University of Denver

Digital Commons @ DU

1-1-2011

Fashioning the Self: Performance, Identity and Difference

Jessica L. Neumann
University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd

Part of the Communication Technology and New Media Commons, Critical and Cultural Studies Commons, and the Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons

FASHIONING THE SELF: PERFORMANCE, IDENTITY & DIFFERENCE

_____

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Denver

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

_____

by

Jessica L. Neumann

June 2011

Advisor: Dr. Kate Willink

Author: Jessica L. Neumann
Title: FASHIONING THE SELF: PERFORMANCE, IDENTITY & DIFFERENCE
Advisor: Dr. Kate Willink
Degree Date: June 2011

Abstract

This thesis project will examine cultural and rhetorical communication studies to determine how these modes of analysis can be compared with interdisciplinary literature to better understand the role fashion plays within everyday performances and the shaping of identity. Criticisms by second-wave feminist scholars have focused on the fashion industry's overarching male influence; in more recent scholarship, feminist academics have often considered an affinity for fashion to be un-feminist and oppressive. I argue that fashion can instead be viewed as a tool for female agency and expressing individuality, rather than just a mode for reinforcing gendered norms. Using feminist rhetorical analysis and visual content analysis, this project examines imagery found on three popular fashion blogs to a determine how fashion is viewed by scholars, especially as a communicative tool in relation to identity, as well as how an interdisciplinary approach enriches the study of fashion and communication.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank Dr. Kate Willink, who is not only an amazing advisor, but also a source of wisdom and inspiration as I navigate my academic identity. Thank you to Dr. Richie Hao for challenging me to examine intercultural approaches to communication and my understanding of race, gender, class, and identity. Thank you to Dr. Ann Dobyns for offering wonderful suggestions and immense knowledge of rhetorical theory and analysis. And finally, thank you to my amazing parents, John and Nancy, who offered words of encouragement and support throughout the exhaustive thesis writing process – I could not have done this without you.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: An Introduction to Fashioning the Self

Much of the research currently found within communication studies, both in rhetorical and cultural scholarship, frames fashion as problematic - a superficial obsession that submits the female participant to patriarchal expectations of beauty and physicality as influenced by the overarching male gaze.[1] Through exploring fashion in academia, communication scholars Waggoner and Hallstein (2001) found that, "Fashion, [feminists] noted, positions women to be looked at; it promotes an ideal image of femininity… it positions women as objects and body parts" (Waggoner and Hallstein 30). However, fashion can also enable individuals to present their true selves and identities to others, through the mixing of styles or other modes of visual exploration (i.e., playing with gender norms, use of style to construct power, etc.).   Using interdisciplinary approaches to study fashion and communication provides a more thorough understanding of how clothing can be used as a tool within construction, performance, and politics of identity.

For at least half a century, criticisms by feminist scholars such as de Beauvoir, Smith, Wolf, and Butler have focused on the fashion industry's overarching male influence.   In more recent scholarship, Waggoner and Hallstein interviewed female,

---

[1] Identified and taken from arguments by Butler in *Gender Trouble*, de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, and Mulvey in *Visual and Other Pleasures*.

feminist academics that primarily consider an affinity for fashion to exist within an oppressive, patriarchal framework. The arguments posed by these scholars stem from traditional, second-wave feminist methodologies, which problematize fashion in relation to gender and performance. Butler, for example, finds that women perform gender through various behaviors, including dressing the body and approaching style in everyday life. Butler defines this as a "mask" and explains that "…the construction of gender operates through exclusionary means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation" (8). Fashion can instead be viewed as a tool for expressing female agency and individuality, not just a mode for reinforcing gendered norms.

While most scholarship in our field addresses the negative implications of fashion on gender and identity, there have been some moves towards shifting these normativities within scholarship. As Wilson points out, "Modern fashion *plays* endlessly with the distinction between masculinity and femininity. We express our shifting ideas about what masculinity and femininity are. Fashion permits us to flirt with transvestism, precisely to divest it of all its danger and power" (122). Outside of pushing the boundaries of specific cultural normativities and extreme versions of expression (such as transvestism or costumed, avant-garde fashion) clothing helps individuals to explore their divergent identities. Fashion acts as a building block to presenting the self, a method of presentation that has a myriad of options for expressing and performing identity. Options are, literally, limitless. Work by Butler, Waggoner, Mulvey, and Hallstein that critique

2

fashion pushed me to question: How is fashion viewed within scholarship, especially as a communicative tool in relation to identity?

