear with another shirt underneath, but when she went home over break she wore it without one and asked her mother about it. Her mother said: "Because it was high school—now it's okay." It seems that her mother's point was not that it is wrong to be sexually appealing, rather one needs to be an adult in order to dress like one, perhaps because as an adult one is more equipped to understand the meaning that her clothing choices has in the eyes of others.

Body type, especially in terms of breast size, was an important theme, although only one participant actually used the word "breast." Most participants preferred the term "curvy," but would then start discussing low-cut shirts. Part of Nina's awareness stems from her experience as someone with a larger bust, so she finds the idea that curvier women should wear clothing with more coverage very frustrating:

> Well let's say that there's somebody that is a B-cup and I'm a DD. They will put on the same shirt that I'm wearing and less of their breast will be showing because they don't have as much as I do. So therefore people would deem it more appropriate for them to wear than for me to wear, even though it's the same thing . . . I just have a little bit more cleavage to deal with than they do and generally then I wear a cardigan over it or something.

Body type is significant and a common idea is that people ought to dress for their body type—not just to flatter, but in terms of what is too revealing. Some of the participants

stated that cleavage has a different meaning for a flatter chested person than for a larger

busted person. A curvier woman's breasts are almost always more apparent. One

perspective is that curvier women should adjust their clothes to conceal more, but Nina

feels that she should not have to cover up her bust more than anyone else does. She said

that she will try to cover up, but the main idea is that she feels she should not have to

worry all the time about what suits her bust, or disguises it. Adrienne said "I'm lucky that

I don't have a super curvy body, so a lot of things I feel like if you have a super curvy

body look a little bit more risqué, but I don't like to reveal a lot of my body in certain

situations." Someone who is curvier is more likely to be sexualized because the body is

more visible and extreme because her contours are more visible. It is interesting that

Adrienne is relieved that she is not very curvy as it seems to remove from her a certain

responsibility. If she were more curvy she might feel the need to avoid showing cleavage,

whereas as she is, she does not feel she has to worry as much. It implies the perhaps

obvious statement that skin is associated with sex/being risqué and relates to certain

assumptions about curvy women. She is not making these assumptions herself, but she is

aware that others may make them.

Helena related a specific story about breast size and revealing one's body: "I

have a friend who she's just very endowed and so it's difficult for her not to have

cleavage and she kind of just doesn't really care and she was at one point staying with her

aunt and uncle and [her uncle] was like 'it's distracting and I don't want to be distracted

by my niece.'" For Helena, it is important to take into consideration how clothing looks

on different individuals. She implied that her friend is viewed differently than a smaller

chested person would be in the same clothes. Nina described herself as being "bigger up top" than other young women, which frustrates her not because she wants to change her body but because of how others view her clothing choices. She describes how she became aware that her body type was deemed less appropriate for certain styles of clothing than her peers' body types:

> In 9th grade, I was wearing two tank-tops, like a tank-top underneath a cuter, yellow babydoll that I thought was so cute and I was wearing a pair of jeans and [I was sent] to the principal's office and he was like, "apparently you're not wearing something that's very appropriate. Somebody said that your tank-top's too low." And I corrected him and "tank top*s*, two, I'm wearing two." Like how is this bad? . . . I was embarrassed, I was like, "are you seriously calling me out because I'm wearing something that everybody's wearing?"

The comments felt very personal because Nina felt like she was being criticized for her body type, which was something that was out of her control. Her body caused her to be judged differently than others when she wears what they wear, which she found very frustrating because she felt that the wearer's clothes, rather than the wearer's body should be evaluated, although clothing and bodies can be seen as inextricably linked.

However, while Nina stated that she should not have to change the style of her clothing because of her body type (i.e. she should still be able to wear tank-tops or a tee-shirt with a lower neckline), she expressed frustration with finding clothing that fits her properly: "I've tried on dresses, where it's like, everything fits perfect, like it gives me a nice waist and it makes it appear as if I have a butt . . . but it will be way too tight on my

bust and it will do like a weird pop-thing, that is just unflattering." Nina is not arguing that she should go out and buy exactly the same shirt that someone with a smaller bust buys, but that she should not feel obligated to hide under her clothing just because her curves are more apparent.

Someone without cleavage might also consciously avoid wearing shirts that emphasize her bust. Rose feels that she should not wear low-cut shirts because she feels they do not flatter her shape:

> I don't ever show cleavage because I don't have any, like it's not that my chest is very small, it's that the way that my bust, if I were a classical sculpture, and my bust from here up. I don't feel like this area is highlighted by something like a v-neck shirt that's meant to show off cleavage. Those items look, awful, awful, awful on me. Or the straight across that's meant to show off how big your chest possibly is, silhouette, those things don't look good on me. So I go more for undergarments that create a natural bust-line.

Rose does not avoid cleavage only because she finds it too revealing, but also because she does not think that showing her chest works well for her body. What is appealing or sexy on one person may not be suited to someone else. Some individuals who do not have to worry about cleavage are less inclined to consider neckline when getting dressed. Stella said:

> I think that this is a situation where being skinnier I can get away with a lot more and neckline in design is something I started to think about when [we were] learning to fit a person as opposed to a form so we all partnered up with people

and had to make outfits for them and there was a gal in our class who had huge

boobs, like [a] giant bust and this other girl had to design for her and she ended up

doing it really awesome, she made just like an absolutely gorgeous garment for

her and I guess that just got me thinking about things, it was like, oh are there

necklines that don't look good on me?

Neckline is not central to how Stella dresses, but she mentioned a large-breasted

classmate and how it suddenly occurred to her that neckline might be an issue for others,

and even for herself. Proper fit can be a concern when trying to find clothing. For

instance, it can be difficult for someone who is taller or shorter than average to find

clothing that fits correctly. Leah said: "Being tall, things are much smaller on you than

you think they're going to be." Even if she does not mean to expose her legs, she is more

likely to simply because clothing may be made for someone with shorter legs. Wearing

clothing in which one feels attractive and that one feels suits one's body type is another

factor. For example, Jennifer feels that her stomach is not flat enough, so she does not

want to show that part of her body: "I would never consider baring that, maybe someday

when I'm more in shape." She is ashamed of her stomach, or at least does not believe it is

sufficiently attractive to be seen, so she prefers to hide it. Jennifer also applied this logic

to others and said that: "I think everyone should figure out what works best for their body

type and just kind of dressing for their body, to accentuate what they have." It appears

that Jennifer would change how she dresses if she thought that she could "pull it off." She

considers others' gazes (even if only implicitly) and does not want to look like someone

whose clothes are better suited to someone with a different body type. Nina described

how the clothes she wanted to wear in junior high did not flatter the body type she had then: "I was fairly chubby when I was that age. Just had my velvet pantsuit on . . . . It was awful." Nina created an image of herself when she was younger. It sounds as if she did not think she was self-aware when she was younger. As a young adolescent, she dressed in a manner that she now perceives as unflattering.

While a skinny ideal is perpetuated in our culture, not everyone feels that being skinny is always an asset. Stella thinks that there are certain styles she should not wear because she is thin: "I think it's just more about, more about something that's baggy whether it's high or low as opposed to something tight." If something is too baggy, or too tight, Stella feels that it emphasizes her slender frame in an unflattering way, so she prefers to dress in a way that makes her look more "average."

Someone may choose to wear tighter clothing because it fits better, not because she wants her clothing to be more sexually appealing. Rose explained:

> I think I have a good body that looks good in tightly fitted items—I don't really
>
> see the point—a lot of times also when you wear looser clothing, that becomes
>
> less functional because I don't like to have bunched up clothing.

Rose tied the idea of flattering and functional clothes together, as something with extraneous fabric does not look good and hampers movement. It is desirable to find a balance between clothing that fits one too loosely and clothing that is too tight, sometimes just because a correct fit is more flattering. Helena eschews wearing clothing that is too loose as well as clothing that clings in unattractive places:

Sometimes if stuff is really loose I feel like it makes me look pregnant and then I don't want to wear it. . .certain knit fabrics I just don't like to wear because I don't like how they fit my waist-slash-hip, those are times when I'd be more comfortable wearing something that's a little looser because I just don't want, like the way knit hugs sometimes and I don't think it's so much a modesty thing so much as it just, not always satisfied with shape of my waist.

Some choices do relate to modesty, but being modest does not mean Helena does not care about being attractive and often choices relate as much to dressing in a way that is appealing. Also, if something hugs certain body parts it reminds her of the parts of her body that she does not really like, which will be discussed later.

A woman may be viewed differently depending on whether or not she is able to make an outfit look good, even if the outfit is one that most people would never wear in that particular setting. Jennifer describes a friend who Jennifer believes pulls off more revealing styles:

She'll wear just like a lace top with just her bra underneath. She does it in a really tasteful way, I've never felt that what she wears is inappropriate—there were actually maybe a couple of times where we were actually at like a school function and I noticed she was wearing that and maybe she could have put a tank-top underneath those times, but like when we're going out for instance I don't think it's inappropriate that she would wear something like that because she makes it look good.

Whether or not Jennifer thought whether or not something was appropriate often related to the wearer's ability to make her clothes "look good." She said that she does not like to show much cleavage at school, but did not have a problem with her friend who wore a sheer shirt that showed her bra. However, her statement suggested she was not sure that her friend's outfit *was* appropriate for the setting—yet because it was appealing it was acceptable, or perhaps she did not want to judge her friend. Yet for herself, Jennifer does not even like her bra strap to show, perhaps not so much because of how much skin she is showing but because of what it implies. I believe that the connotation of a bra strap showing differs from a tank-top strap, even if they look virtually the same because we may perceive a tank-top as outerwear and a bra as underwear.

As stated, different factors relating to appropriateness need to be balanced, although they are not always entirely reconcilable. Specifically in terms of revealing and concealing, Emily explained that she is much more concerned with managing how much of her body shows during the summer: "[in the summer] I'm often wearing dresses and sometimes I wonder if my shorts are too short or my dress is too short or too flowy, but I think a lot of that is having to do with being with kids all the time and I want to be appropriate, but at the same time I don't want to get hot." In summer she is more worried because she wears less clothing and spends more time with children, which makes her concerned with modeling "good behavior." Perhaps, in this case she is speaking only of herself. In winter, she does not want to be cold, so she wears clothing that covers most of her body and thus she does not have to worry about being inappropriate.

Being Respected

Some participants implied that they could control, or at least influence, others' opinions of them based on how they dressed. Helena said: "I don't want to be viewed in a certain way because of the length of my shorts," which indicates that she believes her clothing carries certain messages to people. Wobst (1977) argued that we do encode meaning into dress, but the more complicated the meaning is the more likely it will be misread by others. While one may seek to control how others perceive her, unless she is sending a very specific message to individuals within her subculture, the message she intends to send may or may not be received. Thus, individuals who are concerned with what others think may seek to find out how their choices will be read and/or may make decisions based on how they interpret others' appearance.

Some participants expressed that job interviews or even attending university classes evoked clearer rules that one ought to follow in order to be respected. Jennifer said: "I definitely think a lot about what I'm going to wear in an interview or any sort of professional setting." She implied that she thinks certain kinds of dress will influence others to take her more seriously, while dressing less carefully could be detrimental. This perspective has been propagated in popular press books such as *New Women's Dress for Success* (Molloy, 1988). While one has less at stake when going to class than at a job interview, some participants were concerned also with the impression they make, especially on professors. For instance, Helena explained: "I don't want a professor to be thinking 'Oh, she's got the recent Victoria's Secret bra.' It's not something I feel is very professional." Under these circumstances being respected means being taken seriously. It can be distracting to others if one is dressed in a provocative manner, which may lead

others to think that someone is thoughtless, has poor judgment or even is promiscuous. Jennifer said that she is worried about being "looked down upon," which she explained means that she worries that showing cleavage "may lower someone's level of respect for me . . . . I don't assume that people judge based on that, but I'm sure that does happen." She worries that showing cleavage will cause others to disrespect her.

Young women also may be concerned that men will take them less seriously as people if they dress in a manner that draws too much attention to their bodies. Someone may dress very consciously with the idea that their dress will evoke respect, sometimes regardless of behavior. Dressing to gain respect does not mean that one does not want to be noticed. In fact, one might want to be noticed for being well-dressed. Rose said that while her behavior is not generally conservative: "I don't ever want someone to look at me and judge me as being not the most high[ly] moral of an individual . . . because I feel like you get more respect if you are, you know, if you can look but not touch." Rose does not necessarily dress to show people exactly who she is but instead dresses to create a persona that garners respect. Helena also dresses to be respected, although for her dress and behavior are very closely aligned. She said: "I don't intend to do certain things, so why would I wear clothing that would cause someone to think I might." It is not that dressing actually *is* the act that is moral or immoral, but dress suggests how one could act. She does not seem to think that everyone interprets clothes the way that she does, but she has clear standards. Helena said that part of her reasoning stems from:

> The conversations I've had with my dad and [male family members] and my male
> friends and what goes through their minds when they see that . . . and if they

respect you as a person they don't want to be thinking of you as an object; how it

is hard for them not to . . . when somebody's wearing really short shorts, not to

think that way.

