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Constructing Identity Through the Lens of Fashion: An Honors Thesis

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CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY THROUGH THE LENS OF FASHION

AN HONORS THESIS

by

Cara P. Doiron

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
(Business Administration in Finance)

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ABSTRACT

Fashion is an artistic decision that every person makes every day. Even those who say they don't care about clothing are still portraying something about themselves to the outside world with the stylistic choices they make. This creative Honors Thesis explores the impact of fashion on self-representation, accomplished through the design and construction of a capsule wardrobe line of clothing. Due to the project's personal and introspective nature, the intended wearer is the artist, and therefore the pieces are specifically tailored to her, rather than the straight sized garments that are typically produced in the fashion industry. This line consists of multiple pieces, each addressing a particular event or situation, in which ostensible expectations for dress conflict with what the wearer feels most authentically represented in. Examples include a high fashion take on a winter coat, a pink version of a ladies business suit, and more. The project's goal, through the artist's experience and sharing of this work, is to encourage viewers to reconsider fashion and the ways it impacts each of us inside and out, including their own personal style, the ways they feel they must conform, and how they can use fashion to feel more authentic and confident in themselves.

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INTRODUCTION

Fashion is something that has been important to me for as long as I can remember. Growing up, my mother and grandmother would love dressing me up, allowing my personal sense of style to grow from a young age. Similarly, I began sewing when I was a child, first learning at summer camps and later evolving into a self-taught practice. I would make anything I could think of, including pillows, bags, or repurposing old clothes into new, wearable works of art.

While I have had experience with fashion and sewing throughout my life, this project actually evolved out of a smaller project in the Honors Tutorial course called The Art of Failure, taught by Samantha Jones. Our assignment was to pursue a project that we had always wanted to do but hadn't out of a fear of failing. Fashion and sewing were two strong interests of mine, but I had always feared making my own clothes (rather than just altering existing clothes) because it felt like it required an amount of work and skill that I wouldn't be able to overcome. If I was somehow able to put the adequate effort into it, I was worried the outcome would be so bad that I would be embarrassed and too defeated to ever try again. It seemed easier to imagine design ideas and never make them than to try it and fail.

The reason I was so interested in making clothing of my own was because I had long wrestled with how to dress in a way that I could feel like the most authentic version of myself, experiencing firsthand the uplifting moments of success, and the discomfort of feeling like a look wasn't representing the true me. I was inspired by the idea that

research on this topic paired with the personal creation and fitting of a design might help me more concretely understand the emotional connection I have with clothes for better or for worse. Additionally, I hoped I might be able to use the experience to move to a higher level of self-awareness and authenticity, and to share it in a way that could also inspire others to think about their fashion choices, the ways they choose to represent themselves, and how it might impact them beyond simply a surface level. Working in the academic environment of the Honors tutorial, which would accept failure as long as it was accompanied by passion and effort, allowed me to push past that fear and not only accomplish my goal, but to do so with great success. Making that one garment proved to me that it was only the beginning of what I might be able to create, and thus, my thesis project was born.

Identity and fashion are intrinsically connected. Everyone says something with their style, and everyone makes decisions about how to present themselves on a daily basis. Even the people who claim to not care about fashion still must buy their clothing and choose how to wear it. In the essay “Fashioning a Feminist Style” in *Fashion Talks*, author Astrid Henry references the words of Pamela Church Gibson, saying:

“No one can dress in a way that signifies nothing. One may be ‘fashion indifferent,’ an ‘anti-fashionist’ or crazy about fashion. But regardless, writes Gibson, ‘whether [people] follow current trends, ignore them and create their own style, are relatively uninterested in ‘fashion’ as such, or have little, if any, money to spend on clothes, they nevertheless, by the simple act of getting dressed in the morning, participate in the process of fashion’” (22).

Ideally, fashion could be used to represent one’s most true self as an aesthetic exterior to represent the person within. For some, this process can be empowering and make a notable difference in mood, confidence, and self-acceptance. The significance of these benefits is examined more in Chapter I. However, for others, restrictions on clothing,

whether explicit, ostensible, or internal, can cause the wearer to feel oppressed. This may not only eliminate the benefit that can come from dressing authentically, but could even invert it, leaving one worse off than they felt before. Such factors could include fit, money, weather, gender identity, body, culture, and more, discussed in more detail in Chapter II. This thesis project takes this concept and examines it through the creation of a capsule wardrobe of clothing designed and made for me, by me. Each look addresses a situation in which I have felt unable to dress in a way that made me feel like the best version of myself, and attempts to find a solution that satisfies both the requirements of the circumstance and of my own personal stylistic desires. Each situation and its accompanying look, including cold weather, everyday, professional, and first impressions, is discussed at length in Chapter III. This written component of the thesis serves as an extended artist's statement, discussing supporting research, the works I have created, and the process of their formation.

CHAPTER I

THE IMPORTANCE OF DRESSING FOR SELF-REPRESENTATION

I have always felt some sense of duty to myself to dress in a way that feels authentic. This is, of course, important in the sense that I want to convey something about who I am to the outside world, but beyond that, I want to feel good about myself. This vague notion is hard to concretely qualify and can sometimes seem to vary day by day. However, it is something that we are all familiar with on some level. Whether it is a sense of confidence in professional attire for a job interview, feeling relaxed in pajamas, the excitement for warmer weather the first time one puts on sandals in the spring, or countless other situations, each is unique to the specific wearer and situation.

Fashion is a major part of culture, not to mention an essential component of self-expression. For many, however, it is overlooked, despite the fact that nearly every person makes decisions on their clothing each day. Clothing inherently represents its wearer, and therefore, fashion plays a large role in the lives of individuals and as a representation of society. Perhaps Dr. Jennifer Baumgartner describes it best in her book *You Are What You Wear* when she says:

“Our clothing is the physical representation of our perceptions, our dissatisfactions, and our desires. When we look beyond the physical to our internal workings, we can create a change at the core. Unlike change that occurs in therapy, these difficult internal examinations are softened by the light of the wardrobe makeover . . . Taking care of yourself begins with self-discovery. The clothing you put on your back is an incredibly accurate indicator of what you think of yourself and your life. Cracking open the closet doors can lead to great insight. When you strive toward self-discovery, improvement often follows.

Wearing clothing that makes you feel comfortable, happy, and good about yourself really does make life better” (xv-xvi).

It is worth noting that beyond the individual implications of what we choose to wear, fashion in society says a great deal about its culture at large. As Diana Crane states in her book titled *Fashion and its Social Agendas*: “tracing changes in the nature of fashion and in the criteria for clothing choices is one way of understanding the differences between the type of society that has been gradually disappearing and the one that is slowly emerging” (Crane 236). This topic alone would be enough to write its own thesis on, so while I will not expound upon it here, it is worth recognizing.

There is a constant back and forth between the desires of the internal self and the expectations of society. Some believe that we should dress for ourselves, as Dr. Baumgartner explains above, while others remain steadfast to the idea that because “clothes are intended to be worn in public space; we dress for others not for ourselves” (Crane 237). Crane’s statement here is, of course, in reference to the larger societal impact of clothing as a part of material culture, as previously discussed, and how the clothing may be used to fit into certain social groups or identities. However, I am of the opinion that the latter statement, at its core, minimizes some of the individual opportunities that dressing for oneself can provide. Fashion is not about seeking the approval of others; it is first about seeking the approval of oneself. This is why some choose to flaunt their personal style with courage, even when faced with the possibility of questioning stares or judgmental commentary, with commendation from others serving as icing on the cake, so to speak.