Although existing communications literature presents many fashion practices as frivolous and not worthy of serious study, fashion maintains a space for intervention, individuality, expression, self-discovery, agency, and dissent. Fashion, as conventionally examined, has negative effects on female body expectations since,

> … it promotes an ideal image of femininity that is linked to anorexia and bulimia… [In reference to larger women] Big women… are not supposed to care about quality clothing… The assumption is that women of economic means will not be big but rather will be thin in conformity to the idealized body image presented in the mainstream fashion industry (Waggoner and Hallstein 30-31).

But outside of this perspective, fashion "… may be used to make sense of the world and the things and people in it, that they are communicative phenomena… the structured system of meanings, a culture enables individuals to construct an identity by means of communication" (Barnard 32). Individuals use fashion as a meaning-making tool. Through fashion practices we are able to explore individuality and agency, such as when a female academic alters her clothing choices on a daily basis (e.g., extremely casual one day, buttoned-up the next) in order to buck the traditional notion that female academics *must* dress in a specific way within the university environment (Waggoner and Hallstein 33). Through this study I will examine how fashion is represented, including body types, race, gender, and modes of expression through dress.

Literature beyond communication studies explores fashion as a generative site of study by examining creativity, uniqueness, and power dynamics outside of traditional feminist perspectives. For example, Svendsen finds that:

Fashion has been one of the most influential phenomena in Western civilization since the Renaissance. It has conquered an increasing number of modern man's fields of activity and has become almost 'second nature' to us. So an understanding of fashion ought to contribute to an understanding of ourselves and the way we act. Despite this, fashion has been virtually ignored by philosophers, possibly because it was thought that this, the most superficial of all phenomena, could hardly be a worthy object of study for so 'profound' a discipline as philosophy. But if philosophy is to be a discipline that contributes to our self-understanding, and if fashion really has been - and is - as influential as I claim it ought to be taken seriously as an object of philosophical investigation (Svendsen 7).

Svendsen argues for studying fashion from a philosophical perspective, which enhances the communicative framework clothing exists within. Fashion reflects our identities, thus, how we present to and communicate with the world.

This thesis will examine scholarly work within communication studies and explore how these modes of study can be compared with literature from other disciplines (including anthropology, cultural studies, gender studies, and fashion theory/studies). Through this interdisciplinary work, scholars will be more apt to understand the function fashion holds in shaping identity, while also maintaining feminist critiques and frameworks. Fashion *is* an important site for a range of feminist studies, which intersect with other forms of identity - gender, race, class, and culture - to construct who we present and perceive ourselves to be. Gibson addresses this in her work on patriarchy, postmodernism and feminism, finding that,

The purpose… is to consider some of the points of intersection – past, present, and possible – between fashion and feminist discourse. It grew out of a desire to discuss the perceived and gradual relaxation of feminist attitudes to dress over the past twenty years when located within the context of the parallel recognition of fashion as a respectable academic discipline, as a site of important cultural debate (349).

This project will challenge dominant arguments in the communications field regarding fashion and agency, while also seeking alternative understandings of clothing in everyday life as represented on fashion blogs - such as those identified by Svendsen and Gibson - both as an extension of the self and significant communicative practice.

Following Barnard's exploration of communication and fashion practices, I define *fashion* (via the *Oxford English Dictionary*) as,

> … something that one did, unlike now, perhaps, when fashion is something that one wears. The original sense of fashion also refers to the idea of a fetish, or of fetish of objects… it may be that items of fashion and clothing are the most fetishized commodities produced and consumed within capitalist society. As commodities, items of fashion and clothing appear to the clearest example of the way in which 'a definite social relation between men… assumes… the fantastic form of a relation between things… clothes a 'social hieroglyphics' (8-9).