Based on what males have told her she believes that men have trouble controlling their

thoughts when a woman reveals her body. She takes the "male view" into consideration,

which is that it is hard for a man to take a woman seriously as a person if she is too

revealed. Thus, Helena hopes that if she conceals her body men will respect her more.

Helena has sometimes tried wearing clothing that deviates from her normal style

in that it has revealed more of her body, and she noticed that it changed how people

interacted with her, which was troubling: "I'm so used to not dressing that way and being

respected by the people I interact with generally, that then it was just like . . . if this is the

effect I have on people who don't know me I don't want to be around people that I [care

about]." Her female friends reacted with surprise. She saw parallels between dress and

respect partially because of how her friends reacted when she dressed differently and

partially based on her perceptions of what others were thinking. Helena takes being

respected as her responsibility, with the implication that she can gain respect by

mitigating her femaleness, or at least the sexual aspect of her femaleness. Yet, not

everyone feels that dress should be a deciding factor in whether one is respected. Nina

explained: "Oh, I can get respect no matter how I dress, but I think I have different views

on respect too . . . . I am open-minded to the max. I'm very lighthearted and when I talk

to people I don't really let a whole lot get to me." Nina suggests that respect should be

gained based on actions. She carries herself in a way that demands respect, so for her appearance and respect are not closely aligned.

Summary

This chapter considered how my participants learned about revealing and concealing their bodies and how they use this information to evaluate their choices regarding dress. First I looked at socialization and then I considered appropriateness. Socialization occurs at many different levels, although participants that talked about concepts related to socialization tended to discuss their families. Appropriateness encompasses both what is appropriate for different situations and for different individuals. However, the concept is complicated given that there is no one standard of what is appropriate. Instead, individuals must navigate between different social contexts where different standards apply.

CHAPTER FIVE:

FITTING IN AND STANDING OUT

In the Chapter 5 I examine at how participants talked about revealing and

concealing their bodies when in public situations. Dress functions as a means of

communication and must be understood as it operates within social and cultural contexts

(Roach-Higgins, Eicher & Johnson, 1995). Eicher, et al. (2000) wrote that dress functions

as a form of non-verbal communication and that both large and small elements of dress

convey information such as gender and age. However, as Wobst (1977) pointed out, the

messages encoded in dress are not always clear and the more complicated the meaning,

the more likely it is to be misinterpreted. It is easier to understand the messages encoded

in the dress of those from the same group or culture. Within a particular group,

individuals tend to conform to one another and differences between group members are

more apparent to those who belong (Eicher, et al.). Given the importance of dress in

sending signals and demonstrating group membership, it is unsurprising that participants

discussed dress in terms of group situations and signal sending. Participants discussed

revealing and concealing in terms of standing out to attract attention from men as well as

in terms of fitting in with and/or standing out from others.

Avoiding or Attracting Attention

In common parlance, whether or not a woman reveals or conceals her body

frequently is attributed to her desire for or aversion to attracting attention. Generally,

when I refer to wanting attention in this research I mean wanting attention from the

gender(s) to which one is sexually attracted. No participants discussed attracting

members of the same gender, so in the future I will refer to attracting men, but my decision is not intended to discount other kinds of sexual attraction. Participants were not inclined to talk about their own tendency to dress in the hopes of attracting members of the opposite sex. Instead, they surmised that other young women sometimes wear revealing clothing because they want this kind of attention.

Defining "Trashy"

The term "trashy" was brought up several times, in reference to how others might appear or in terms of not wanting to look trashy oneself. Trashy was almost always used in the context of wanting to attract men, usually with the connotation that these other young women use only their appearance to attract men. This type of clothing tends to be worn at clubs, for example, with low-lighting and very loud music. It seems that "trashy" clothing is defined as clothing that another person uses to purposefully seek out a certain (sexual) kind of (generally male) attention, especially in a setting where verbal communication is limited to perfunctory exchange, such as in a club where the music is too loud for conversing. According to Emily, an example of a "trashy" outfit might include: "Slashes in the dress and super low cut and really tight, maybe really tight." Nina said that cut-out dresses can be trashy if "They have it cut out, like, where you can see your stomach or your navel . . . not that I've seen that particular example." Nina stated that "trashy" is something that is both revealing and unflattering.

Stella gave the clearest demarcation between clothing that is simply revealing and clothing that is trashy. She said: "I have pictures of it in my mind and I'm trying to describe it, I know exactly. There's like some sort of difference between exposed like it's

a hot day and it's really comfortable and 'think what you want about my body', or like push-up bras and exposed thongs . . ." On a really hot day people may be expected to show more skin, but that differs from wearing a push-up bra, for example, which can be construed as a deliberate effort to show skin. The style described as "trashy" often includes fake tanned skin and bleached hair along with copious amounts of makeup. No one stated that they liked to wear clothing that is considered trashy, although Nina said: "I feel that there are people that would say some of the things I would want to wear or that I like to wear are trashy." However, she then said: "I don't think anything that I wear is trashy." While there is a general definition of what it means to be trashy, there is a continuum from trashy to not-trashy. Part of the reason that clothes are defined as "trashy" is because they are associated with a desire for male attention.

Dressing to Attract Attention

Being attractive and wanting attention does not have to be negative, and most participants acknowledged that there were times that they wanted attention in one form or another. However, no one stated that she liked to wear clothing that was considered trashy. Although no one had empirical evidence, many participants suggested that *other* young women wear revealing clothing because they desire attention and feel that showing their bodies is the only way to be considered appealing. Emily said: "I think it's a little sad when girls are dressed to the bare minimum." She views dressing this way as pathetic, as if these girls feel that they have nothing else to offer. Leah felt that girls who wear "super-cleavagy shirts and tight pants" may "need that sort of reassurances from males, or they feel that they need to look 'hotter' than all the other girls'. . . it's just an

obvious kind of dressing that's not appealing to me." Wearing really revealing clothing may be something that some people feel a "need" to do. Leah did not associate this type of dress with enjoyment or feeling confident. Instead, she seemed to see it as an indication of insecurity or a need for validation from men. To her, the main reason for dressing like that is not for one's self but for others.

Participants all talked about the idea of wanting attention, meaning wanting to be approached by others or sometimes dressing to find a partner, whether for the evening or on a more long term basis. Yet a person could also want attention as simple as compliments without having any intention of pursuing a romantic connection. Jennifer said: "Compliments are always welcome. Men, I'm single and, yeah. It's just nice to get compliments every once in a while." Jennifer suggested that she would like positive attention from strangers, even if it is not someone she would be interesting in dating. However, she also said: "I don't consider going to clubs—especially downtown—trying to find a boyfriend there." She also did not seem to be looking for casual sexual encounters, so, while she may appreciate compliments, she did not go out with the specific intent of getting attention from men. Dressing for attention can have negative connotations because it implies that one is not necessarily comfortable with a style but is wearing it just to get noticed by guys. Nina said: "[my male friends] know that I'm not just looking for attention and they know that I'm not a whore that's just showing off my body to attract dates or fans or something like that." Intention can be more important that what one is wearing.

Some people will put more thought into what they are wearing when they are going on a date than they do when they dress for every day. In some cases this may mean wearing something more body-conscious, because of wanting to be appealing. Leah suggested that guys do not understand more unusual fashions, so she might wear something more simple because: "I want to look cute to them," so she would wear "something [with] not too many patterns going on . . . something off the shoulder, something sexy. . ." Although Leah regularly wears short skirts, she does not perceive her usual, eclectic style as being appealing to guys. What does it mean to be appealing? For Rose, being appealing does not mean showing skin, but it might mean accentuating her body: "Well, clearly if I'm going out on a date, I'll probably wear something a little more body revealing, not so much as skin, probably more shape . . . . I feel like I look more professional when my clothes fit more tightly." Rose said that she "clearly" wears something more body conscious when she goes on a date, implying that revealing one's body is related to having better luck romantically. Rose is concerned with subtlety and with getting positive reactions. She transitioned from the idea of dating to looking professional, which suggests that she may want her dates to see her as someone who is both attractive and formidable, or that she associates both dating and being professional with wanting to be impressive.

Wanting to be attractive is complicated, as sometimes it may mean revealing more, but the decision to reveal may not be conscious. In some cases, smaller details, such as wearing lipstick, may be what a person does to feel attractive. Stella said:

I think I had a crush on some guy that hung out at some coffee shop and I was

going to go over there and study and so of course I get all dressed up, I put on my

lipstick . . . . I wear bright lipstick when I go out all the time, but usually, unless

I'm trying to cover up the fact that I haven't slept I usually don't wear lipstick

[during the day].

Wanting to be seen as sexually attractive is a gestalt—yes, a woman might wear a shorter

skirt, but it seems to be about looking as appealing as possible overall which might mean

lipstick rather than cleavage, not that the two are mutually exclusive.

If a woman does not usually wear revealing clothing, she may become very aware

of whether or not she is being noticed if she wears something more revealing than usual.

Helena said: "I totally got more double takes from people, which is flattering to a degree,

but it's like really, all I had to do was show more inches of my chest and you're looking

at me differently." She felt that a low-cut shirt made people view her differently, although

it is possible that she was simply more conscious of being watched because she was

anticipating being noticed. Her comments implied that attention based on one's

appearance alone can be less desirable because it lacks depth.

At other times, a woman may want to be seen as appealing without revealing

much of her body. Adrienne explained: "There's the misconception that you have to be

immodest to look hot, which I feel is not true. I feel like you can be really modest and

demure and still look really attractive and appealing." Adrienne believes that others think

that someone who is modest is trying to avoid attention and that others may believe that

being modest is less attractive. However, she argued sexiness and showing one's body

are not necessarily correlated and implied that there are different ways of being appealing as stated in the adage "leaving something to the imagination." This is a complicated concept of attractiveness, as it suggests that showing too much skin/form can be less attractive, meaning that one may attract the "wrong" kind of attention.

Attracting Negative Attention

The concept of "negative attention" is subjective, such that someone may find getting attention from many different men to be very uncomfortable, while others may enjoy the experience or seek it out. For instance, Emily said: "I'm not like asking for it with what I choose to wear. I think that indirectly says I'm not interested in any old guy who will give me attention just because I'm showing most of my chest." When I asked her what she meant by "asking for it" she said: "That was probably a bad choice of words" and elaborated that she meant asking for a particular kind of attention, not asking to be raped or assaulted. She said that: "Sometime if you show up like that [quite revealing], maybe you are looking for someone to take home from the bar and I morally typically would not do that." Emily related revealing clothing to wanting sexual attention. Revealing one's body can be seen as a way of demonstrating one's potential willingness to be approached. Emily was not comfortable being viewed this way and may be worried about being misread by those who do not know her well. She wanted to be clear that she was not "looking for people to sleep with" and associated dress with implying potential action. It is possible that some young women who reveal their bodies are less discerning and want attention from anyone, but in some cases young women may wear revealing clothing in order to follow social expectations.

In between dressing for attention or wanting to avoid attention there is room for the concept of dressing without considering attention. Adrienne explained: " I have a boyfriend, so I don't need to look super . . . skin revealing . . . . I don't like revealing a lot of my body in public situations." The idea that having a boyfriend means not wanting (or "needing") to attract attention implies being revealing attracts a certain kind of attention that is primarily sexual. Adrienne suggested that dressing in more revealing clothes may help with initially attracting a partner.

Dressing to Avoid Attention

The idea of dressing to avoid attention does not mean wanting to be invisible to others, but it may suggest wanting to be noticed and/or approached only by select people. Someone can want a certain amount of attention without wanting attention from everyone, as Adrienne expressed: "I like feeling sexy, but I don't like attention from people I don't want attention from, which I feel is a little different from most people." She went on to say: "I don't want attention from random people in a club who might notice that I'm wearing a short skirt." Adrienne is conscious of who is paying attention to her and while it can be enjoyable to be noticed, she wants some control over who notices her. She feels that other young women may desire attention from many people. The kind of attention she might receive from someone in a club probably does not relate to her as a person, but is a kind of general objectification that she prefers to avoid. She said that she does feel she can wear something more revealing when she is with her boyfriend because she will not "get that kind of attention," but she remains aware of how those who do not know her might view her.

Going out with a girl friend who is dressed more provocatively can both reinforce one's preference to avoid attention and make her extremely aware of the lack of attention. Emily described going out with one of her friends who has a very different personality and sense of style: "I didn't actually want to go out with her because I would feel kind of uncomfortable. You know, all of the guys would talk to her and that's okay, I don't really want the guys to talk to me anyway, but it's also kind of awkward to just stand there and be like 'okay, well here I am.'" She would have preferred not to be in that situation because it was outside of her comfort zone. However, being ignored was preferable to revealing her body and feeling awkward for that reason. She said: "I'm not blatantly sexual with people I don't know." For her, revealing her body in the way that people are inclined to at clubs implies desire for sex more than anything else.