One of the best examples of someone who is living their life and using fashion to represent her most authentic self is Iris Apfel. She is a 96-year-old fashion icon of New

York City, her life and perspective detailed in countless documentaries, notably the 2015 release *Iris*, directed by Albert Maysles. Apfel is known for her signature use of accessories, adorned with giant beads, chunky bracelets, and owl-like circular glasses. A photograph of her, serving as an example of her style, is shown in Figure G in the Appendix. In the film, she emphasizes that her style is not intellectual, and it is all based on her gut feeling, saying “it just has to feel right with me. Every time I do it, I do it a different way,” referring to the daily evaluation of what pieces feel most authentic to who she is and what she wants to present on that particular day.

Regardless of the level of outlandishness an outfit might display, the benefits of dressing for one’s own truth of spirit often make worth it, in spite of the appraisals of others. These advantages are too valuable to be written off as simply a means to seek approval from others. The most obvious reward of dressing authentically is that it can make the wearer feel happier, more confident, and comfortable in their own skin. Discovering who we are in an aesthetic sense can be enlightening, and that greater understanding of the self allows for that heightened sense of fun in what could like a chore. In the text *Change Your Clothes, Change Your Life*, the author, George Brescia, says:

“..you may feel your emotions surrounding your clothing become suffused with a lightness and a joy you haven’t felt since those high school days. Despite all the struggles you previously had with your clothing, you may rediscover a sense of fun . . . On a deeper level, you will certainly feel an increased sense of poise and self-confidence. An outfit you feel 100 percent proud of is an immeasurably powerful baseline with which to start your day. You will notice the difference the instant you step out of your door, and the benefits will only accrue through the days, weeks, and months that follow” (266-267).

We don’t need a book to tell us this, as it is something we all know is true. Whether it is something experienced daily, once in a lifetime, or even if it is only experienced it in the

imagination, most people recognize the power of clothing. This is especially true for special occasions like weddings, with white gowns holding a special place in the hearts of many traditional brides in the U.S., or graduations, with a cap and gown denoting accomplishment, etc. It is once we are able to go beyond this event-based celebration of clothing, instead recognizing the daily power of our stylistic selections, that we can use fashion for the purpose of self-discovery, representation, and love.

Even though this desire to represent oneself is internally motivated, and has indisputable emotional benefits, the virtues may extend beyond how it makes one feel. Fashion can be used to show the world who you are, and this sense of authenticity can allow you to attract likeminded individuals, open new doors, and even strengthen connections with others.

While some situations, such as those that I focus on in the creative body of work for this thesis, do require meeting certain expectations, it remains my choice to adhere to those expectations because I want to reap some of the benefits of doing so. A very simple example of this is the choice to wear an adequately warm coat in the winter. It is clothing, and therefore represents a stylistic choice, but the practical demands of the situation, such as staying warm in frigid temperatures, are something that I also want to take advantage of. Another example is choosing to wear business attire to a job interview. I want to show the company something about myself, the person they are considering hiring, but I also want to prove to them, on some level, within the context and expectations of our specific culture and society, that I am a professional. Dressing well has been scientifically shown to increase my chances of getting a job (Brescia 4), and because that is, of course, the ultimate goal of my attending a job interview, I am willing to take into consideration the

ways in which I dress can help me achieve that objective. Therefore, I am continuing to dress for myself, representing who I am, and while in pursuit of my own goals, I am choosing to strategically abide by certain expectations the particular situation suggests. In fashion, especially once the metaphorical door of designing and creating one's own clothes is unlocked, it seems there will always be a way to balance the need for personal expression and the necessities of circumstance.

CHAPTER II

INHIBITORS OF DRESSING FOR THE SELF

In my life, I have become acutely aware of the impact clothing has on my mood, and even how my mood impacts which clothing I choose to wear. During periods of my life in which I have lost a sense of who I was, often due to struggles with emotional mental health, it became more difficult to dress in ways that felt truly representative of myself, likely because I no longer felt as sure of just who that person was. I would fall into the rut of wearing the same so-called uniform every day, like jeans or leggings with a simple shirt, no accessories, etc. I knew that I always felt better when I cared about my appearance and worked to put together outfits, but the effort it required often felt insurmountable. It was almost like it was easier just to give up and blend in, feeling unhappy, than to put myself out there.

Thankfully, those times did not last forever for me, and every time I came out of it, I was able to rediscover my love of fashion. However, it is because I love fashion and care deeply about how I present myself and whether I feel authentic in what I choose to wear that I can still sometimes find myself in an emotional struggle with my closet. In many ways, I am very fortunate in my life to have the freedoms that I do, including my freedoms of clothing choice. However, in discussing a topic such as this, it is essential to acknowledge my own privilege and to recognize the perspectives and struggles of others. There are countless reasons why one could feel inhibited or even completely prevented

from dressing for themselves, while still other factors exist as social or cultural norms that one might independently choose to adhere to. Each individual topic within this section could easily fill volumes on its own, and while they are not the predominant focus of this project, it remains important to note and briefly discuss them here for the sake of thoroughness.

A negative interaction of fashion and mood is one of the more apparent inhibitors of authentic dress; an equally negative association with fashion occurs with the desire to dress more fashionably, but not knowing where to begin. If anything indicates the pressure many feel to dress in a certain way, it is the vast selection of fashion help books. Unfortunately, the majority of these texts seem to focus on correcting a negative or making the reader better, under a closed-minded definition of the word, according to some vague, collective group of others, with promises of making the individual seem skinnier, sexier, wealthier, more likable, etc. Certain texts push readers to feel shame about their bodies, with titles like *How Not to Look Fat* by Danica Lo, *Does This Make Me Look Fat?* by Leah Feldon, *How to Never Look Fat Again* by Charla Krupp, and countless others. In fact, when visiting the library, this type of book dominates most of the fashion help section. Others are thinly veiled attempts by stylists-turned-authors to impose their own opinions upon those seeking advice. While there are some standout written works that truly have the best interest of the reader in mind (see a brief list of suggestions in the Appendix, Table A), they are few and far between, and it is the potential reader's inundation with these surface-level texts that makes the task of discovering oneself through fashion feel impossible, and to some, perhaps no longer worth pursuing.

As is implied by the previous listing of books, body type is a factor that can impact clothing choice. For many years, fashion glamorized the ultra-thin, and as a result, plus-sized clothing was harder to find, had fewer options, and was even more expensive, according to Tim Gunn's 2016 op-ed for the Washington Post. However, in the very recent past, there has been a major shift, as companies are finally starting to recognize the validity of this market segment, according to a 2017 article in *The Economist* titled "The Forgotten Majority: The Fashion Industry Pays Attention to Plus-Size Women." The article states:

"A frequently-cited study . . . by Plunkett Research, a market-research firm, found that 67% of American women were "plus-size", meaning size 14 or larger. . . in 2016, only 18% of clothing sold was plus-size, according to NPD Group, another research firm" (*The Economist*).

The article then goes on to discuss the beginnings of progress that the industry has shown to become more inclusive to all body types, but that it is still not even close to the level that it should be.