Moving beyond this foundational definition of fashion and examining it as a concept, Craik's exploration of the term reveals that fashion practices are inherently tied to agency. Using Mauss and Bourdieu, Craik finds,

> Fashion is often thought of as a kind of mask disguising the 'true' nature of the body or person. It is seen as a superficial gloss. Yet… we can regard the ways in which we clothe the body as an active process or technical means for constructing and presenting a bodily self… The 'life' of the body is played out through the technical arrangement of clothes, adornment, and gesture (1).

The significance of fashion stems from its association with the body and the active process of dressing it in everyday contexts. Fashion is essentially gestural, which can highlight individuality rather than solely mask these characteristics, as Butler claims.

By looking at more specific, nuanced approaches to fashionable dress, scholars can sharpen their understanding of the relationship between clothing and communication techniques. Street style, on one hand, is a specific style that originated in British fashion

culture out of a subcultural milieu. Woodward defines street style as "…the intersection of several domains: the high street, fashion magazines, and the background, relationships, and preferences of the consumer and social milieu" (85). Street style is an interdisciplinary approach to fashion, producing styles and discourses that intersect and are not solely reliant upon mainstream fashion opinions (such as those dispensed from publication and editorial boards). The "street" approach to style and fashion is oftentimes based upon individualism, not simply current fashion trends.

On the other end of the fashion spectrum is haute couture, which could also be considered an interdisciplinary approach. This mode of dress,

> …represents the fusion of fashion—the modern entity that combines novelty and synergy with personal and social needs—and costume—the arts of dressmaking, tailoring, and crafts constituent to apparel and accessories. Founded in the crucible of modernism's invention in the middle years of the nineteenth century in Paris… couture has long stood as the modern equilibrium between the garment as exquisite aggregate and the burgeoning notions of fashion as a system (Koda and Martin).

Both of these styles are highlighted on fashion blogs and will be explored in this project, revealing a shift in fashion norms and a move towards new representations for women through clothing choice.

Blogs, Fashion, and Performance

Throughout the preliminary research process for this thesis project, I developed several questions that would guide my research and writing:

1. How does interdisciplinary scholarship that examines fashion and its role in identity development within the everyday experience complicate and extend existing communication studies scholarship?

6

2. How are fashion blogs changing our understanding of fashion, identity, and representations in Western culture?

3. What is the connection between high fashion, street style (as seen on most fashion blogs), and communication studies within the everyday?

In the course of investigating the research questions above, I will also incorporate performance studies theory, a vein of scholarship I believe to be intertwined with fashion and communication. Clothes are an important component of performance itself. Goffman finds that,

> …one may take the term 'personal front' to refer to the other items of expressive equipment, the items that we most intimately identify with the performer himself and that we naturally expect will follow the performer wherever he goes. As part of personal front we may include: insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like… 'Appearance' may be taken to refer to those stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer's social statuses (23-24).

Clothing, among other visual cues, contributes to what Goffman describes as presentations or performances of self within the everyday. Styles of dress work with other appearance-based characteristics to communicate to others who we are. However, this thesis will work to further examine how clothing also contradicts these traditional, normative notions of performance and self. Fashion functions as a communicative tool and will be explored in terms of identity formation and the use of alternative representations, such as fashion blog imagery, high fashion, and street style.

The emergence of fashion blogs within the last five to ten years signifies a turning point, a move to a new direction in fashion, performance, and identity studies. The March 2010 issue of *Vogue* magazine featured an article on the "Top 10 Bloggers" to watch and highlighted how these individuals are changing the fashion industry.

According to blogger Tommy Ton, "What I want to do is document personal style because that's what people are really interested in" (Holbrook 514). Blogging has led to the creation of a new voice in the fashion industry: "'Now you can be in your own room, getting your voice out there.' Open an atlas and point… as long as they have a laptop and a Wi-Fi connection, [individuals] can engage and participate in the conversation" (Holbrook 514). The level of engagement between the individual and fashion industry has risen dramatically, the gap between fashion houses, publications, and individuals narrowing. Within the everyday people can communicate via the blogosphere, sharing their personal, individualized expressions of self.