In the next section I will address fitting in and standing out, which is a another way of considering revealing or concealing one's body impacts one's interactions with others.

Fitting In/Standing Out

By fitting in, I mean dressing and acting in a way that conforms to others within a particular context. Standing out refers to dressing and behaving in a way that makes one more noticeable than others. On the one hand, a person can stand out for failing to look sufficiently like others, or she can stand out for looking better than others. However, fitting in to standing out is a continuum. The extreme of fitting in would be hypothetical, as in clones who are completely identical, while the extreme of standing out would imply that one is entirely different from everyone else. Because what fits in in one situation will

stand out in another, there is no simple answer as to what determines whether someone is doing one or the other or some combination. Whether or not a person fits in or stands out is determined by a host of factors. Someone's clothing choice could enable her to fit in perfectly, but her actions could make her stand out. Something that is noticeable in one situation may be blend in perfectly in another. For example, bare legs stand out more in winter than in the summer, and a person with bare legs in the winter may simply look cold, but she also may look like she is trying to show off her body.

Whether or not a person fits in or stands out also is a matter of perception. This concept can be better understood using symbolic interactionism. Kaiser (1983-1984) wrote: "The self is viewed both as being an active perceiver trying to interpret symbols tied to another person and as a reflection of others' observations" (p. 3). That is, fitting in and standing out can relate to one's observations of others or one's perceptions regarding being observed. A person can notice that someone else is standing out, which can be a neutral observation or a negative or positive judgment, depending on how the other person stands out. If someone believes that she is standing out in relation to others, she may be projecting her concerns about failing to conform onto the other people. Alternatively, one could dress in the hopes of standing out in relation to others and imagine what others are thinking. Her projections could be based entirely on conjecture/fantasy or they could be based on previous experiences. That is, someone may choose to wear a particular garment because she feels it will make her appear more like others and/or because she feels it will make her appear unique. In the following sub-sections I will address fitting in, following fashion, and standing out.

Fitting In

Participants tended to talk about "fitting in" relative to themselves and did not tend to recount stories in which they felt that others were fitting in or greatly desired to fit in. There were two main variations within the concept of fitting in: first impressions, and fitting in with a particular group on an ongoing basis.

Some participants mentioned that they wanted to wear something that would make them fit in when they are meeting new people. Stella explained that she is worried that if she wears something unusual, she will be judged as strange before she is given a chance to demonstrate her personality:

> I challenge myself to not care and wear what I think is attractive or stylish or whatever, but [when] meeting new people . . . . I really care and I put so much thought into what I'm going to wear to meet friends of friends when I should just wear whatever I think is stylish or comfortable.

Stella said that when she is meeting people who are important to her friends she tries to adapt what she wears to how she imagines the people she is meeting tend to dress. For example, if she is meeting people who still live in the small town in which they grew up, she probably will wear jeans and a tee-shirt, whereas if she is going to an art opening in the city, she will wear something that fits in with that crowd. It is not that she wants to disguise her personality. Rather, she does not want her clothing to obscure her and make her seem unapproachable: "I really like meeting new people [and] I like being friends with people and I guess it's easier to get along with someone when you have similarities like that and obviously when you first meet someone, what you're wearing is one of their

very first impressions of you." Stella consciously dresses to fit in with others, not because she is afraid to be herself, but in order to make others more comfortable with her. In these social situations, she perceives looking very different as a communication barrier. She manages her appearance in order to display an identity (Kaiser, 1997).

A person's desire to fit in may stem from having had a negative experience with standing out. Rose described a party she went to as a college freshman:

I had the mentality also of 'we're going out' means a completely different

wardrobe or outfit, type of thing . . . I had on a really tight shirt, it was sort of like

a tank-top shirt, and I had on lipstick and I had my hair done and makeup and

contacts and jewelry and stuff, tight jeans on. And we get to the party and it was

like a dinner party of grad students. . . everyone [was] wearing wool socks and a

cozy extra large wool sweater . . . . There was nothing I could do to blend in.

Rose demonstrated keen awareness of what others wore and it seemed that if she were to be out of place she would rather have been more covered than everyone else. Being more revealed was very embarrassing because she assumed that she would be perceived as "slutty" and not taken seriously. She wanted to fit in stylistically so that she would be recognized for what she had to say, not for what she wore.

Some individuals want to blend in because they are afraid being judged for being different in a negative way, while some individuals may dress in a style that blends in because it is their personal preference. Jennifer explained: "I kind of like just being in the middle. I don't like standing out a whole lot. I mean, it's nice to be noticed and recognized and talked to, but at the same time I don't want people to look at me and be

[disparagingly] 'oh, who's that girl?'" Her aversion to standing out seems to stem from a fear of "negative" attention. Jennifer's perspective relates to projections about how she thinks others might react, whereas Emily uses her own sensibilities as a barometer: "There's always a certain amount of blending in I want to do . . . . I don't really feel comfortable being the one who stands out the most very often. I don't want to be like everyone else, but . . . I'm not one to put together crazy outfits or draw attention to myself, but I still want to be an individual." Emily expressed discomfort with standing out, at least in terms of her physical appearance, in most situations. For one person, the desire to fit in may relate to concern that others will censure her, whereas for another the main reason is that standing out does not suit her personality.

Whether or not one wants to fit in and/or stand out also may depend on a person's stage of life. During adolescence, physical appearance is particularly important (Kaiser, 1997) and many adolescents are concerned with fitting in with their peers, which can influence their clothing choices. Adrienne discussed the "popular girls" who all dressed similarly: "There was definitely the popular clique who wore the super-short jean skirts, which were awful . . . . It was nice actually being into fashion so early [in my life] because I realized that [what they were wearing] wasn't in fashion." Adrienne stated that she views herself as having been somewhat different from her peers and as more attuned to fashion outside the high school context. Because she read *Vogue*, which is aimed at an older audience, her context differed and she personally felt less need to dress in a revealing manner. Dressing in what was fashionable in the world outside of high school

would have made her stand out compared to her peers, but fit in with others who shared her perspective.

In adolescence, it is common for individuals in the same grade in school to have great variations in physical maturity, such as height or secondary sex characteristics (Smart, 1982). Developing earlier, or later, than one's peers may make an adolescent more inclined to hide her body. There were times when Nina was less comfortable showing her body because she felt it made her stand out: "I would try to conceal a little bit more, just like, okay, I'm developing now, what do I do? And then as time went on it was like, I shouldn't have to, I shouldn't have to worry about what other people are thinking about me." She felt that her body made her stand out too much and she worried that perhaps she should try to hide her figure because other people were less curvy than she was. Leah felt that she stood out too much because she was taller than most of her peers: "I was always super self conscious of being tall and thin. I was really, really skinny when I was younger, like stick thin and I was always so unhappy about it." She went on to say: "Most 13 year olds are self-conscious about something. It's just a tough age because you're awkward." Leah felt that if she had not been tall and skinny, she would have been unhappy with other attributes simply because she was at an age where most individuals were uncomfortable with themselves. She was hyperaware of her own appearance and felt that it made her stand out too much, but as an adult she is aware that others were probably just as concerned about their own appearances.

Clothing choices within a peer group may vary also because of the variance in group members' social maturity. A young woman may dress like others in her peer group

because she has not yet figured out what her own style is or because she is afraid to assert her own sense of style within her peer group. For example, when Emily first came to college, she felt that perhaps she should push herself to wear more revealing clothing because she thought that everyone else in her new setting did: "I thought maybe I should dress like the other girls, but I didn't really know how to dress slash want to slash feel comfortable doing that." I asked what changed so that she again became comfortable dressing in her own style and she responded:

> Probably just growing up, in general, and feeling more comfortable with who I am, aside from dress and style, just being myself and knowing what I'm into and what I'm not and the lifestyle I lead and, so, meeting people who are like me and, we rarely find ourselves in the club downtown or in any club, you know, if we do go out it's just kind of, just fun, we don't go out to pick up guys at Aqua or you know. I'm just not with that crowd. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

Emily went out dressed up like other girls at a transition point in her life when she was not as comfortable with herself. Yet, she opined that certain other young women wore wearing revealing clothing because they needed a particular kind of male attention to feel worthwhile. However, she also stated that attracting male attention was not *her* reason for wearing that style.

In the next sub-section, I will discuss how following fashion falls into a grey area between fitting in and standing out.

Following Fashion

Wanting to be fashionable poses a conundrum because by being in fashion an individual is fitting in with other fashionable people, but fashion also relates to a desire to stand out for having an unusual or particularly well-thought-out way of dressing. Rogers (2003) addressed innovativeness and argued that the adoption of trends can be broken into categories that follow a typical bell curve. Innovators (followed by early adopters) pick up new trends before the rest of the population. Extrapolating from this concept, innovators may fit in with one another, but will seem avant-garde to the majority. That is, a person who is extremely fashionable will fit in with her fashionable peers, but will stand out to the general public. Thus, when Stella is at a fashion industry event her awareness of her style differs from when she is going out to an event aimed at the general public:

> If it's something fashion related I usually want to wear something I made because it always comes up, so I'll make an effort to wear something that's one of my own designs [or] one of my friend's designs. Someone that I can help boast about. If I'm meeting people that I've never met before, like if it's friends of friends I'll probably wear something a little bit more low-key and something a little bit more standard, even though, I guess that's just an inner struggle as I want to be unique and have my style, but sometimes I'm very conscious of meeting new people and not wanting my appearance to be the first impression that I [make] on them in a negative way.

Because Stella is sensitive to her audience, she adjusts her personal style according to the impression that she wants to make. She does not adapt her style in order to dissemble, but because she fears that wearing fashionable clothing among people who lack an interest in being fashionable could be off-putting. She is aware that she dresses differently, not only according to situation, but according to the individuals with whom she is spending time.

What is fashionable may impact a woman's personal sense of style, such that someone who is very involved with fashion may find her own sensibilities shifting with the zeitgeist. For example, when I asked Stella what kinds of silhouettes she prefers she said: "Looser things on top, tighter things on the bottom. That's kind of the silhouette that's in style now." She does have a sense of style that is consistent despite evolving trends, but at the same time she adapts her wardrobe so that it fits in with what is avant-garde: "If it's in fashion to wear a short skirt, I'll wear a short skirt. If it's in fashion to wear turtlenecks, I'll probably wear turtlenecks." Stella seems to be saying that because fashion guides her choices, she will conceal or reveal what it is fashionable to conceal or reveal. However, discomfort with revealing parts of her body that she would rather not reveal may trump fashion. Adrienne said:

> If hemlines are falling that's kind of a fun thing to follow and the fact that I'm confident and I don't have to wear a certain length dress that makes me feel comfortable. I could try going for longer lengths because I feel like being confident means that I can try to follow fashion in the way that they reveal or conceal but with certain things. . .

Adrienne went on to explain she does not like current fashions that have cut-outs that reveal the wearer's ribcage just below the bust, but that she does attempt to follow some fashion trends. She correlates following fashion (or timely style) with confidence. Rather than feeling the need to conform to every fad, she follows the fashions that she enjoys and ignores those that she feels do not suit her. She is not so concerned with being fashionable that she will sacrifice her personal style.

Next, I consider what it means to stand out.

Standing Out

Revealing one's body has the potential to make one stand out, especially in situations where most people are not revealed. Emily explained: "If I'm wearing something very revealing and I'm at school, or anywhere, people are going to stare at me and that will draw attention to myself." In her mind, a person wearing revealing clothing is more noticeable, or perhaps the issue is that she is noticeable in a particular way that may make others make inaccurate or accurate but embarrassing assumptions about her actions and character.

For Jennifer, revealing clothing makes a woman stand out and concealing clothing makes her less noticeable. She said: "I feel like I'm always kind of in the middle of the spectrum. I'm not really super conservative by any means, but I'm not super flashy and out there and [I don't] want to be the center of attention all the time. I'm usually pretty straight in the middle." Fitting in too much implies being very conservative, but in reality wearing something that is extreme on either end of the spectrum makes a person noticeable, although Jennifer did not see it this way: "I think it's maybe sort of the same

thing with being in the mid-range of things, not being overly concealed and not being overly revealed. The same as not being super-standing out and not totally disappearing in a crowd. I think they're both kind of like in the middle field." Jennifer wanted to be seen as part of a group, so being in the middle of the spectrum meant fitting in to the greatest degree. She associated being revealed with being noticed and being concealed with not being noticed. She said: "[When I go out is] when I would be more willing to reveal more, to possibly stand out more." But when everyone is doing the same thing, wearing revealing clothing would not actually make her stand out. Rather, Jennifer's preference is to adapt to the setting by being more revealed.