In addition to these concerns about the range of available sizes, there remains the concern of the fit of the clothing in general. Most people realize how difficult it can be to find something as simple as a pair of jeans that actually fit well. While it is certainly cheaper for manufacturers to produce clothing in a single, standardized shape, large groups of people are left with only ill-fitting options. Fit is a key component to feeling good in clothing, as George Brescia states, "whatever your size and shape, well-fitting clothes send the message that you're confident about your body, where ill-fitting clothes telegraph uncertainty and a lack of confidence" (53). Part of the complication of fit is the issue of vanity sizing, as Time magazine discusses in the article "One Size Fits None":

“The rise of so-called vanity sizing has rendered most labels meaningless. As Americans have grown physically larger, brands have shifted their metrics to make shoppers feel skinnier—so much so that a women’s size 12 in 1958 is now a size 6. Those numbers are even more confusing given that a pair of size-6 jeans can vary in the waistband by as much as 6 in., according to one estimate” (*Time*).

The U.S. once had a universal system of sizing that all clothing manufacturers adhered to, but by the early 80s, it was no longer in use. Of course, there is no universal body type, but lacking even a basic system of sizing means that the majority of people will have a difficult time finding well-fitting clothes now, and the clothes that they do have may all have different numeric sizes, according to the tag. Endlessly trying on clothes is often the only option, and it can be frustrating to the point that many give up. Furthermore, the option to try things on exists only in brick-and-mortar retail environments, which is falling by the wayside with the rise of online shopping (Sanburn, *Time*).

Another important factor that contributes to or restricts one’s ability to dress in a certain way is money. As Hadley Freeman puts it in *The Meaning of Sunglasses*, “That fashion generally involves the expenditure of money is probably the most common criticism of it” (168). It is true that fashion and money go hand in hand, with the industry arguably being one of the strongest ties between business and art. Certain styles are accessible only to the elite, for instance, luxurious designer brands, or “the fact that the cost of furs makes them attainable to only the richest provides their wearers with the thrill of exclusion” (Arnold 16). Even the line of clothing that I created for this project was made possible through generous monetary academic grants, and without them I would not have been able to accomplish anything even close what I was able to, because I would not have been able to afford it. The financial demands that the fashion industry

places on the consumer permeate not only the ready-to-wear market, but even those who try to circumvent it by making their own clothes.

With today's interconnected global businesses and cultures, designs that start out as available to only the upper echelon are quickly reimagined, sometimes ripped off, by lower cost manufacturers, making way for the world of fast fashion we find ourselves in today, dominated by players such as H&M and Forever21 (Bain, *The Atlantic*). For this reason, fashion is more accessible than ever, but the environmental and ethical costs sometimes associated with these brands can weigh heavily on the consumer. Therefore, spending money on the higher end labels is financially unfeasible, and buying the lower cost versions brings the aforementioned issues along with lower quality and durability, so it is difficult to find a way to win.

Another obstacle in dressing for oneself is the consideration of practicality in terms of the weather or activities. For instance, if one's lifestyle demands that they walk a lot, there is some necessity to wearing comfortable shoes. Another example is that in a climate like the state of Maine's, one must have clothing appropriate for all types of conditions, from blizzards to beach days. For the sake of functionality, it is easy to feel constrained by wearing certain pieces, and once those habits are established, it is even more difficult to break away from them.

One of the biggest inhibitors of dressing for oneself stems from location. Location has less to do with physical location (though that is incorporated when it comes to factors like weather, discussed above), and more to do with the culture and society of that particular area. For example, one wouldn't expect to see someone going out to dinner in, say, Topeka, Kansas in the same outfit as someone doing the same in New York City.

Some of this is self-selecting, as some people are able to move to areas where they feel they fit in better, but when someone is brought up in a location that they feel they don't belong, it can be hard to branch and wear the kinds of fashion to which they might someday aspire. This kind of constrictive homogeneity can take place on an even smaller scale, such as the overabundance of Abercrombie & Fitch and Hollister branded clothing that I remember being surrounded by in middle school, or the hundreds of pairs of Bean boots paired with Patagonia fleeces at the University of Maine. There is absolutely nothing wrong with these stylistic choices, but when one wants to deviate from that norm, it can feel uncomfortable, both for the wearer and the onlooker, sometimes enough to discourage any deviation at all.

Relating to culture, religion can also play a role in the way that people dress. Numerous religions around the world have norms related to clothing for people involved at different levels. For discussion's sake, a focus will be placed upon Islam, as it is perhaps the religion most commonly associated with modest dress, especially for women, who often wear garments such as the hijab head covering, or the loose abaya dress (*Arabs in America*, University of North Carolina). While some may view this as oppressive, many of the women who actually wear the garments do so out of personal preference. They view it as a sign of respect for themselves, others, and Allah, and an essential part of their culture, as discussed in Dr. John Turner's Honors 112 lecture on *the Holy Qur'an* in March of 2015. Furthermore, some of these Muslim women even take the opportunity to enhance the style of their modest garments. This is discussed in the essay titled "Glam Abaya: Contemporary Emirati Couture" by Jan C. Kreidler in the book *Fashion Talks*, saying:

“In the search for modern styles that do not offend religious and cultural customs, most fashionable Muslim women wear conservative, more conventionally attractive abayat. A *Gulf News* reader writes, ‘We Emirati women wear the abaya because it is our cultural dress and our culture is defined by our religion, Islam. That is why it is a beautiful, conservative way to be a good Muslim and an elegant woman.’ . . . One design team claims, ‘The EFFA ‘Abaya Couture’ customer is an independent, active and modern woman that wants her abaya to reflect her personality whilst keeping her cultural identity’” (141).

This brief discussion on a subset of the fashion of Islam serves as a single example of how the cultural norms of some religions influence dressing, but at the same time, they may also encourage new ways of exploring personal style. This message, of course, becomes more complicated for individuals that are involved in various religions against their will, or out of fear of retribution. In any case, religion is a factor that influences the ways people dress.

A final possible inhibitor of dressing for the self to be discussed here is the individual’s gender identity. This topic is one that is especially broad and is an ever-growing conversation in today’s society. In the essay “Dressing Left” in *Fashion Talks*, author Shira Tarrant writes:

“Gender is a continuum of identities and presentations of self. As such, there is no binary, there is no Other. . . The even larger question that remains unanswered is whether it is ever really possible that mainstream images of fashion and style can move beyond a binary of masculine and feminine in opposition to each other . . . Or does the coding of masculinity and femininity run so deeply through our collective psyches that any attempt to subvert this phenomenon will remain incomplete?” (49).

While in some circles, acceptance of the multitude of identities grows, there is still a great deal of prejudice, and this lack of acceptance makes it more difficult for many individuals to come out, and when they do, they can often be faced with criticism or even violence (Astor, *New York Times*). For trans people who are unable to come out, they may feel as if the clothes they wear in their birth-assigned gender (as opposed to the

gender they identify as) are in betrayal of their true self. Furthermore, as the quote above emphasizes, fashion and traditional gender roles have long been intertwined, so clothing can feel especially restrictive for those who do not identify in that anachronistic binary.

The topics discussed here in relation to their impact on fashion, including emotions, accessibility, body type and sizing, money, practicality, culture, religion, and gender identity each carry their own weight, and often, it is likely that multiple categories could apply to any one person. To conclude the discussion on restrictions of dress, one final example should be acknowledged, and that is the significance of the uniform. People wear uniforms in many circumstances, including service jobs, the military, and even prison. The one commonality in each of these situations is that the uniform is designed to remove the sense of individuality from its wearer. This practice alone is enough to demonstrate the power of fashion for representation of the self, as well as how restrictions on these choices can have an indisputable impact.