Individuality, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, refers to a character that helps to distinguish one thing or person from another, especially those characters that are strongly marked ("Individuality"). Bloggers,

> …offer different commentaries about fashion, beauty, and lifestyle that can't be found in the mainstream media. Bloggers don't upload new content several times a day, 365 days of the year, to ruminate on the bigger conceptual sweeps of fashion. There is specificity to their discourses, one that's highly subjective and generationally specific, born of a desire to share their own particular opinions, tastes, and obsessions. 'Sometimes fashion can seem too perfect; you can't relate to it,' says [blogger] Bryanboy. 'Bloggers make it more attainable, approachable' (Holbrook 514).

By utilizing texts, including images and narratives, from fashion blogs, individuals can view, and thus, approach dress from an innovative, individualized perspective. Fashion choices are more visible, accessible, and relatable through the fashion blog space due to these sites' availability, user-friendliness, and constant change (i.e., uploading of new images and narratives). Discourse in fashion blogging, whether alternative or

mainstream, offers an interesting, new, contemporary perspective to the debate of fashion's relevance and significance within scholarship.

On a performative level, fashion practices can be interpreted as theatrical, especially in regards to high fashion, haute couture, or street style. According to Madison and Hamera,

> On multiple levels performance 'means' and 'does' different things for and with different people. On one level performance is understood as theatrical practice, that is, drama, as action, or 'putting on a show.' For some, this limited view regards performance as extracurricular, insubstantial, or what you do in your leisure time. In certain areas of the academy these narrow notions of performance have created an 'anti-theatrical' prejudice that diminishes performance to mimicry, catharsis and mere entertainment rather than as a generative force and a critical dynamic within human behavior and social processes… performance has evolved into ways of comprehending how human beings fundamentally make culture, affect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world (xii).

Fashion - as performance - does all that is described above, and also maintains the possibility described by Hamera and Madison in that it allows individuals to make culture, affect power, and reinvent place by using clothing to present the self and as a tool for critique. Women's use of menswear styles, for example, takes clothing traditionally considered masculine and appropriates it to create strong lines, bold shoulders, and/or severe silhouettes. The stylistic moves made through menswear are not conventionally thought of as feminine. It can be argued that our society accepts when women dress as men, but it is not acceptable when men dress as women or through more feminine stylistic approaches. But for the purposes of this paper, by wearing menswear women utilize a more masculine (i.e., powerful) look while also commenting and critiquing gendered dress expectations. By altering menswear pieces to be body conscious or with

9

slightly more feminine edges, women are creating a space for clothing that is intersectional and both uses and changes dress norms.

Another common example is the punk fashion movement of the 1970s. This approach to style took common goods such as plastic trash bags and safety pins and turned them into fashion statements. Modern street style essentially does the same. This increasingly popular style often utilizes vintage items or "low" fashion, pairing these items with designer high fashion or couture. Street style lets the wearer use multiple styles of dress to communicate to the world *who they are* (and that they are not *just one thing*). Woodward finds that,

> …the well-documented histories of street style chart the transition from more clearly defined subcultures through to less clearly differentiated style groupings… Street style is linked to specific music scenes and location… as its associations with creativity and innovation have become a pivotal means through which… style has been imagined and constructed (85).

Using street style methods, individuals demonstrate their multiple, negotiated identities, in addition to utilizing subcultural and intersecting styles or trends. This, in itself, is a performance, as it creates a space where identities can be explored through the act(ion) of dress.

In her work on dancing communities and the power of performance in structuring specific communities, Hamera reminds us that utilizing performance,

> … has the potential to remake the world and our abilities to know and theorize it… dance techniques are ideas of order, performative templates for generating artifice in/and community. They offer vocabularies for writing, reading, speaking, and reproducing bodies… organize communities around common idioms, rewrite space and time in their own images, provide alibis, escape clauses, sometimes traps, sometimes provision utopias (Hamera 208).

Fashion has the same potential as dance, assisting individuals with their negotiation of meaning and place in the everyday, speaking and reproducing bodies and identities, helping to generate both order and understanding of the world.

Performance through clothing is also relational, whether between the performer and the immediate audience or performer and culture-at-large. Ultimately, clothes help individuals to approach everyday experiences. Davis finds that,

> Obviously, because clothing (along with cosmetics and coiffure) comprises what is most closely attached to the corporeal self - it frames much of what we see when we see another - it quite naturally acquires a special capacity to, speaking somewhat loosely, 'say things' about the self. Dress, then, comes easily to serve as a kind of visual metaphor for identity (Davis 25).