Wanting to be more concealed does not universally imply that one does not want to be noticed. Modesty is important to Helena, but she is not modest because she feels the need to fit in, except perhaps with the people who are important to her. She said:

I think when I dress to a degree I always want to stand out, all with modesty being said, it's not like I want to hide . . . . I want to stand out. I want to look great. And I guess, I feel like, when I was younger I thought that in order to do that I wanted to dress like other people and I wanted to wear less clothing. 'Cause somehow that would make me stand out, and I guess, I have now come to a point of being like, I don't need to reveal skin to stand out.

Helena does want to stand out, but she wants her physical appearance to mirror her interior. She used to feel that she would stand out if she looked like everyone else, which is a paradox. She wanted to stand out by fitting in, by which I mean she associated standing out with being accepted by her peers. That is, she wanted to stand out from the

majority of students in order to fit in with her peer group. The members of a peer group may dress similarly to one another, which helps differentiate them from everyone else. Kaiser (1997) pointed out that group members tend to dress within certain constraints, but that individuals generally are allowed to change details in order to demonstrate their individuality.

Leah addressed the irony of trying to stand out and ending up fitting in: "I don't necessarily want to blend in, like completely, but I guess there's situations where you're kind of blending in." She explained: "When I go out I don't want to be underdressed, or overdressed depending on where I'm going. Like, if I go to one of these dance things I usually go to I usually end up blending in because the other people who are there are the type to wear things that I would wear too." She gave the example of wearing ripped-up tights, which was once unique, but now is done by everyone. Leah does not go out of her way to blend in, but she finds that places she likes to go involve people who are similar to her so they end up dressing somewhat alike without necessarily intending to. Whether or not blending in relates to revealing or concealing is contextual because what blends in during one situation, such as a low-cut top at a club, will stand out in another situation, such as at school or work. Despite the reality that one may try to stand out and end up fitting in, Leah said: "It's fun to go and see what everyone else is wearing, how everyone, like everyone's standing out so no one's really standing out, but it's still interesting to see how everyone stands out." Leah enjoys seeing what people wear when they go out because the types of clothing people wear have more personality, such as bright colors, mixed patterns, interesting silhouettes or embellishment. Perhaps part of why people

reveal more at night relates to the sort of clothes designed for events and the kinds of

clothes are generally considered acceptable to wear out, which has a long history in

Western culture. For example, Gernsheim (1981) pointed out that women in the Victorian

era revealed up to 15 centimeters (6 inches) more décolletage in the evening than during

the day.

Compared to concealing clothing, revealing clothing usually is more closely

associated with standing out, but there are circumstances when the opposite is the case.

Emily does not tend to reveal her body, but there are times when she has gone out with

friends who like to dress up: "If I go out with my friends and I go to a bar and everyone is

. . . glammed up and have their pleather dress and super high heels . . . . I [still] show up

in my typical dress and cardigan." Emily tends to stay true to what she is comfortable

wearing, but that can make her stand out too much if everyone else is wearing revealing

clothing. It can feel awkward to be out with friends who are wearing revealing clothes.

She perceives that she is noticed, but for seeming out of place rather than for being

exceptionally alluring, but, for her, it is preferable to be feel awkward than to pretend to

be someone she is not.

Even for individuals who prefer to blend in, there may be circumstances when

they would like to stand out, which may or may not relate to showing more of their body.

Emily, who is an artist, explained: "I want to stand out in my own way . . . going to an art

show, I'm going to wear something a little different, or if I'm the artist I'm probably

going to want to stand out more so people remember me." She said that when she is the

artist: "I might try to wear something a little brighter. I feel like I'm entitled to a little

more creativity . . . if I'm introduced as the creator of a piece [of art]." Brighter clothing does not reveal one's body more, but it does draw the eye. However, there is a difference between wearing something that makes a person (which includes her body) stand out and dressing with the intention of revealing one's body. For example, because Nina has larger breasts, they are simply more noticeable. She said that a v-neck that is moderate on most people is "plunging" on her. Thus, even if her goal is not to reveal her body, it is difficult for her to hide her figure, which means that she may stand out even if being noticed is not her main goal.

For Stella, standing out ideally means drawing attention away from her body: "I do want my body to be normal. I want to stand out with my clothing." She elaborated that: "I think that the more proportionate somebody is, the more normal their body is the more range of styles they can get away with and being in clothing design I love to be able to try random new styles and I think that's just easier [for me] to do." Stella wants her clothes, not her body, to stand out and she feels that having a more "normal" body would make this happen. She perceives a separation between the body and clothes, although when people observe what another person is wearing they are always observing both. She imagines that if she were "normal" people would just see the clothes.

Many participants expressed that they learned to be comfortable standing out as they came into themselves as individuals. For instance, Stella explained that when she was in middle school, she just wanted to fit in, but that she became willing to experiment before many of her peers:

I was dealing with a lot of things emotionally with my mom that were going on at

the time, but also she started telling me stories about when she was younger and

experiences she'd had and I guess like her wardrobe came into play with that and

she was like, look at this, look at that and I was like, hell yes, that's awesome,

totally cool and so I wore some of those things and wore them to school and

things that other kids definitely were not wearing and I actually got a positive

reaction from people. I think that if I'd had a different group of friends or people

would have poked fun at me for that it would have been a totally different

scenario.

Because Stella was allowed to wear almost anything, her sense of style may have

developed more organically. Stella had a period of wanting to conform, but it did not last

long and her mother helped her by showing her interesting things that she had worn in her

youth, which Stella started to wear as well. Growing up in an open environment allowed

Stella to explore and perhaps keeps her from passing judgment on others.

Someone may also stand out because of how she interacts with what she is

wearing. It can be difficult to tell whether someone is standing out because she is more

revealed or concealed than most other people or because she is uncomfortable because

she is worried about standing out. Adrienne described this scenario:

There's always proms in high school where there's a girl who's wearing a really

high neckline and long sleeves . . . but I feel like the reason I've noticed it is

because the person is acting awkward and so, one, acting like unconfident in

something that is out of the norm or more covered up if you're wearing a jacket

over the dress makes you, I feel like stand out more.

In other words, while the long sleeves or jacket have the potential to make someone stand

out, what is really noticeable is when the person who is dressed differently feels very

uncomfortable.

Summary

In Chapter 5, I addressed my participants' perspectives on revealing and

concealing their bodies as well as their opinions on why other young women choose to

reveal and conceal their bodies. I found that participants' views relative to themselves

tended to differ from how they thought about others. Some participants argued that other

young women reveal their bodies because they want to be noticed by the opposite sex,

but tended to see their own decisions in terms of wanting to fit in with their peer group.

In some cases, dressing like one's peers may mean wearing the same combination of, say,

sheer blouses and short-shorts that one's female friends are wearing, or it might mean

dressing in a way that fits in with one's group as a whole regardless of gender.

CHAPTER SIX:

SELF-FOCUSED DRESSING MOTIVES

Chapter 6 considers reasons for revealing and concealing that are concerned with choices an individual makes with herself as the focus. That is, the individual frames her clothing choice as motivated primarily by her own comfort rather than by imagined responses of others or by wanting to conform with social norms. Comfort relates to being physically comfortable as well as dressing in a way that a person feels fits her self-concept. Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1995) defined the self as: "A composite of an individual's identities communicated by dress, bodily aspects of appearance and discourse as well as the material and social objects (other people) that contribute meaning to social situations for interaction" (p. 12). They also wrote that individuals have multiple social positions and thus multiple identities that combine to form the "self." Eicher, et al. (2000) explained that some individuals enjoy using dress for self-expression. In some cases or situations, an individual may dress to draw attention to herself, whereas another person, or the same person in a different situation, may dress to show that she is part of a group. Dress also can be used to demonstrate particular perspectives (Eicher, et al.). Some of my participants discussed dressing to demonstrate who they are, or how they want to be perceived, while others stated that they tend to dress based on what "feels right." I begin by discussing comfort before moving on to using dress to exemplify one's identity.

Physical and Psychological Comfort

In general, being comfortable: "implies the absence of disturbing, painful or distressing features and, in a positive sense, stresses ease, contentment, and freedom from care" (*Webster's New World College Dictionary*, p. 292). Crowley (1999) defines physical comfort as "self-conscious satisfaction between one's body and its immediate physical environment," (p. 750), which also can be understood in terms of how the body interacts with clothing, although I would argue that a person may be more conscious of physical discomfort than physical comfort. Psychological and physical discomfort are related—if a person is too aware of her physical self it may be difficult to concentrate on anything else. When participants brought up the idea of comfort, they often moved from physical comfort (i.e. not being hot or cold, not being restricted by garments) to psychological comfort (i.e. being overly aware of one's body, feeling at ease). As Emily said, "If I feel physically comfortable then I often feel psychologically comfortable." In the following sections I will address how my participants discussed comfort in terms revealing and concealing their bodies.

The idea of comfort generally has positive connotations, although wearing clothing that sacrifices style for comfort may be regarded negatively. For example, Nina said: "I've done it maybe once or twice on lazy days where I'm wearing a sweatshirt which will hit the middle of my butt with, I don't know, slippers, but generally I want it to cover my butt and then I can wear leggings." For Nina, leggings with a shirt that does not cover her posterior is not appealing and instead signals laziness or being too casual. Sometimes a particular style is avoided because it is both uncomfortable and unattractive.

Nina described why she dislikes wearing something tight over something loose: "[If] I'm

wearing something loose underneath [a tighter garment it] will pinch the loose [garment]

and it just bunches out." It is uncomfortable when clothing bunches, but it also does not

look quite right. Nina felt it was important to strike a balance between being comfortable

and looking put together. For example, she discussed wearing cardigans over vintage

camisoles: "I like how it looks. I feel like it looks comfortable, yet feminine."

Movement is an important factor related to comfort in clothing, and some

garments are fine for most situations and become problematic only when one is in

motion. When Helena swing dances she takes into consideration being able to move

easily and not revealing too much of her body:

> With dancing I wear things I can move comfortably in, like when I twirl I'm
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> either wearing some kind of compression shorts that come to mid-thigh or I'm
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> wearing a skirt that I know isn't going to come all the way up . . . . I don't want to
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> be continually thinking about, oh my underwear's showing, or, am I distracting
>
> somebody?

If she revealed more she would be self-conscious, and if she dressed to reveal less than

she would not have to attend constantly to what others might be seeing. She was

comfortable when she could move easily in her clothes and when her clothes moved with

her body so that she did not have to think about whether or not she was exposing too

much of her body to others.

Perceiving or imagining the gaze of others may make one uncomfortable,

especially when out in public, even if others do not indicate through speaking or

gesturing that they have any particular opinions. Cooley's (1902) concept of the looking-glass self is one way of framing awareness of being observed by others. Scheff (2005) explained that there are three processes contained in the idea of the looking-glass self. First, we imagine how we appear to others; then, we consider how others judge us and, finally, we feel either pride or mortification. According to Cooley, if a person imagines that others may be judging her negatively, she may feel ashamed. Adrienne described how it felt to wear a dress that was much shorter than dresses she normally wore: "In my room I felt really confident because it was, I mean it wasn't [that] short and I was wearing opaque closed tights underneath it but then walking around in class and things I felt a little uncomfortable." She then elaborated:

> I think it's just when you sit down or if you cross your legs—or just having that where you notice how short it is, versus sitting in my room, in a different situation, a different environment I felt really confident, but when I'm around people I'm thinking—that's a lot of my leg showing and this is a little bit too short, not really appropriate right now, for what I believe.

For Adrienne, wearing a short dress to class made her very aware of how much of her body was visible and it made her worry that she was inappropriate for the situation. Whether or not she felt her dress was appropriate was important primarily because there were others around, leading her to internalize the "negative voice."

While it is illegal to appear topless or naked in public and there are certain standards to which almost everyone holds, such as not appearing in one's underwear in public, there is no objective standard regarding what is too revealing. One must rely on

one's own sense of what is appropriate and if a woman feels that she is dressed outside of her normal range she may become overly aware of her clothing. In some cases this may relate to being *more* concealed than others. Rose discussed taking yoga classes with women who were dressed only in yoga pants and a sports bra: "I would never wear just a sports bra to work out, even if it's all females. I don't care what the situation is, I would just feel better having on a tee-shirt, but I did feel uncomfortable and out of place, like I don't belong there because I wasn't showing off my stomach." Rose sometimes compared herself to others and being aware of differences could be uncomfortable, but sometimes it was more comfortable to be different and wear clothes in which she generally felt at ease. She explained that she was uncomfortable showing off a lot of her body, especially her stomach, which she perceived as not sufficiently toned, although her main rationale for how she dresses was based on her own sense of appropriateness rather than embarrassment about her body. In some cases a person may have to decide if she will be more comfortable dressing in her usual style, even if others or not, or she would feel more comfortable dressing like others. In Rose's case, her own comfort with her body/sensibilities trumps fitting in.