CHAPTER III

WORKS AND PROCESS

The predominant component of my thesis is the creative work that I have done in the design and physical creation of a capsule wardrobe of clothing, to be discussed in this chapter. The concept of the capsule wardrobe means that many of the pieces can be worn together in different combinations to create multiple harmonious looks. This chapter is broken down into sections for each situation: Cold Weather, Everyday, Professional, and First Impressions. For each, I first provide a brief description of each piece that I have created, and then an abbreviated history of the type of garment, as appropriate. Then, I discuss the concept and reasoning of each finished piece(s), followed by a more in depth discussion of the process, ending with a photo of the finished garment(s).

It should be noted that in the fashion design industry, patterns are typically used as a starting point for garments, commonly referred to as slopers (Mahon 53). While I have had years of experience in sewing, I am relatively new to the practice of making clothing. Thus, an essential part of my process was the adaptation of basic patterns (listed in Works Cited and in Table B in the Appendix). Beginning with the pattern as a general starting template for a certain cut or style, I adapted each as needed to have the optimal fit for my body, and to reflect the ideas I had for the design of each piece. Each piece discussed in this thesis was constructed by me in my makeshift basement sewing studio at my home in Bangor, Maine.

The color scheme for the line was established early on as an adapted primary, so rather than the potentially childish red, yellow, and blue, it would be pink, yellow-orange, and a rich cobalt blue, with the addition of white as a neutral. This functions as a sort of grown up version of the palette, maintaining a sense of youthful fun, but applied to more grown up pieces. Additionally, all pieces were finished with woven labels, showing my name, Cara Doiron, in sparkly gold on a pink background (see Appendix, Figure H). These furthered the idea of building a brand, and also forging a stronger personal connection with the pieces as an extension of myself.

Cold Weather

The first piece created for this collection is a three-quarter length winter coat in blue faux fur, with matching blue satin lining, a hidden Thinsulate interior lining, with exterior, two-way, lined pockets. While coats for warmth and style have a long history, this particular type stems from the 1920s cocoon coat (*Vintage Dancer*). They were typically made of wool at the time, though fur was a common addition around necklines, as well as making up entire coats. Particularly in the early to mid 1900s, fur was seen as a symbol of status, and more recently, “the haute symbol of the Lady, the fur coat, the emblem of both the aloof aristocrat and the kept mistress, has seen a tentative revival on the catwalks of high fashion since the mid-1990s” (Arnold 15). More and more brands are now declaring themselves fur-free, instead utilizing faux fur as I have done here. In fact, after I had already made this piece, numerous fashion news outlets, declared brightly

colored faux fur coats a major trend at New York Fashion Week for Fall 2018, which took place in February of 2018.

Concept

Winter is a big part of living in Maine, and most people have a winter coat that they wear simply for the sake of staying as warm as possible. The stylistic options for these ultra-warm coats are typically limited and very plain, as it is something we must wear nearly every day for months at a time and therefore requires versatility. I was intrigued by the idea of a coat that is just as warm as any coat by L.L. Bean or Canada Goose, but far more high fashion and luxurious than any of the existing options that were designed predominantly with practicality in mind. The resulting coat is very warm and cozy, proven to keep its wearer comfortable in cold temperatures, while remaining a fun and vibrant piece that might actually make someone look forward to winter.

Process

I had been seeing a lot of three-quarter length coats in my visual research, and loved the polish they added to any outfit, and, of course, the extended length would contribute to the warmth of the coat. I knew that I wanted to do a faux fur in a bright color, and after ordering a myriad of samples from Mood Fabrics, a rich and vibrant cobalt stood out to me in a way that I could not ignore. I remember leaving a meeting with my thesis advisors in the evening during Fall of 2017, and the sky was the exact color of the blue fur. It felt like just the inspiration I needed to move forward with the design. The color feels fun, yet grown up and is truly a treat for the eyes. The pile of the

fur was short enough that it was fuzzy and fun, rather than the less desirable adjective of hairy. I later acquired blue satin in a matching tone for the lining.

I started the process by cutting the gigantic spread of faux fur on my living room floor, leaving some remnants of bright blue fuzz even after multiple rounds of vacuuming. I sewed the thick fur exterior on my sewing machine. The next step was the satin lining, which proved to be very slippery both to cut and to sew, so I ended up hand sewing the entire satin lining. The coat was meant to be oversized to some extent, but it was far too large for what I was envisioning, so I adapted the pieces, creating a narrower collar in exchange for a more fitted profile. I incorporated two-way pockets into the design as something very practical for the wearer. This means that one can put something in the top of the pocket and put their hands in the side pocket, with each part of the pocket separately lined in satin. It took a lot of trial and error to figure out the mechanics of the design, but eventually each part was successfully constructed and sewn on by hand.

Before stitching the exterior and satin lining together, I decided to incorporate an additional Thinsulate lining in between the layers. This was a low volume way to take the coat from something for mildly cold weather to something that I could actually wear in frigid winter temperatures. Essentially, I ended up making three coats: one fur, one satin, and one Thinsulate. Then, I hand stitched them together to form the complete, consolidated coat. Circular gold buttons were chosen as the finishing detail with hidden sewn on snaps beneath them, as sewing a button hole through the three layers of the coat would have been nearly impossible for my non-industrial sewing machine. Surprisingly, choosing the buttons was one of the more difficult decisions in making this coat. I wanted them to complement the simple shape of the coat, but they needed have at the same luxe

feeling that the coat itself had. The circular shape is simple but is made more grand with the shiny gold finish and hammered appearance. The coat is shown at right in Figure A.



Figure A: Cold Weather - Blue Faux Fur Coat

Everyday

This look consists of a white peplum top with embroidery on the sleeves and stitched borders around the neckline and sleeve edges. The top is complemented by a pair of custom fit high waist, skinny leg jeans with a zipper fly and back pockets. The T-shirt and jeans is a staple of American dress, with their specific pairing a result of a 1950s film archetype, the “working class rebel . . . a costume consisting of blue jeans, black leather jackets, and T-shirts” (Crane 182). As discussed by Tim Gunn in his *Fashion Bible*, jeans themselves have much older origins. Denim itself was invented in Genoa, Italy in the 16th century. Designed as a sturdy garment for laboring, the first pair of jeans were patented by Levi Strauss and Jacob Davis in 1872. Gunn also notes that “that the only reason blue

jeans are blue today is that the fabric was easy to dye indigo” (Gunn, *Tim Gunn’s Fashion Bible* 41). Gunn also examines the history of t-shirts, emphasizing that, though they have existed as undergarments for hundreds of years, they only started being worn in public in the 1940s. Since then, t-shirts have grown to become ubiquitous, available in every iteration and design one could imagine, exemplifying casual clothing in America and abroad.

Concept

For this look, I wanted something that I could wear on a normal day, when I might be going to class, running errands, etc. but that would also feel special and true to myself. T-shirts often seem too casual in a way that makes me feel sloppy, so this piece has been elevated and personalized in style, with a peplum waist and embroidery, and material, through the use of a thicker, slightly stretchy fabric. These details provide a whimsical and artistic flair and help to represent some of my own personality.

I wanted to create a pair of jeans for an everyday look because they are one of the items of clothing I wear most, but simultaneously one of the hardest to find, a challenge that surely many can also attest to. I have found it to be especially true in my own life that clothes that fit well feel very empowering, while clothes that do not fit feel frumpy and can disintegrate my confidence. Therefore, tailoring was a key element in the success of this piece. Essentially, I aimed to create the pair of jeans I always wanted but could never afford, with custom fit, flattering and versatile dark wash, skinny leg, and high waist. They are finished with a hammered appearance gold metal button, referencing the

buttons on the blue fur coat, and adding a sophisticated element to the otherwise casual jeans.

Process

For the top of this look, I knew that I wanted to incorporate embroidery because it would add a very unique, personal, handmade quality to the piece. Additionally, I have long admired embroidery in its various forms, particularly the style of the Mexican indigenous people, Otomi, and their tenango style (an example of this style is provided in the Appendix, Figure I). In creating my embroidery designs, I was also inspired by the heart motifs used by one of my favorite artists, Keith Haring (see Appendix, Figure J). After a lot of sketching and planning, I eventually decided to locate the main embroidered designs on the sleeve panels, a placement that made it feel more like a high-end detail, rather than a graphic T-shirt. The borders are made up of adapted lazy daisy stitch and French knots, visually tying the full piece together. The colors used in my embroidery were chosen to reference the other pieces in the collection, adhering to the aforementioned planned color scheme for the line as a whole. A detail photograph of the embroidery can be seen in the Appendix, Figure K.

Before beginning the physical construction of the shirt, I completed all of the embroidery on the cut fabric components that would later form the garment. One thing that sometimes bothers me about wearing t-shirts is that I don't feel as feminine in them as I would like to, and thus I added a peplum waist which helped emphasize more of an hourglass shape. This was achieved by using the gather technique on a piece of fabric wider than the shirt's body, purposefully puckering the stitches evenly across the seam.

The scoop neckline is both more comfortable and more polished than a standard crew neck. The edge was covered with another piece of fabric to give it a smooth line, rather than needing to cut notches, aided by the slight stretch in the chosen material. The sleeves are fitted in a way to emphasize the embroidery, with similar edge covering to match the neckline.

According to most denim jean size charts, I often find myself one size for my hips, multiple sizes smaller for my waist, and drowning in too long inseams. When I do find a pair that fits, the fabric usually incorporates stretch, but after wearing the pants for even just a few hours, they are often stretched out and no longer fit well. The jeans created for this project are one hundred percent cotton, and this lack of stretch means I had to be sure they were tailored to exactly my body size. Working with the reference pattern for this piece, I first cut the full pieces of the size supposedly required to fit the widest part of my body, my hips, out of muslin material. Using these pieces, I created a fabric pattern for the jeans as custom tailored to my body by pinning the pieces, basting them together, checking for fit, and then repeating the process until the desired fit was achieved. This took many iterations, but once the muslin pair was complete, I deconstructed it and used the components as pattern pieces to cut out the denim pieces, and I subsequently made the final pair of jeans.

I chose to forgo the side pockets, because not only do I never use them, but they are also difficult to use, especially in high waisted pants. However, I made sure to incorporate sizable back pockets because I habitually use those to hold items. I also did not include belt loops because I don't typically like wearing belts, and since the jeans are fit to my body, I don't need a belt to keep the pants up. They are finished with a zipper

fly, which I had to experiment with to figure out the mechanics of. I had sewn in zippers before, but this was my first attempt at incorporating it as a part of a fly, so I kept working with it until I figured out a way that was successful. The most difficult part of the jeans beyond just getting the fit right was creating the buttonhole. The layers of denim were so thick that it was hard to get my sewing machine to successfully stitch through, and ripping the hole was also very difficult. I chose a button that was smaller but a similar style to that chosen for the coat, gold metallic with a hammered texture, referencing the blue and gold of the faux fur coat. It takes a few times wearing a pair of jeans for the fabric to start to relax, so they are still somewhat stiff and the button can be difficult to maneuver at times, but the more they are worn, the easier they become to wear. The top and jeans are shown below in Figure B and Figure C, respectively.



Figure B: Everyday - Embroidered Top



Figure C: Everyday - Jeans

Professional

The professional look for this collection is a pink ladies' business suit, consisting of a blazer and a skirt. The material is a printed linen cotton canvas. The blazer has pockets and a gold button closure, and the skirt has a zipper closure with an additional decorative button, matching that of the blazer. According to *Tim Gunn's Fashion Bible*, the origin of the suit as we know it was likely a mandate made by King Charles II requiring members of the English court to wear pants and a waistcoat, essentially a suit, done in response to a similar decree of wardrobe standardization by France's Louis XIV. The modern suit that we know today stemmed from Londoner George Brian Brummell in the early 1800s (Gunn 152-153), with the city's Savile Row remaining the premiere destination for bespoke suits to this day. These suits were all for men at that point, serving as "the epitome of style that expresses social class distinctions" (Crane 173).

Women began to wear suits in the 1980s, and according to Gunn:

"traditional business clothes for woman originated from tailored menswear, and this is a trend that regrettably continues, even though women are a major presence in pretty much every sector of the working world . . . The most common thing I hear from women who wear male-tailored clothes to the workplace is that it's because they don't want to risk being unprofessional. However, it is possible to be both feminine and professional" (Gunn 164-166).

Concept

This suit was one of the first things I knew I wanted to create as part of this collection. My field of study is business administration, more specifically finance, a field still dominated by men to this day. In my academic and professional career, I have attended numerous events in which the expectation has been for me to dress in a

professional way. However, when I discovered that the women's suit was just an adaptation of a man's suit, I was inspired to make the most unapologetically woman-centric business look that I could, while still maintaining the classic elements of a suit. Pink is a color assigned as traditionally feminine, founded in the last century of fashion history and instilled in our society from young age. Though that designation may arguably be outdated, its power as a symbol of feminism persists in our culture. Thus, I made a blazer and matching skirt in an undeniably bright pink hue.

In my own life, pink is one of my favorite colors, and I have a treasured photograph of my grandmother wearing a pink suit (see Appendix Figure L). Once, at a family gathering, I proclaimed that I hoped I could have a job one day that would allow me to wear a pink suit, and a male member of my extended family replied that I would "never be taken seriously in something like that." Of course, this only motivated me further to make that goal happen, and now I have the suit to do it in.

Process

Although this was one of the first concrete ideas I had for my collection, it was one of the last to actually be constructed. I looked far and wide for the perfect fabric, something with the right texture, weight, and most importantly, the right color pink. After unsuccessfully searching for weeks, I came up with the solution of getting the exact pink I wanted printed on fabric through the company Spoonflower. I selected a linen cotton canvas out of their available options because it is sturdy enough for structured pieces such as these, but it is still soft and breathable.

Much like the jeans, the suit's skirt required a lot of modification from the pattern sizing to fit properly. A zipper was installed on the side with a sewn on snap closure added to further secure it, with a decorative button added on the exterior using the same type as on the jeans. The blazer, though comprised of many pieces and likely the most complicated construction of the pieces made in this thesis, went together much as expected according to my research in the pattern and garment type with minimal additional tailoring required. The most difficult part was getting the lapels to lay flat with no puckers after attaching the facing and flipping it back to show the right side of the fabric. I created a button closure on the blazer, again using the same type as on the other pieces. Pockets were added on the front exterior as a stylistic element, but also as a solution to never having functioning pockets in blazers, as they are usually stitched shut for appearance. Interior edges were finished using pinking shears to prevent fraying. The completed suit is shown here, in Figure D.