Someone may be comfortable when she feels that she does not have to worry about what other people are thinking and when what she is wearing does not weigh on her mind. Jennifer said that there have been times when she felt her shirt was a little too low cut: "It's not like I notice other people noticing, but I would look down and notice myself and try to hike it up a little bit." She went on to say: "You may be doing all these things, talking to all these people, but really in the back of your mind it's like, ugh, I

really wish I hadn't worn this shirt." Jennifer usually is dressed in a way that she regards as appropriate, but she does not want to wear clothes that make her too aware of what she is wearing. She does not want her clothes to be "in the back of her mind," as wearing something revealing makes her too conscious of her body and also more aware of whether or not others might be noticing and forming negative opinions. If a person thinks of herself as too concealed/revealed, she thinks about her body more, which changes her posture, which may impact what others think (or what she believed others were thinking). This situation can be especially uncomfortable if she clearly is exposing her body in a public setting where others are not similarly exposed. Stella described a misadventure she had while biking in a skirt and tank-top:

> I was going to go meet up with friends and we were going to pre-game or whatever and then bike and go out dancing. And so, not even thinking about it, I threw on this skirt . . . a tank-top and a sweater or something and my bike bag and . . . the skirt was way too short so when my legs came up you could see my world . . . .The other thing was, I had this tank-top that was kind of low and the way the bike bag lay between my boobs it pushed my right one out, so I was exposed between my legs as well as I had to keep tugging my boob back into my tank top. It was so embarrassing. I only had to go a mile or something, but it was the worst bike ride and I think about it all the time whenever I'm getting ready to go biking.

For Stella, the most poignant memory involved being too revealed for biking, which was mortifying. Stella was conscious of how she felt— exposed and awkward—but she also considered what others might be seeing, the combination of which made the experience

agonizing. Being exposed in front of many people is clearly more mortifying than being exposed when one is alone, yet, even if no one is there to observe, being very revealed can still be uncomfortable, as Leah described:

> I'm sitting in a room by myself, so it doesn't matter, but I was wearing like a really short skirt that I think it got shrunk in the wash or something, but I didn't realize it 'til I got out of the house . . . . I felt really self-conscious walking to the bus and walking home. There wasn't really anyone around, but I just felt kind of uncomfortable.

Perhaps she felt uncomfortable because of how she would have felt if someone were there or perhaps it was enough that wearing a very short skirt made her sit and think about what she was wearing and how it interacted with her body.

Being physically comfortable can be so entwined with what others may think that it is impossible to determine which is more important. When discussing wearing spaghetti straps or a strapless dress Helena described the conundrum of whether or not to wear a strapless bra: "If I'm wearing a strapless bra am I going to be hiking it up all night? Is it more distracting to occasionally see my bra strap or is it more distracting to be going like this [made a tugging motion to mimic pulling up strapless bra] all the time?" Wearing a strapless dress or spaghetti straps means dealing with a strapless bra, which was another annoyance that made her too aware of herself, causing her to be hyperaware of how she was interacting with her clothes and what others might think. Emily also described wearing a strapless dress: "I know it's not revealing and it's not 'not okay' for me to wear a strapless dress [but] physically a strapless dress isn't that comfortable

because you have to wear a strapless bra and pull it up." Emily found strapless dresses uncomfortable for several reasons: First, she felt exposed, second they are not physically comfortable and, finally, they forced her to pull up her bra repeatedly, an annoyance that made her overly aware of her clothes.

Sometimes how much one reveals is less important than whether or not that style of clothing stays in place. Helena said that she is comfortable with her back showing and implied that gapping is less of an issue, but she generally does not wear low cut shirts. However, she has one that she is comfortable wearing because it hugs her neckline, but she is less comfortable with shirts that are loose around her neckline. She explained: "I think it's one of those things where if I'm going to continually be thinking of the fact that I'm going to try to keep it from showing my bra." She went on to list many of the considerations that she takes into account:

I have this one shirt that I wear sometimes, but I don't, I just don't feel comfortable all the time. It's kind of sheer so that when you look at it at first you can't really tell that it's see-through, and the bust part is lined and it's like square so it really hugs, but the straps are just this strip with a little frill on it, so sometimes it will show the edge of my bra over here, so . . . I don't wear it very often because I don't want to be consciously thinking of that all the time . . . I'm not really comfortable with mini-skirts just because I hate having to be like "Oh, I've gotta keep my legs crossed" or like always just like sitting like this, if I'm not wearing tights or something . . . . I do have a two-piece swimsuit, but I would not feel comfortable wearing a string bikini . . . that would just, I don't know why,

like it's one of those things again where it's really not showing that much more. I

don't know if it's really the idea of the thing, it's like all you have to do is untie

the string and it's gone? . . . When I'm running, I feel more comfortable wearing

shorter shorts than I do [normally], but it's like they're exercise shorts . . . . Some

people run with just a sports bra and shorts and I don't feel comfortable with that.

Helena kept reiterating that she does not want to have to think about her clothes. She

implied that wearing clothing that is slightly revealing was acceptable as long as it

revealed only what she intended to reveal and did not slip or gap to reveal more. She

described taking into consideration how she appeared to others; the other is implied

because if no one were around it would not matter if someone could see up her skirt.

Because Helena was aware that others can see her, she was most comfortable when she

felt she was dressed in a way that would not be distracting.

Adrienne described circumstances during which was concerned about how much

of her body she was covering: "If it's something that's sleeveless . . . I might wear a

jacket depending on if I feel uncomfortable I can put it on or take it off. . . . If I'm

wearing a skirt and it's . . . short I'll try it on with heels, but I'll try on a couple different

things to figure out what I feel comfortable in." I asked her if what she wears is mood-

based and if it varies day-to-day and she responded:

Definitely. There's some days where it's like, I don't really want to see the world

right now, so I'm just going to hide in my little shell and there's days where it's

like I feel kind of out-there and I just want to be a little more flashy, so you'll

wear, I'd wear heels or something to school, where it's a little more of an

attention getting thing I guess.

She addressed physical and psychological comfort in covering arms for warmth and

appropriateness. Heel height and skirt length relate to both types of comfort as well in

that heels can be physically painful, but a short skirt and high heels may be too sexy for

her to feel at ease even if her feet do not hurt. While wearing heels does not affect how

much of a woman's body is revealed, it does change her posture and the way she moves.

Comfort also relates to avoiding or desiring attention. When Adrienne wanted to protect

herself she felt more comfortable in something that did not make her stand out, but other

times she felt like being more "flashy." Perhaps she desired attention *more* when she was

confident, or perhaps she was willing to risk being noticed.

"Comfortable in My Skin."

Being comfortable in one's skin is very similar to being self-confident. Some

people feel that they need to be self-confident in order to wear certain styles, whereas

others feel that challenging oneself and learning to exude self-confidence—whether or

not one actually feels confident—leads to becoming self-confident. An individual who

feels that she is attractive, may be more comfortable when more of her body is visible

than would someone who feels less herself to be less attractive. Rose described an

experience she had at the beach while traveling abroad with other young women. At the

beach, the local women did not wear swimsuit tops and appeared entirely comfortable,

while the young women Rose was with were ashamed of their bodies: "[My friends] were

wearing bikinis; they had awesome bodies, and they were clutching themselves and were

just like, this is literally what they said: 'I can't believe those women are not wearing tops around their children?' and I'm like 'Why, do you think it's ugly and wrong?' and they're like, 'No, but how are they so confident in their bodies? Their bodies aren't perfect.'" Rose felt that there is something very sad about women who are so uncomfortable with their bodies that they try to hide even in an environment when everyone is exposed. Rose's friends were not sufficiently comfortable in their own skin to wear bikinis confidently even though they were on a topless beach. They apparently felt obligated to meet an external standard of perfection that they brought with them from their own culture.

Jennifer is happier with her appearance when she is tan: "I like to be a little more covered, especially in the winter. Not being as tan . . . once it starts getting nicer, more sun you get a little more color and then you're just more comfortable in your skin, I think—me personally." Jennifer associated being tan with being more comfortable in her own skin and thus with feeling more attractive. She did not even want to wear a tee-shirt during the winter and not just to avoid being cold. Her desire to be covered seemed to relate to not feeling comfortable with herself unless her skin was tan. That is, she felt that she did not meet her own standards of attractiveness.

Although some people may reveal more of their bodies only when they already feel confident, others believe that one also can learn confidence. Nina said: "When I first kind of started opening up my shell, there were moments where I would feel uncomfortable and then it's like, no, I'm okay with this, I love this, I love what I'm wearing and I shouldn't let other people impact me and it kind of opened me up." In

order for Nina to become confident, she had to stop worrying about what everyone else was thinking and focus on how her clothes made her feel.

Nina suggested that being comfortable in one's skin may have more power than wearing revealing clothing, implying that wearing revealing clothing to receive compliments is not an effective method for increasing one's confidence:

> If I like how I look that should be just enough. Like sure, it's great when you get compliments, but I think it's mostly, it's mostly how you carry yourself, like if you're comfortable in what you're wearing and if I was more comfortable wearing something that was a little but more revealing and flattering I would walk with more confidence and people would see that and I think that's mostly what would get compliments.

Nina feels that her confidence stems from within herself and she is able to get enjoyment out of clothing without direct interaction from others. In fact, she uses clothing to enhance her confidence and pointed out that it is noticeable when someone is not comfortable in her own skin: "If you wear something that is more revealing and you're not comfortable with it, it will show. Like you will walk kind of slouched over, just tugging at your hemline and pulling your shirt up all the time." She implied revealing clothing is more noticeable when a woman's clothing makes her uncomfortable because it draws others' attention to what she wants to hide.

People may be uncomfortable revealing parts of their bodies with which they are unhappy. Emily said that insecurities about her body impact what she wears: "I get self conscious about [my weight]. I would never wear something that is for super skinny girls.

I just can't pull it off." Emily has certain perceptions about her body, and believes that

she should not wear what very slender young women can wear, which she implied means

a more form-fitting or skin-revealing clothing. She compared herself to others and seems

to think that what looks good on some people simply would not look good on her.

Jennifer also described being uncomfortable showing her form because of her weight:

> Going back to, in high school, and even before that, I was, and still nowadays,
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> was always just really uncomfortable with my body and my weight and definitely
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> more so in high school . . . . So I would end up wearing big sweatshirts a lot more
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> often than I do now, so I feel like just like the evolution of my body itself has
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> changed the way I'm able to, and I'm just more comfortable revealing my body.

Maybe oversized clothes made her *feel* invisible, and even years later, she still felt like

she would be better off if she lost weight. It is not just that she thought she would look

better in certain styles if she were thinner, but then she would have more confidence. She

believed that revealing clothing made her look worse than more concealing clothes.

Someone who is very comfortable with her body may be inclined to wear clothing

that is more revealing, although a woman can, of course, be comfortable with her body

and still choose to cover up. Nina analyzed the idea of wearing loose clothing:

> Generally people associate wearing looser fit clothing to feeling uncomfortable
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> about their body and I definitely am comfortable with my body . . .[if] I'm
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> wearing maybe a loose sweater and a pair of leggings which would be tight and
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> can like you can see that I have long legs or something like that, or wearing a very

loose cardigan with a tighter top underneath it where I can show a little bit of

cleavage, so I guess so. That kind of makes sense. Revelation.

Nina opined that other women may associate loose clothes with hiding or being unhappy

with their bodies, partially because she is so comfortable with her body and is not afraid

to show it. Because she is comfortable with her body, she would not generally wear all

loose, skin-concealing clothing, but she imagines someone who dislikes her own body

might. However, despite her general acceptance of her body, she said that she is less

happy with her stomach. She does not go out of her way to hide her stomach, but: "I've

never wanted to wear anything that makes it stand out."As someone who generally likes

her body, Nina has the option of accentuating what she does like and does not seem to

feel forced to tailor her wardrobe around concealing.

What a person is comfortable wearing can vary depending on how she feels about

her body on a particular day or during a particular phase. Helena explained:

Some of what I feel comfortable with [regarding] revealing and concealing has to

do with body image . . . I have a pair of jeans that I just don't wear right now

cause it's like it reminds me of the fact that I have more weight on my midriff

than I want to. So it's like, well, when I'm wearing those jeans it's not so much

that . . .they're tighter on me right now—it's that they're reminding me of the fact

that I weigh more than I want to.

Helena explicitly stated that body image is a factor, although she generally was happy

with her body. In the case of jeans the issue is not so much that they *look* too tight, but

that their tightness is a reminder of her weight. Her jeans draw her mind back to her

body. Stella sometimes avoided wearing jeans because they reminded her of her body but for the opposite reason, as they were too loose: "When you're wearing your jeans they stretch out and then I feel skinny." She became overly aware of her clothing when it was too loose, but she also preferred to avoid very tight clothing for the same reason: "I will hardly ever wear something very tight and covered because it just really accentuates that I'm skinny, and I'd probably go the more exposed drapey route." Perhaps most women feel comfortable when their clothes fit them in a way that they feel draws attention (both theirs' and others') away from their "flaws."

In the final section, I will discuss how my participants talked about dress relative to their concepts of themselves.

"An Expression of My Personality"

While individuals in my study talked about dressing for themselves to greater or lesser degrees, because each participant exists within the context of her families, social groups and society at large, her decisions must be understood within these contexts. Hypothetically, one could divide a person's motives regarding dressing in the following categories: with herself in mind, and with others in mind, but we do not live in a vacuum, in spite of contemporary American culture's fixation on individual identity rather than seeing oneself as inseparable from his or her group. Scheff (2005) pointed out that the existence of intersubjectivity or "shared consciousness" is accepted in Eastern cultures but nearly anathema in most Western cultures. Yet, even if we find the idea of living in the minds of others (Cooley, 1902) unacceptable, it remains difficult to separate an individual's understanding of herself from the groups to which she belongs. Thus, while

individuals talked about themselves, most also saw themselves in relation to others. In addition, the idea of expressing oneself often implies that one will be seen by other people. Although some participants seemed to believe that their own clothing choices were relatively free from the impact of others, Cooley argued that many people are not conscious of how much they care about others' opinions. I will address some of the ways that individuals talked about dress in terms of expressing oneself.

Some individuals are more inclined to observe their own self-display, while others individuals consciously associate the types of clothes they wear with their own personalities or values. Helena explained why what she wears is so salient to her:

It's such a grey area, and that's why I hesitate to, that's why I just, where people are like, you can't wear this or you shouldn't wear this it's so grey and it's like, it's such a personal thing . . . . I guess I just try to check my motives, of like, why am I wearing this? Am I wearing this to attract attention? Am I wearing this because I want someone to look at me in a certain way? Or am I wearing it because I know I look good in and I feel good in it and it fits who I am and it's an expression of my personality.

She is conscious that, while she has certain interpretations, not everyone will have the same perspective. Since she cannot control how others think, it appears that she dresses based on how she would read herself. She has created an idea of clothing as a manifestation of herself. Helena explained:

There's no concrete rule, but setting determines so much of what I'm going to feel like it is appropriate socially. Just I'm very modest, like another example is my

swimsuits. Unless I'm just hanging out with my girlfriends I wear a one piece just cause, when it's really like a one piece isn't actually covering that much more. It's still completely skin tight, but, somehow it feels more modest.

Helena considers both what is right for the situation and what is right for her. Even within an individualistic culture, people are not entirely independent of their significant others. Helena experimented with dress and deviated from her parents' standards, but as she grew up she began to think that perhaps they were right:

You know, I think there's a point where you're really wrapped up in yourself and for, that was really, I didn't really care that much about other people, and so getting to a point where I think you do actually care about other people on different levels at different times, but just being like, yeah, instead of being like, "Well, why do I have to dress this way? You're the guy- stop thinking that way, you know" like, and it being a choice for myself instead of something my parents told me and all of those things kind of combining in that and too those experiences of wearing that shirt, of just like, I don't want to be looked at that way.

Helena is sensitive to the opinions of the people that matter to her. She believes that she dresses somewhat for herself, and only wears what she likes, but she is always conscious of others and not others in the sense of wanting to be noticed, but she really values the people in her life and is guided by what she imagines (or knows) they would say or even just by what they will think and feel.

Sometimes a woman will not be sure if a particular style or garments suits who she is, which includes both personality and physical appearance. For example, Adrienne actively seeks out her roommate's opinions on dress because she values having another person's perspective: "We're on the same wavelength with fashion and so it's easy to say is this too much, but is it still . . . I'm revealing a little bit, but is it still class within the range of what I want to look like?" It helps to have someone to compare oneself to and to be able to get someone else's opinions. There is a continuum of different styles and part of dressing may be determining one's comfort zone and what makes one feel out of place.

Rose also discussed dressing deliberately and keeping in mind both who she is and who she wants to be. She said:

> I have a lot of friends who like to go out dancing and to clubs and things like that, and they will dress like that all the time and I get drug along to stuff like that, but that does not primarily define who I am. I primarily define myself as who I am during the day and they primarily define themselves as who they are at night.

Rose dresses based on how she defines herself, and notes that her friends do as well. She sees herself as who she is during the day, which seems to relate to wearing more practical, professional clothes. Some women also can dress for who they want to be; someone who spends a lot of time looking to the future may consider how she dresses in terms of what she will think later. Rose explained that she dislikes current fashions that involve sequins and glitter because it makes her feel "cheap and tacky." In general, she explained: "I try not to wear things that I would feel embarrassed [when] looking at pictures of myself maybe 5-10 years down the road." Rose does not buy into current

fashions for going out because they are too "flashy" and because she feels they do not represent who she is and who she would like to be. She already dresses as if she were older, partially because she feels it suits her body type and partially because she feels it makes a better impression:

> I feel like somebody in their mid-thirties. I just channel how they would dress and that's with items that fit nicely that show what they've got in a tasteful way and that's more about color than about hem length or cleavage or something like that. I don't think that I have very good cleavage and I think that that's inappropriate most of the time, so I don't ever find myself in a situation where cleavage becomes something that I show.

Rose is aware of what flatters her. She also tries to dress to match the style of the person she aspires to be, which is a professional who is pulled together. She avoids showing cleavage and chooses necklines with thought and interprets the meaning of dress literally, by which I mean that she assumes a particular neckline or style has a specific significance.

Clothing may reflect the wearer's identity, but some participants suggested that dress offers an incomplete picture of who a person is. Emily said: "Obviously, I make choices about my clothes and so it shows a little about who I am, but I don't think you could look at anybody's clothes and tell totally who they are." Yet, someone might consider how she dresses relative to an overarching self-concept, although her choices may relate more to what feels comfortable than to attempting to demonstrate to others who she is. Emily explained: "I've never been one of those girls to super glam up and . . .

show a lot of skin, but I have a couple shirts that are lower than this that I would wear

out." Emily does not see herself as being inclined to dress up and show her body. In this

case, "glam" implies showing more skin. She does have some slightly more revealing

clothes that she reserves for going out. However, her sense of style is quite consistent,

partially because she prefers going to more casual events/venues. Yet, it is possible to

feel that certain styles do not fit one's personality without judging others who wear them.

Emily described going out with friends who were more psychologically comfortable than

she was in revealing clothing: "[Their shirts] were just more low-cut, they weren't super

trashy, but they were low-cut and kinda, they flaunted it. And that's fine, but I didn't

really [flaunt my body] that much." Dress is both personal and social. Emily saw herself

relative to others and noted that she was not like them, but accepted that neither choice

was better than the other.

People may pick out clothing simply because they feel comfortable in a particular

style without making active comparisons between that style and another style. Stella

prefers to wear shorter skirts over longer skirts, not because she wants to go out of her

way to reveal her legs, but because shorter skirts simply feel more comfortable: "I feel

like most of the long skirts that I've had, that I've bought because I liked them, I've worn

and they've gotten wrinkly, something just doesn't feel right." What feels right or wrong

can be almost instinctual and someone may gravitate toward a particular style simply

because it feels natural. Adrienne described the type of sun-dresses she likes to wear: "I

have some, most of them are probably sleeveless, or cap-sleeve, like a small sleeve. I

don't have any halter, but [a few of them are] spaghetti strap. I just kind of like that. I've

never noticed why I pick them. I guess I just like more coverage." Adrienne suggested that coverage is somewhat about personal preference and implied that there would not be anything inherently wrong with showing more skin. Describing one outfit Adrienne said: "It was appropriate compared to what some people wear, but for me I felt like it was a little much." Even though she was around people who wore more revealing clothing than she chose to wear, she still felt she should be dressed according to her own standards.

The choices a person makes about her clothes may relate to both who she feels she is as a whole and who she feels she is in a particular moment. Dress can enhance, protect, or both. Emily said: "I just wear what makes me feel good." She dresses in clothing that is physically comfortable but also clothing that she feels suits her self-concept. However, what makes a person feel good may vary depending on her mood. Emily explained: "If I know that it's going to be a really fun night and I'm going to be amped, maybe I'll choose one of my lower-cut shirts, or if I'm crabby and I don't want to go and I just made a commitment and I have to go, maybe I won't try as hard." Her style may be related to her personality, but it seems that she dresses primarily to please herself, which may be inseparable from who she is. It can be something that enhances or coincides with her mood or something that serves to make her feel better or shows that she does not particularly care or want to be seen. If she feels more extroverted she may wear something that stands out more.

Wearing very revealing clothing may also be avoided simply because it is deemed to be too boring. About girls who wear more revealing clothing Leah said: "I feel like it's, like the whole archetype, it's a very easy thing to pull off—or not pull off, but it

doesn't take much creativity to [do], which some people really just like dressing that way

. . . . It's not me." Leah then explained that she generally does not have a particular

agenda when she gets dressed. However, "I feel like clothes . . . say something about

your personality." For Leah, being revealing is boring because it does not require

innovativeness. She clarified that she does not assume all women who wear revealing

clothing dress for other people, but that she thinks that these women may be unable or

unwilling to highlight their other characteristics. Leah was not suggesting that one can

know everything about a person from her appearance. She uses clothes to express herself

even if she is not entirely sure what she wants to express.

Dressing creatively does not mean that someone lacks a sense of style or has no

inner compass guiding her choices. Rather, individuals who consider getting dressed to

be a creative endeavor may be less inclined to dress in the hope of imparting a particular

message. Leah described how she thought about her wardrobe:

> I work with what I have. Like, instead, some of my friends go and find something
>
> they really want and they'll like specifically go look for it and buy it, and I kind of
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> look around and whatever catches my eye at the time. Like, if I find something
>
> lying around in my closet that I haven't worn in a while, I'll try to find a way to
>
> wear it.

For Leah, fashion is like playing with paint—she mixes different elements together in

order to create different effects. She does not seem to take her choices particularly

seriously because if a particular outfit is uncomfortable or does not work, there will be

other opportunities. Dress is something she enjoys: "I don't get dressed to impress

anyone. I wear things for myself, and because I like creatively putting clothes together. I get a sense of satisfaction from it. It's a little something I look forward to. I'm not going to wear something because it's like, oh, so-and-so will think this if I wear this." Because she does not dress with others in mind, she has more flexibility in what she wears. Indeed, sometimes she will wear things that are imperfect and try to find ways to make the piece work: "Sometimes I'll bring something home and be like, oh, this is shorter than I thought it was, but I'll wear it anyway, but yeah, I try [to figure out a way to wear it]" An extreme style may be somewhat accidental or a challenge to work into her wardrobe. She went on to explain why she prefers shorter skirts: "I think that I just feel too, like, too covered up if I wear a longer skirt, like longer skirts are 'in' now and I want to try wearing a longer skirt [but] . . . I just like shorter skirts. I feel like they're more fun. I'm young, so I feel like I should take advantage of my time when I can get away with short skirts." Generally, Leah will try to work with clothes even if they do not fit her quite right. She tries to strike a balance between dressing without constraints and ensuring that a particular outfit will not make her physically or psychologically uncomfortable.

One can use dress to channel different moods or express different ideas. For instance Stella said: "I don't look at my wardrobe in the morning, or when I wake up, and go 'I want to have a short skirt' and go for a short skirt. It's more like, I want to have this feel or this color or this pizzaz and then I go for that." Stella said that she generally does not dress expressly to show off a particular body part—it is more of a sense of what style she feels like wearing. Nina also enjoys being creative with dress and does not restrict her

style: "I don't really ever limit myself to anything . . . . I've had like my little phases that I still will kind of go through occasionally, where it's like, I want to dress like I'm from the fifties today, I want to be a seventies hippy today . . . ." Dress is playful. Nina sees it as an expression of who she is in that moment and she does not intentionally dress to impact others' opinion of her. Nina explained:

> I kind of have a light-hearted view on life in general. I've never ever thought of a situation where it's been like somebody says something about what I'm wearing where I'm completely offended or extremely embarrassed and I want to cry and go hide in a closet and go change. It's generally like, if somebody makes a comment about my cleavage I say, well, I don't know, you're going to have to suck it up and just not look.

If others judge her dress she does not take their judgments too seriously. It seems that she feels others should worry about themselves, so she worries about herself and whether or not she feels she is being true to herself.

Summary

The focus of Chapter 6 was motives for dressing that focused on the self. Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1995) wrote that individuals have multiple social identities that, when combined, form the self. Thus, individuals need to balance who they are under different circumstances in order to determine if a particular outfit fits who they are in that moment and who they are overall. My participants' comments regarding comfort implied that they consider both physical comfort and psychological comfort. Psychological comfort relates to feeling that one's dress is congruent with whatever identity (or

identities) a person currently inhabits along with her overall self-concept. The idea of expressing varies from person to person. For some, it is important that one's dress is an "accurate" representation, whereas others choose their dress to project a certain image that may or may not be "accurate." Others are more interested in having fun with what they wear and the idea of self-expression may relate to a desire to show that they are creative. At times, someone may wish to be creative whereas at other times she may be concerned with demonstrating who she is on another level.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand how young women conceptualize revealing and concealing their bodies. I chose my particular participants because they were members of the demographic that led to my initial research questions. I conducted interviews between January and April, 2011.