Figure D: Professional - Pink Suit (Blazer and Skirt)

First Impressions

This dress has a wide circle skirt and a scooped back with a bow across the top. It is sleeveless and has a high waist. The top and bottom components of the dress are each adorned with a custom designed print. It has a waistline reminiscent of the early 1800s Napoleonic era's empire waist, which saw more recent resurgences of popularity in the 1960s and 1990s, but when combined with the sleeveless bodice and boat neckline, it is most aesthetically related to 1960s gowns (Gunn 50).

Concept

The title given to this situation is "First Impressions," but the idea actually began in consideration of what one might wear on a first date. In *The Meaning of Sunglasses*, Hadley Freeman states, "Of course you want to look nice for your date. But do you know what looks best of all? You feeling comfortable, relaxed and confident that you look good" (Freeman 55). I sought to find a way to dress up but still feel like myself, and to depict something about my personality through shape, color, and print. The voluminous circle skirt is airy and playful, but the length makes it elegant as well, while the exposed back paired with the high boat neck references 1960s fashion. The colors of the dress are consistent with the line's overall palette.

I wanted to use this dress as a canvas for a print designed by me. The circle motif is emblematic of a solar eclipse, with a total eclipse on the top of the dress, and partial eclipses in repeating block on the lower portion. I chose this imagery because I shared my

22nd birthday with the total solar eclipse on August 21, 2017. I witnessed it on the streets of New York City with thousands of strangers, and I somehow felt connected to all of them through that shared experience. In the July 4th, 2017 episode of the podcast *The Love Bomb with Nico Tortorella*, the host interviewed astrology coach Jennifer Racioppi and she made a statement that someone who shared their birthday with an eclipse would have a “monumental year.” Despite not being much of a believer in astrology, I adopted this phrase as my own, and as such it became somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy. In the time since my birthday and the eclipse, I have had amazing opportunities and experiences unlike I have ever had before, and the work I have done in this thesis is part of that. Thus, the eclipse became very personally important to me because it is symbolic of everything I have been able to accomplish this year and everything that is to come in my future, so utilizing this imagery for the dress represents this special time in my life.

Process

This dress is the most structurally consistent with the sewing pattern used, and thus I must credit its designer, Andrea Katz. However, the way that I made this design my own was through the creation of the custom prints adorning the dress. I have had previous experience designing prints, but this was the first time creating one to be put on fabric. I knew I wanted to incorporate the eclipse motif, but it took a great deal of sketching and planning to determine just how it might translate into a print, the placement of the print on the dress, and the color layout within the print itself. I chose to portray a singular total eclipse on the top portion of the dress because the total eclipse is, in the lives of many, and especially for me as it fell on my birthday, a once in a lifetime event.

Partial eclipses are still special but are much more common, which is why they repeat in more abundance in a repeating block on the lower half of the dress. Concentric circles as well as gradating colors were common elements in 1960s design, so this tied into the physical style of the dress as well.

To create the pattern, I designed a block to repeat in Adobe Illustrator, and uploaded it to the Spoonflower website, the same site I used to print the custom pink fabric for my suit. For the top component of the dress, I simply made one large block with the single eclipse motif in the center, and had them print it one time, as opposed to repeating it. I selected a sateen material because it was lightweight enough to have a beautiful drape in the skirt, and it was slightly shimmery to add textural sophistication to the dress.

This piece, like the blue coat, required large amounts of fabric and I once again found myself with my fabric spread out across the living room floor. I incorporated interfacing into the top of the dress to give it more structure. For the bow, I chose to make it double sided, with the solid blue on one side and the partial eclipse print on the other, so that the solid color would connect with the back panels of the dress, but the print would peek through the bow when tied. The inside of the top of the dress was finished with facing. For ease of wearing, I installed a zipper and hook-and-eye closure at the top of the skirt. The dress and an image of the back with bow detail are shown on the following page in Figure E and F, respectively.



Figure E: First Impressions - Dress



Figure F: First Impressions - Dress (back detail)

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

This thesis project has provided me with the immensely valuable opportunity for me to further explore the field of fashion design. Through its process, I have grown in my skill and knowledge of various garments and their construction. I have also learned about how fashion impacts my own life through self-discovery, and the reflection required to make clothes that represent who I am while fulfilling various sets of expectations. My research has shown that I am not alone in the experience of being deeply impacted by the clothing I choose to wear, and the intertwined history of fashion and self-expression is a testament to that.

Making clothing, especially for oneself, inherently forges a unique and very personal connection with it. It is akin to creating a portrait of someone, and how after studying their face so intently and recreating it with paint and a brush, you never see it the same way again. The pieces I have made exist as a capsule wardrobe, but also as a time capsule that represents who I am at this time in my life, represented through the power of fashion. I struggled with the concept of being finished with the project, because despite the countless hours of work I put into it, it somehow didn't feel like enough. Upon further reflection, it seems that this feeling stems not from a sense of inadequacy, but instead from the feeling that the possibilities of what I could create in the future are wide open. In that way, I recognize that the conclusion of this thesis is, in reality, only the beginning.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX: SUPPLEMENTARY CONTENT



Figure G: Iris Apfel at One Kings Lane's NYC offices, 2014, by Ryan Dixon

Table A: An Abbreviated List of Recommendations of Fashion Self Help Books

Title	Author
<i>Change Your Clothes, Change Your Life: Because You Can't Go Naked</i>	George Brescia
<i>You Are What You Wear: What Your Clothes Reveal About You</i>	Dr. Jennifer Baumgartner
<i>Tim Gunn: A Guide to Quality, Taste, & Style</i>	Tim Gunn & Kate Moloney

Table B: Pattern Sources, Adapted for Use

Garment	Pattern Company	Pattern Number	Pattern Title
Cold Weather/ Blue Coat	Burda Style	6736	Jacket & Coat
Everyday/Top	Simplicity	8367	Pattern Hacking: Misses' Knit Top with Options for Design Hacking
Everyday/Jeans	McCall's	M7547	Misses' Jeans and Overalls
Professional	New Look	6035	Misses' Seven Sizes in One
First Impressions	Vogue Patterns	V1102	Misses' Back Bow Dress



Figure H: Woven Labels



Figure I: Otomi tenango (embroidery) from Mexico, Photo from the Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences in Sydney, Australia

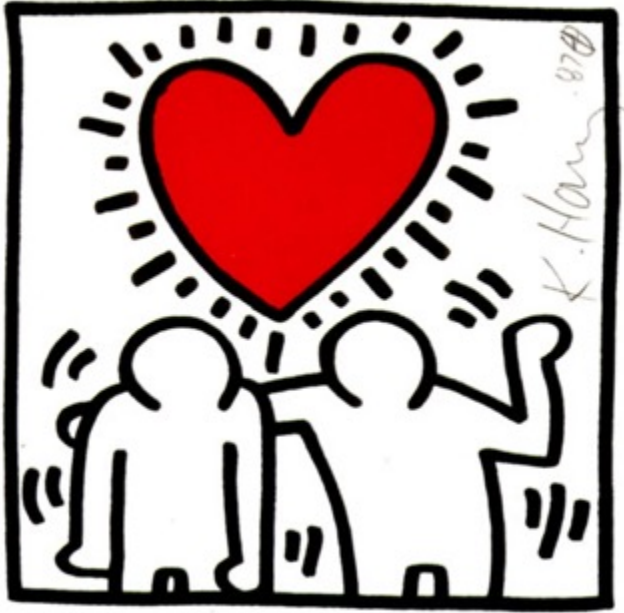


Figure J: Haring, Keith. Untitled. 1987. Silkscreen. The Keith Haring Foundation.