My participants shared certain similarities, but they had different temperaments, familial backgrounds and understandings of how dress related to the body in general and to their individual bodies. Please see Appendix III for a list describing my participants and Appendix IV for tables comparing them. All of my eight participants were Euro-Americans between the ages of 20 and 23. They were all undergraduates at a large Midwestern university and six of them studied apparel in some capacity. For some, dressing tended to be deliberate and they dressed with the hope of demonstrating who they were or who they wanted others to think they were. For others, dress related more to their sense of enjoyment. Of course, a woman might dress with care under some circumstances and not others.

My first research question was: Do young women consider whether (or not) they reveal or conceal their bodies as relevant to their clothing choices? All of my participants considered revealing and concealing their bodies at least some of the time. Five participants—Adrienne, Emily, Helena, Jennifer and Rose— were acutely aware of revealing and concealing and it factored into many of the choices they made regarding

dress. For the remaining three— Leah, Nina and Stella— dressing in relation to revealing and concealing was a secondary or tertiary concern, although there were circumstances in which they had been uncomfortable, generally because they felt too revealed. Unsurprisingly, the individuals who were most concerned with revealing and concealing their bodies tended to be deliberate in their clothing choices and more concerned with creating a particular impression. For example, Helena spoke about wanting to dress in a manner that reflected her values.

My second research question was: What do young women say influences their views on revealing and concealing their bodies? My participants gave many examples of factors that affected their perspectives regarding how much they chose to show their bodies. The themes that emerged were: being socialized, being appropriate, avoiding/ attracting attention, fitting in/standing out, physical and psychological comfort and "an expression of my personality." In the following paragraphs, I will summarize each theme (in bold type) and provide illustrations of each theme.

Being socialized includes both the explicit and implicit ways that an individual learns particular values and norms. Some participants spoke about how their families— especially their mothers—socialized them. Nina explained that her mother would compliment what she liked and said: "It seemed really subtle at the time, but now it's like, oh you like what I'm going to wear, I'm going to wear this again, thank you very much, so it was mostly just the subtle push toward the right clothing choices." When Leah was an adolescent, she did not want to follow her mother's, but her comments may have impacted Leah's style as a young adult: "[My mom] would always encourage me to

be more creative and I didn't want to be more creative. I just wanted to look like the other kids." Stella, who was one of the most creative dressers I interviewed, said: "My family is fantastic and they had very few rules for me growing up. Unless I wanted to run out of the house naked I could pretty much wear whatever I wanted to."

Being appropriate encompasses both what is appropriate for different situations and for different individuals. However, the concept of appropriateness is complicated given that the participants of this study do not agree on one standard of what is appropriate. Stella encompassed many concerns in one brief idea when I asked her what she thinks about when she is getting dressed: "Who's going to be there is probably the first one . . . where it's going to be-slash-what are we doing."Appropriateness depends on the circumstances, which include the weather. Nina said: "Summertime is a little bit different, though, because you should be able to wear a tank-top and shorts and not be worried." Adrienne did not want to reveal a lot of skin, but in some situations she felt that it is necessary to reveal some skin: "I don't like to reveal a lot of my body in certain situations. I feel like… where you're going out or something, some higher [shorter] skirts or something are needed." Personal factors, including age and body type, also were considered when determining appropriateness. Adrienne explained that, when she was growing up, her mother monitored what she wore based on Adrienne's age: "There was an instance in seventh grade where I tried on a bikini and my mom was like 'absolutely not. You are 12' or 13 or whatever I was. 'That's not going to happen.'" Part of Nina's awareness stems from her experience as someone with a larger bust, so she finds the idea that curvier women should wear clothing with more coverage very frustrating:

Well let's say that there's somebody that is a B-cup and I'm a DD. They will put

on the same shirt that I'm wearing and less of their breast will be showing

because they don't have as much as I do. So therefore people would deem it more

appropriate for them to wear than for me to wear, even though it's the same thing.

Nina felt that her body type makes it difficult for her to not reveal cleavage, at least some

of the time. Rose feels that she should not wear low-cut shirts because she feels they do

not flatter her shape: "I don't ever show cleavage because I don't have any."

In this study, **avoiding/attracting attention** refers specifically to the desire for or

aversion to attention from the opposite gender. Avoiding and attracting are not

necessarily mutually exclusive, as someone might want attention from some people but

not from others. Participants were not inclined to talk about their own tendency to dress

in the hopes of attracting members of the opposite sex. Instead, they surmised that other

young women sometimes wear revealing clothing because they want this kind of

attention. The term "trashy" was brought up several times, in reference to how others

might appear or in terms of not wanting to look trashy oneself. Trashy was almost always

used in the context of wanting to attract men, usually with the connotation that these

other young women use only their appearance to attract men. Leah felt that girls who

wear "super-cleavagy shirts and tight pants" may "need that sort of reassurances from

males, or they feel that they need to look 'hotter' than all the other girls'. . . it's just an

obvious kind of dressing that's not appealing to me." At other times, a woman may want

to be seen as appealing without revealing much of her body. Adrienne explained:

"There's the misconception that you have to be immodest to look hot, which I feel is not

true. I feel like you can be really modest and demure and still look really attractive and appealing." Revealing one's body can be seen as a way of demonstrating one's potential willingness to be approached. Adrienne explained: " I have a boyfriend, so I don't need to look super . . . skin revealing . . . . I don't like revealing a lot of my body in public situations." Adrienne expressed: "I like feeling sexy, but I don't like attention from people I don't want attention from."

By **fitting in**, I mean dressing and acting in a way that conforms to others within a particular context. Standing out refers to dressing and behaving in a way that makes one more noticeable than others. Rose said: "I had on a really tight shirt… [and] tight jeans on. And we get to the party and . . . everyone [was] wearing wool socks and a cozy extra large wool sweater . . . . There was nothing I could do to blend in." Jennifer prefers to blend in: "I mean, it's nice to be noticed and recognized and talked to, but at the same time I don't want people to look at me and be [disparagingly] 'oh, who's that girl?'" There were times during adolescence when Nina was less comfortable showing her body because she felt it made her stand out: "I would try to conceal a little bit more, just like, okay, I'm developing now, what do I do? And then as time went on it was like, I shouldn't have to, I shouldn't have to worry about what other people are thinking about me." Revealing one's body has the potential to make one stand out, especially in situations where most people are not revealed. Emily explained: "If I'm wearing something very revealing and I'm at school, or anywhere, people are going to stare at me and that will draw attention to myself." Modesty is important to Helena, but she is not modest because she feels the need to fit in, except perhaps with the people who are

important to her. She said: "I think when I dress to a degree I always want to stand out, all with modesty being said, it's not like I want to hide." Despite the reality that one may try to stand out and end up fitting in, Leah said: "It's fun to go and see what everyone else is wearing, how everyone, like everyone's standing out so no one's really standing out, but it's still interesting to see how everyone stands out." Sometimes, wearing more clothing than everyone else can make one stand out. Emily does not tend to reveal her body, but there are times when she has gone out with friends who like to dress up: "If I go out with my friends and I go to a bar and everyone is . . . glammed up and have their pleather dress and super high heels . . . . I [still] show up in my typical dress and cardigan."

Comfort relates to being physically comfortable as well as dressing in a way that a person feels fits her self-concept. When Helena swing dances she takes into consideration being able to move easily and not revealing too much of her body: "I don't want to be continually thinking about, oh my underwear's showing, or, am I distracting somebody?" Emily described wearing a strapless dress: "I know it's not revealing and it's not 'not okay' for me to wear a strapless dress [but] physically a strapless dress isn't that comfortable because you have to wear a strapless bra and pull it up." However, it is not just what one wears that is important but how one acts when wearing it. Nina said: "If you wear something that is more revealing and you're not comfortable with it, it will show. Like you will walk kind of slouched over, just tugging at your hemline and pulling your shirt up all the time." People may be uncomfortable revealing parts of their bodies with which they are unhappy. Emily said that insecurities about her body impact what she

wears: "I get self conscious about [my weight]. I would never wear something that is for super skinny girls. I just can't pull it off." For all participants, the most salient factor was the desire to feel comfortable in their clothing. That is, they wanted to feel that their clothing was suitable in their own eyes and in the eyes of others.

Dressing as "**an expression of my personality**" relates to dressing in a way that expresses who someone is. Individuals need to balance who they are under different circumstances in order to determine if a particular outfit fits who they are in that moment and who they are overall. Rose also discussed dressing deliberately and keeping in mind both who she is and who she wants to be: "I try not to wear things that I would feel embarrassed [when] looking at pictures of myself maybe 5-10 years down the road." When Helena wears something she asks herself: "Am I wearing it because I know I look good in and I feel good in it and it fits who I am and it's an expression of my personality?" Dress is something Leah enjoys: "I don't get dressed to impress anyone. I wear things for myself, and because I like creatively putting clothes together. I get a sense of satisfaction from it. It's a little something I look forward to. I'm not going to wear something because it's like, oh, so-and-so will think this if I wear this." One can use dress to channel different moods or express different ideas. For instance Stella said: "I don't look at my wardrobe in the morning, or when I wake up, and go 'I want to have a short skirt' and go for a short skirt. It's more like, I want to have this feel or this color or this pizzaz and then I go for that."

In the following paragraphs, bold type is used to designate a concept or term that is defined in the paragraph. I began with three working definitions that I kept in mind

during my research, which will be reconsidered here. During the initial phases of my research, I used these definitions in constructing my questions and considered them throughout the research process. Original definitions are shown below with revisions and new definitions that resulted from my analysis shown in italics.

Modesty: [in terms of revealing and concealing] refers to dressing in a manner which does not reveal too much of the body due to visible skin and/or tightness. Modesty also has to do with dressing appropriately for a given situation within a given culture or not drawing attention to one's self.

Revealing to concealing is a spectrum from completely naked to covered from head to toe. It relates to how much skin is exposed as well as to how form fitting a person's clothing is. Whether or not a person is considered to be revealed or concealed also is culturally defined. *While it is possible to measure quantitatively how revealed or concealed a person is, the meaning is defined by context. For example, someone wearing a bikini is appropriate at the beach or pool during Midwestern summers, while a mini skirt with bare legs in winter is not. Revealing and concealing is more than how much of the body is visible—it also relates to a person's attitudes and how she interacts with others.*

Provocative dress is: "dress that defies contextual norms of modesty" (Sterling, 1995, p. 90). That is, provocative dress is dress that is considered immodest by a particular culture and/or is immodest for a given situation.

In addition to the definitions with which I began, my research also led to the following definitions.

Trashy *is a subset of provocative, meaning that trashy dress generally is provocative, but provocative dress is not always trashy. Trashy refers to a particular style of revealing clothing and generally involves deliberately exposing the skin through tight, skin revealing clothing, especially aided by push-up bras.*

Appropriate *dress entails being dressed in a way that is suitable for the individual (based on her age, body-type, personality, etc) in a given context (ranging from cultural context to more localized contexts). It also means being dressed correctly for weather conditions and activities.*

Comfort *refers to how physical and psychological comfort interact with one another. Individuals are more likely to be cognizant of discomfort than comfort. Being comfortable implies, perhaps paradoxically, that one is not focused on comfort.*

Woodward (2007) found that women choose what they are going to wear for a variety of reasons, and I found that these young women also chose to reveal and conceal their bodies for varied reasons. While this might seem like an obvious conclusion, it is at odds with common parlance regarding why women show or hide their bodies. That is, in common discourse it is assumed that women show their bodies to attract men. Interestingly, my participants sometimes gave different reasons for why they had revealed or concealed their bodies compared to what they imagined other women's reasons were. Some participants stated that they revealed or concealed (or used to reveal or conceal) their bodies because they were less comfortable with themselves and wanted to fit in and/or not be noticed. When discussing the motives of other young women, some

of the same participants imagined that many other young women wore revealing clothing because they thought it was the only way to be appealing or provocative to men.

Implications

Although revealing and concealing has been addressed peripherally in a great deal of scholarly and popular writing, it has not been central in much scholarship. This study contributes to the literature because each participant was asked about her own reasons for revealing and concealing, rather than only asking about particular or generalized others' reasons for revealing and concealing. That is, other researchers have been more likely to ask respondents why they think other women reveal and conceal under the assumption that the researchers would learn why their participants dress the way that they do.

The findings of this research have implications for the design and marketing of clothing to this demographic of young women, given that some young women would like to be appealing without having to show a lot of skin. In addition, designers need to consider how clothing reveals and conceals different body types, as a garment that does not reveal a great deal of skin on one body type may reveal "too much" skin on a different body type. Some companies, such as Lands' End and Talbots, use symbols depicting different body types to show what figures are flattered by a particular garment. However, I have not seen this in any catalogs aimed at young women. Some brands, such as Levis and Gap, have started marketing jeans that are cut for different shapes, but there are not many options for overall body type (such as different bust sizes). Thus, I think it would be useful for companies to produce clothing that is explicit regarding what shapes any given garment is meant to flatter.