Figure K: Everyday - Embroidered Top (detail)



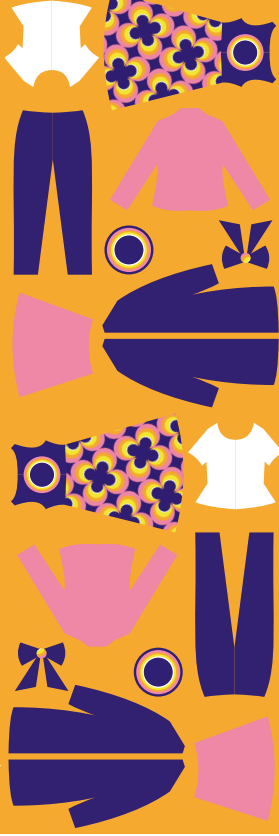
Figure L: My Grandmother in July of 1980 in her pink suit

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Cara P. Doiron was born in Bangor, Maine on August 21, 1995. She grew up in Bangor as well, attending Bangor High School and graduating in 2013. After taking a year off after high school, she attended the University of Maine beginning in Fall of 2014 and graduating in May of 2018. Cara majored in finance and was recognized as the top graduating student in that program when she received the Academic Achievement in Finance Award. She also has a concentration in entrepreneurship, a minor in graphic design, and in addition to this creative Honors Thesis, participated in the International Collegiate Business Strategy Competition as her business capstone, serving as Chief Financial Officer on the Maine Business School 2018 team. She has received grants from the Center for Undergraduate Research Fellowship and the Slavin Research Fund to put towards the completion of this Honors Thesis. Cara is also a member of Beta Gamma Sigma and Phi Kappa Phi honors societies.

Professionally, Cara has worked with numerous Maine businesses as a part of the Innovate for Maine Fellowship program, through the Foster Center for Student Innovation. Upon graduation, she plans to travel to Italy and Greece, and then to begin her business career.

Constructing Identity Through the Lens of Fashion



Cara Doiron



**Constructing Identity
Through the Lens of
Fashion**

Cara Doiron
Photography by Kate Finnemore

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Introduction

Identity and fashion are intrinsically connected. Everyone says something with their style, and everyone makes decisions about how to present themselves on a daily basis. Even the people who claim to not care about fashion still must buy their clothing and choose how to wear it. Ideally, fashion could be used to represent one's most true self as an aesthetic exterior to represent the person within. For some, this process can be empowering and make a notable difference in mood, confidence, and self-acceptance. However, for others, restrictions on clothing, whether explicit, ostensible, or internal, can cause the wearer to feel oppressed, not only eliminating the benefit that can come from dressing authentically, but even inverting it, leaving one worse off than they felt before. Such factors could include fit, money, weather, gender identity, body, culture, and more.

This thesis project takes this concept and examines it through the creation of a capsule wardrobe of clothing designed and made for me, by me. Each look addresses one in a series of situations in which I have felt unable to dress in a way that made me feel like the best version of myself, and attempts to find a solution that satisfies both the requirements of the circumstance and of my own personal, stylistic, desires. The written components of the thesis serve as an extended artist's statement, discussing the works I have created and the process of their formation.





2



WARM

3

Cold Weather

Winter is a big part of living in Maine, and most people have a winter coat they wear simply for the sake of staying as warm as possible. The stylistic options for these ultra-warm coats are typically limited and very plain, as it is something we must wear nearly every day for months at a time and therefore requires versatility. I was intrigued by the idea of a coat that is just as warm as any coat by L.L. Bean or Canada Goose, but far more high fashion and luxurious than any of the existing options that were designed predominantly with practicality in mind. The resulting coat is very warm and cozy, proven to keep its wearer comfortable in cold temperatures, while remaining a fun and vibrant piece that might actually make someone look forward to winter.

I had been seeing, and a lot of three-quarter length coats in my visual research, and loved the polish they added to any outfit, and, of course, the extended length would contribute to the warmth of the coat. I knew that I wanted to do a faux fur in a bright color, and after ordering a myriad of samples from Mood Fabrics, a rich and vibrant cobalt stood out to me in a way that I could not ignore. I remember leaving a meeting with my thesis advisors in the evening during Fall of 2017, and the sky was the exact color of the blue fur and it felt like the push I needed to move forward with the design. The color feels fun yet grown up and is truly a treat for the eyes. I later acquired blue satin in a matching tone for the lining.

I started the process by cutting the gigantic spread of faux fur on my living room floor, leaving some remnants of bright blue fuzz even after multiple rounds of vacuuming. I sewed the thick fur exterior on

my sewing machine. The next step was the satin lining, which proved to be very slippery both to cut and to sew, so I ended up hand sewing the entire satin lining. The coat is meant to be oversized to some extent, but it was far too large for what I was envisioning, so I adapted the pieces, creating a narrower collar in exchange for a more fitted profile. I incorporated two-way pockets into the design as something very practical for the wearer. This means that one can put something in the top of the pocket and put their hands in the side pocket, with each part of the pocket separately lined in satin. It took a lot of trial and error to figure out the mechanics of the design, but eventually each part was successfully constructed and sewn on by hand.

Before stitching the exterior and satin lining together, I decided to incorporate an additional Thinsulate lining in between the layers. This was a low volume way to take the coat from something for mildly cold weather to something that I could actually wear in frigid winter temperatures. Essentially, I ended up making three coats: one fur, one satin, and one Thinsulate. Then, I hand stitched them together to form the complete, consolidated coat. Circular gold buttons were chosen as the finishing detail with hidden sewn on snaps beneath them, as sewing a button hole through the three layers of the coat would've been nearly impossible for my non-industrial sewing machine. The circular shape of the buttons is simple but is made more grand with the shiny gold finish and hammered appearance.





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CASUAL



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Everyday

For this look, I wanted something that I could wear on a normal day, when I might be going to class, running errands, etc. but that would also feel special and true to myself. T-shirts often seem too casual in a way that makes me feel sloppy, so this piece has been elevated and personalized in style and material through the use of a thicker, slightly stretch material, a peplum waist, and embroidery. These details provide a whimsical and artistic flair and help to represent some of my own personality.

I wanted to create a pair of jeans for an everyday look because they are one of the items of clothing I wear most, but simultaneously one of the hardest to find, a challenge surely many can also attest to. I have found it to be especially true in my own life that clothes that fit well, feel very empowering, while clothes that do not fit feel frumpy and can disintegrate my confidence. Therefore, tailoring was a key element in the success of this piece. Essentially, I aimed to create the pair of jeans I always wanted but could never afford, with custom fit, flattering and versatile dark wash, skinny leg, and high waist. They are finished with a hammered appearance gold metal button, referencing the buttons on the blue fur coat, and adding a sophisticated element to the otherwise casual jeans.