Researching body type and body image is outside of the scope of this study, but I think that revealing and concealing should be considered as a factor by researchers who study these issues. The current study is an initial step toward learning more about how people think and about revealing and concealing their own bodies in comparison to how they evaluate how others dress. Another way to look at this topic might be to go shopping with women and have them try on and talk about the clothing they are trying on in relation to their bodies. It also seems that revealing and concealing needs to be understood in terms of different demographics and in different cultural contexts, such as looking at women of different ages or within different work and leisure contexts. A study looking at different ages could be longitudinal or it could be cross-sections. In terms of cultural context, what is revealing in one culture is perfectly acceptable in another culture, but what happens when cultures collide? In sum, how do women (and men) consider revealing and concealing in terms of their own and others' values and place in society?

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APPENDIX I

Not-to-be-signed Consent Form

I am studying young women's attitudes toward revealing and concealing the body. I am interested in learning about how young women develop their views and how this impacts their choices of dress. I am doing this research for my thesis in partial fulfillment of requirements for a Masters of Arts at the University of Minnesota.

I hope that what I find will help me to learn about how young women think about revealing and concealing their bodies and that it will contribute to research in the field of Apparel Studies. It is also my hope that people who talk to me might find it useful to talk about their own experiences and knowledge.

Answering my questions may take between 30 and 60 minutes. I have eleven questions that I would like to ask you and you are not obligated to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable. You can also stop participating at any time during the interview. Your answers will not be connected to your name. Everything that you say to me will be confidential. In any publication or presentation of the data I might make, it will not be possible for you to be identified as a participant in this research. You needn't participate if you don't want to. If you decide to be interviewed, you can stop at any point and can refuse to answer any question. Also, you can ask me to turn off the tape recorder at any time. Your interviewer on this project is Caitlin Cohn, a student at the University of Minnesota. You can contact me at 815-751-2791 or cohnx037@umn.edu. My work is being supervised by my academic advisory Marilyn DeLong professor in the College of Design, McNeal Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN. Her office is 351 McNeal Hall and her phone number is 612-625-1219 and the department phone number is 612-626-9068.

Interview tape recordings or notes will be kept away from all other people except Dr. DeLong. When I am finished with them, I will destroy them. I may quote what you say in writing up this research, but I will never use your name and will change identifying information (like age and, if you are a student, major in the University) so that nobody will be able to recognize you in what is quoted. Nobody, except possibly Dr. DeLong, will ever be in a position to know who said what specific things in this interview.

I may decide to present this research at a local, regional, or national conference, either as an oral presentation or in a poster session. If I do so, I will make it impossible for anybody to identify you through quotes I use from your interview or from descriptions I give of you.

Your decision whether or not to participate and whether or not to be recorded will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the interviewer or Marilyn DeLong, you may contact the Research Subjects' Advocate line at the University of Minnesota. The phone number there is 612-624-1650, and the address is D528 Mayo, University of Minnesota, 420 Delaware St. SE, Minneapolis 55455.

RSPP#: 9205S05318
version date: January, 2011

APPENDIX II

Question Schedule

1. Can you describe a typical outfit that you wear to school?

2. How would the outfit you wear to school be different from what you would wear to go dancing?

3. If you had to go straight from school to going out, without having time to change your entire outfit, how would you modify you're wearing for going out?

4. Can you describe an outfit that you would wear to a family event?

5. When you think about revealing your body what do you think about? If you were going to take that revealing and make it concealing what would you do?

5. In what situations do you think about how much of your body you are revealing and concealing?

6. Can you tell me about a time when you felt that you were too covered up for a situation?

    -if not, can you tell about someone else you observed who was

7. Can you tell me about a time when you were dressed in clothing that was too revealing for the situation?

    -if not, can you tell about someone else you observed who was

8. In what situations do you want to blend in?

    - how much does that relate to revealing and concealing your body?

9. In what situations do you want to stand out?

    - how much does that relate to revealing and concealing your body?

10. What parts of your body do you feel good about?

    - are these parts of your body that you reveal?

11. What parts of your body do you not feel good about?

    - are these parts of your body that you prefer to conceal?

12. What guides the choices you make about the degree to which you reveal or conceal your body?

13. Who in your life is an important source of guidance about how you dress?

    - does this vary depending on the situation?

12. Describe a time when you and someone who is important to you disagreed about what you were wearing.

13. How have your views on how much of your body you reveal and conceal shifted over time?

14. Some of the people I've talked to have said that they're more comfortable wearing something that is looser but reveals more skin, while others have said that they prefer something that is tighter but reveals less skin. What are you more comfortable with and why do you think that?

APPENDIX III

Participants

Adrienne— tends to dress in more classic rather than trendy clothing, but is willing to take some risks. She is more willing to wear revealing clothing when she is with friends than when going out in a new environment. She described herself as less curvy.

Emily— generally prefers to wear more basic styles, such as tee-shirts and jeans, and she often wears scarves. She prefers more of her body to be covered up partially because that is her personal style, but also because she is uncomfortable with certain parts of her body, especially her stomach.

Helena— is willing to wear different styles, but generally describes herself as very modest. She feels it is especially important to be modest around the people who are most important to her. She also is uncomfortable showing certain parts of her body and compares herself to her sisters.

Jennifer—tends to wear trendy clothing sold at mainstream clothing stores and is most comfortable when she fits in with those around her. Although she is smaller than she was when she was younger, she wishes that she were somewhat slimmer.

Leah—has a very eclectic sense of style and likes to experiment with different types of clothing. She tends to shop at thrift stores and mixes different styles together. She takes risks, even if she sometimes ends up being uncomfortable. When she was younger, she did not like to stand out because she is tall and thin, but she is more accepting of her body now.

Nina—enjoys wearing clothing that makes her feel feminine and is willing to wear clothing that others might perceive as risqué, although she does not go out of her way to be provocative. She is very unafraid and primarily thinks of getting dressed as a way of self-expression. She says that, because she is "curvy up top" she sometimes reveals more cleavage than others find appropriate, but it is difficult to find clothing that does not reveal her curves.

Rose— tends to wear very classic styles, although she does like bright colors. She tends to have a small wardrobe, so she mixes and matches pieces to different effects. She says that she does not like to reveal much of her body, especially her chest because she does not have any cleavage and thinks it looks unappealing on her. She is more likely to wear tight clothing than skin-revealing clothing.

Stella— wears a wide variety of different styles, depending on her mood. She sometimes wears short skirts and also is comfortable in low-cut tops, but she said that part of the reason she does not think about neckline is because she is not curvy. She is most uncomfortable with how thin she is and dresses to make herself look more "average."

APPENDIX IV

Table 1: Socialization and Appropriateness

	Socialization: Family	Socialization: Workplace	Dressing with others in mind	Influence of Mother
Adrienne	Mother's rules shifted with age			Mother clearly verbalized limitations and was a role model
Emily		Appropriate dress at work with children		
Helena	Sisters, mother: clear rules. Rebelled earlier, now agrees.		If significant others wouldn't like it, she wouldn't wear it	
Jennifer				
Leah		Appropriate dress at work with children		Mother encouraged creativity
Nina	Rebelled earlier; agrees with mom now; grandmothers disagreed		People close to her should not judge her	Mother used praise, not shame. Old pictures of mother's youthful clothes
Rose				
Stella	Parents very flexible (today, she wears unusual clothes)			

Table 1, Socialization and Appropriateness, Continued

	Appropriate: Being practical	Appropriate: everyday	Appropriate: going out	Appropriate: Individual
Adrienne	Winter: warmth. Summer: takes more thought	"uniform"	Dress it up at night; skirts shorter; more concern about reveal/conceal at night	Too old or too young to be revealing; finding clothes for body type
Emily	Activity, setting, temperature. Private/public setting	No cleavage at school		Doesn't want to show stomach
Helena	Swing dancing		More revealing in summer	Finding clothes for body type
Jennifer	Setting: professional/ casual; Children/ adults/peers		Shows more skin at night;	Finding clothes for body type
Leah	Not revealed around certain people, e.g., grandparents			Finding clothes for body type
Nina	Summer: cool	Dresses to please herself; sees self as having different views than others; may reveal more at night	More reveal at night	Finding clothes for body type
Rose	Winter: functional-warm and dry; Summer: cool	Flexible dressing; e.g., change jacket, add scarf		Finding clothes for body type
Stella	Physical activity; public/private setting			Finding clothes for body type

Table 1, Socialization and Appropriatness, Continued

	Appropriate: Looking good	Appropriate: Being respected
Adrienne		
Emily		Doesn't want to be viewed negatively over length of shorts
Helena		Dressing appropriately in professional setting; dress and behavior are aligned
Jennifer	Friend makes revealing clothes look good;	Dressing appropriately in professional setting
Leah		
Nina		
Rose	Looks good in tight jeans	Not conservative, but does not want to be judged as not moral because of clothing
Stella		

Table 2, Fitting In and Standing Out

	Defining Trashy	Attracting Attention	Attracting attention: positive	Attracting negative attention
Adrienne		Has boyfriend; does not need to attract attention	Wants to be appealing without revealing body	
Emily	Other women: slashes in dress, super-low cut, really tight	Pathetic when other women dress in a revealing way to attract attention		Avoids "asking for negative attention"
Helena			Low-cut shirt causes others to look	
Jennifer			Nice to get compliments from others	
Leah		Super-cleavagey shirts and tight pants; shows insecurity of other women	Wants to look cute for men; wears something sexy;	
Nina	Revealing and unflattering; others might sat some of my clothes look trashy, but I disagree		Male friends know she is not dressing for attention	
Rose			Accentuating her body (not showing skin) on a date; clothes should fit well in professional setting	
Stella	Push-up bras and exposed thongs; ok to reveal more skin when it is very hot		Wearing lipstick	

Table 2, Fitting In and Standing Out, Continued

	Dressing to avoid attention	Fitting in- first impressions	Fitting in with group - ongoing	Fitting in- life stage
Adrienne	Does not want to be objectified by strangers			In high school, did not want to fit in with short-short wearing peers
Emily	Does not want to go out with a friend who dresses to attract male attention in clubs	Wants to blend in when meeting people		Wanted to fit in with college peers as freshman when not as comfortable with herself
Helena				
Jennifer		Does not want to get negative attention when meeting people		
Leah				Did not want to reveal her body because she developed earo8ier than peers
Nina				Did not want to reveal her body because she developed earlier than peers
Rose		Wants to fit in after a negative experience with standing out in a new group		
Stella		Wants to fit in when meeting new people in order to make them comfortable with her		(p. 85) wanted to conform when in middle school, but now is comfortable wearing clothes that are different from others'

Table 2, Fitting In and Standing Out, Continued

	Following Fashion	Standing Out
Adrienne	Follows fashion if she likes the look; prefers non-revealing fashions	At prom, a girl in a sleeved dress would stand out
Emily		Standing out by wearing reveal-ing clothing embarrassing in professional setting; may stand out because she is less revealing when going out
Helena		Wants to stand out by looking great, not by revealing
Jennifer		Concealing clothing makes person less noticeable; wants to be seen as part of a group
Leah		By trying to stand out, one may fit in with others dressing similarly
Nina		
Rose		
Stella	When at a fashion industry event, dresses more *avante garde;* Tends to follow fashion	Stands out by drawing attention away from her body and to her clothing;

Table 3: Self-Focused Dressing Motives

	Physical Comfort	"comfortable in my skin"	"An expression of my personality"	Setting
Adri-enne	What is comfortable in private may not be comfortable in public		Seeks roommate's opinion; less revealing	
Emily	Strapless dress is not comfortable because of strapless bra	Insecurities about parts of her body limits what she wears	Consistent sense of style; wants to feel good	
Helena	Move comfortably when dancing; Constant hiking up of strapless bra; loose neckline needs constant attention; miniskirts require crossed legs	How she feels about her body on a particular day will impact what she wears; body image is a factor	Checks her own motives: am I trying to attract attention? Fit a role? Dresses for herself	Setting is important, but personality is equally important
Jennifer	Not comfortable to reveal too much in public	More comfortable showing skin when tan; insecurities about parts of her body limits what she wears		
Leah	What is comfortable in private may not be comfortable in public		her clothes suit her personality; dressing is like "playing with paint"	
Nina		Moments of discom-fort with her clothing were quelled by reminding herself that she loves what she is wearing; confidence is from within	Enjoys being creative; goes through phases (1950's today; 1970's another day). Clothes are fun	
Rose	Not comfortable to wear bra and yoga pants even if other women are wearing them for yoga	At a topless beach in another country, her friends were ashamed of their bodies even in bikinis	Who she is and who she wants to be; primarily defines herself; likes to dress older	
Stella	Not comfortable to reveal too much in public while exercising		Shorter skirts feel more comfortable	