For the top of this look, I knew I wanted to incorporate embroidery because it would add a very unique, personal, handmade quality to the piece. I have long admired embroidery in its various forms, particularly the style of the Mexican indigenous people, Otomi, and their tenango style. In creating my embroidery designs, I was also inspired by the heart motifs used by one of my favorite

artists, Keith Haring. I eventually decided to locate the main embroidered designs on the sleeve panels, a placement that made it feel more like a high-end detail, rather than a graphic T-shirt. The borders are made up of adapted lazy daisy stitch and French knots, visually tying the full piece together.

Before beginning the construction of the shirt, I completed all of the embroidery on the cut fabric components that would later form the garment. One thing that sometimes bothers me about wearing t-shirts is that I don't feel as feminine in them as I would like to, and thus I added a peplum waist which helped emphasize more of an hourglass shape. The scoop neckline is both more comfortable and more polished than a standard crew neck.

According to most denim jean size charts, I often find myself one size for my hips, multiple sizes smaller for my waist, and drowning in too long inseams. The jeans created for this project are one hundred percent cotton, and this lack of stretch means I had sure they were tailored to exactly my body size. Working with the reference pattern for this piece, I created a muslin pattern for the jeans and custom tailored it to my body. Once the muslin pair was complete, I deconstructed it and used the components as pattern pieces to cut out the denim pieces, and I subsequently made the final pair of jeans. It takes a few times wearing a pair of jeans for the fabric to start to relax, so they are still somewhat stiff and the button can be difficult to maneuver at times, but the more they are worn, the easier they become to wear.





SUITED

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Professional

The professional look for this collection is a pink ladies business suit, consisting of a blazer and a skirt. The material is a printed linen cotton canvas. The blazer has pockets and a gold button closure, and the skirt has a zipper closure with an additional decorative button, matching that of the blazer.

This suit was one of the first things I knew I wanted to create as part of this collection. My field of study is business administration, more specifically finance, a field still dominated by men to this day. In my academic and professional career, I have attended numerous events in which the expectation has been for me to dress in a professional way. However, when I discovered that the women's suit was just an adaptation of a man's suit, I was inspired to make the most unapologetically woman-centric business look that I could, while still maintaining the classic elements of a suit. Pink is a color assigned as traditionally feminine and though that designation is entirely arbitrary, its power as such persists in our culture. Thus, I made a blazer and matching skirt in an undeniably bright pink hue.

In my own life, pink is one of my favorite colors, and I have a treasured photograph of my grandmother wearing a pink suit. Once, at a family gathering, I proclaimed that I hoped I could have a job one day that would allow me to wear a pink suit, and a male member of my extended family replied that I would "never be taken seriously in something like that." Of course, this only motivated me further to make that goal happen, and now I have the suit to do it in.

Although this was one of the first concrete ideas I had for my collection, it was

one of the last to actually be constructed. I looked far and wide for the perfect fabric, something with the right texture, weight, and most importantly, the right color pink. After unsuccessfully searching for weeks, I came up with the solution of getting the exact pink I wanted printed on fabric through the company Spoonflower. I selected a linen cotton canvas out of their available options because it is sturdy enough for structured pieces such as these, but it is still soft and breathable.

Much like the jeans, the suit's skirt required a lot of modification from the pattern sizing to fit properly. A zipper was installed on the side with a sewn on snap closure added to further secure it, with a decorative button added on the exterior using the same type as on the jeans. The blazer, though comprised of many pieces and likely the most complicated construction of the pieces made in this thesis, went together much as expected according to my research in the pattern and garment type with minimal additional tailoring required. The most difficult part was getting the lapels to lay flat with no puckers after attaching the facing and flipping it back to show the right side of the fabric. I created a button closure on the blazer, again using the same type as on the other pieces. Pockets were added on the front exterior as a stylistic element, but also as a solution to never having functioning pockets in blazers, as they are usually stitched shut for appearance. Interior edges were finished using pinking shears to prevent fraying.





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DRESSUP



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First Impressions

The title given to this situation is "First Impressions," but the idea actually began in consideration of what one might wear on a first date. I sought to find a way to dress up but still feel like myself, and to depict something about my personality through shape, color, and print. The voluminous circle skirt is airy and playful, but the length makes it elegant as well, while the exposed back paired with the high boat neck references 1960s fashion. The colors of the dress are consistent with the line's overall palette.

I wanted to use this dress as a canvas for a print designed by me. The circle motif is emblematic of a solar eclipse, with a total eclipse on the top of the dress, and partial eclipses in repeating block on the lower portion. I chose this imagery because I shared my 22nd birthday with the total solar eclipse on August 21, 2017. I witnessed it on the streets of New York City with thousands of strangers, and I somehow felt connected to all of them through that shared experience. In the July 4th, 2017 episode of the podcast *The Love Bomb* with Nico Tortorella, the host interviewed astrology coach Jennifer Racoppi and she made a statement that someone who shared their birthday with an eclipse would have a "monumental year." Despite not being much of a believer in astrology, I adopted this phrase as my own, and as such it became somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In the time since my birthday and the eclipse, I have had amazing opportunities and experiences unlike I have ever had before, and the work I have done in this thesis is part of that. Thus, the eclipse became very personally important to me because it is symbolic of everything I have been able to

accomplish this year, and everything that is to come in my future, and utilizing that imagery in this dress represents this special time in my life.

This dress is the most structurally consistent with the sewing pattern used, and thus I must credit its designer, Andrea Katz. However, the way that I made this design my own was through the creation of the custom print adorning the dress. I have had previous experience designing prints, but this was the first time creating one to be put on fabric. I knew I wanted to incorporate the eclipse motif, but it took a great deal of sketching and planning to determine just how it might translate into a print, the placement of the print on the dress, and the color layout within the print itself. I chose to portray a singular total eclipse on the top portion of the dress because the total eclipse is, in the lives of many, and especially for me as it fell on my birthday, a once in a lifetime event. Partial eclipses are still special but are much more common, which is why they repeat in more abundance in a repeating block on the lower half of the dress.

To create the pattern, I designed a block to repeat in Adobe Illustrator, and uploaded it to the Spoonflower website, the same site I used to print the custom pink fabric for my suit. I selected a sateen material because it was lightweight enough to have a beautiful drape in the skirt, and it was slightly shimmery to add textural sophistication to the dress. For the bow, I chose to make it double sided, with the solid blue on one side and the partial eclipse print on the other, so that the solid color would connect with the back panels of the dress but the print would peek through the bow when tied.



Gratitude

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About the Designer



Cara P. Doiron was born in Bangor, Maine on August 21, 1995. She grew up in Bangor as well, attending Bangor High School and graduating in 2013. After taking a year off after high school, she attended the University of Maine beginning in Fall of 2014 and graduating in May of 2018. Cara majored in finance and was recognized as the top graduating student in that program when she received the Academic Achievement in Finance Award. She also has a concentration in entrepreneurship, a minor in graphic design, and in addition to this creative Honors Thesis, participated in the International Collegiate Business Strategy Competition as her business capstone, serving as Chief Financial Officer on the Maine Business School 2018 team. She has received grants from the Center for Undergraduate Research Fellowship and the Slavin Research Fund to put towards the completion of this Honors Thesis. Cara is also a member of Beta Gamma Sigma and Phi Kappa Phi honors societies.

Professionally, Cara has worked with numerous Maine businesses as a part of the Innovate for Maine Fellowship program, through the Foster Center for Student Innovation. Upon graduation, she plans to travel to Italy and Greece, and then to begin her business career.



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