Clothes help individuals to play, dance and act through the aesthetic, saying far more than words ever could. Clothing offers a visual, rhetorical space for expression.

By using performance to weave together a study of clothing as visual language, scholars can more clearly see how meaning and identity are constructed through fashion practices. Methods used in external presentations to the surrounding world act as a vocabulary and grammar, of sorts, through the medium of cloth and accessory. Incorporation of specific styles (such as street style or haute couture) creates a greater lexis for communicating with others. Utilizing theory by Lurie, Barnard finds that,

> …there are many different languages of dress, each having its own vocabulary and grammar… clothes are the equivalent of words and may be combined into 'sentences'… a sharecropper, for example, having very few clothes, will be able to create only a few 'sentences'… expressing only the most basic concepts, whereas a 'fashion leader… may have several hundred words at his or her disposal' and will be able to express a wide range of meanings (Barnard 29).

Clothes help individuals to construct "sentences", as though speaking, in order to communicate with the world around them. Meaning is often made through one's fashion vocabulary.

Just as performance is inescapable, fashion is also an inexorable entity. As Gibson explains,

> Whether women 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 (Gibson 353).

Fashion offers a foundation for one of our most basic cultural performances. Cultural performances help to identify individual behavior in conjunction with social performances, which are the everyday occurrences and interactions that move us through our social lives: "Social performances become examples of a culture's or subculture's particular symbolic practices" (Madison 155). Fashion is thus representative of both social and cultural performances, since the ways in which our bodies are clothed is imbued with socially constructed meanings, especially in regards to gender. Fashion also acts as both a cultural and social symbol, operating under the overarching cultural conventions defined by dominant systems of power. Within clothing are the possibility for constructing power and influence, and a space for dissent, critique, and exploration.

It should also be noted that existing within our current cultural milieu clothing conventions are often shaped by cultural and societal expectations for physical beauty and perfection. The fashion culture is still largely rooted in the normativities that were critiqued by second-wave feminists, primarily the expectation for (abnormally) thin female bodies. Thinness remains a problem within fashion imagery; while women can

use their clothes as agency and in constructing identity, as scholars we must still identify that there are specific norms surrounding the feminine body. Visuals of fashion, both within the industry and on fashion blogs, tend to promote the ideal of thin and traditionally beautiful bodies. As Brumberg identifies,

> …the current body problem is not just an external issue resulting from a lack of societal vigilance or adult support; it has also become an internal, psychological problem: girls today make the body into an all-consuming project in ways young women of the past did not (xvii).

The fashion system does perpetuate many of these body issues; however clothing practices do also work to push boundaries for appropriate dress and traditional gendered conventions.

Another important vein in communication scholarship that relates to the performative power of fashion is de Certeau's concept of everyday life, a theory laden with understandings of structural power. According to the theorist, "…everyday practices, 'ways of operating' or doing things, no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity… a body of theoretical questions, methods, categories and perspectives [complete goal of] penetrating this obscurity, make it possible to articulate them" (64). Since methods of dress are part of the fabric of everyday experience, clothes act as a tool for accomplishing de Certeau's penetration of obscurity, allowing individuals to articulate notions of identity and individualism.

Clothing creates a method for constructing and presenting who and what we are through visual style. Fashion is a both consumed and operational to our negotiation of the everyday experience; power is inherent in fashion, since cultural fragments of the everyday (e.g. articles of clothing) either emphasize what is repressed (lacking power) or

inscribed (holding power). As evidenced in *A Practical Science of the Singular*, de Certeau finds communication to be "…a cuisine of gestures and words, of ideas and information, with its recipes and its subtleties, its auxiliary instruments and its neighboring effect, its distortion and its failures" (254). Fashion is an idea, a method, and an instrument for communication enacted within the everyday. Culture is composed of various constructed normativities, and fashion maintains a key space in our Western, cultural understanding.

Further, de Certeau examines language within everyday life and how discourse in a specific space or place contributes to the *becoming of* or *being of* an individual. He finds that, "The approach to culture begins when the ordinary man *becomes* the narrator, when it is he who defines the (common) place of discourse and the (anonymous) space of its development" (de Certeau 5). The space of fashion blogs - and the presence of an actual body within the everyday experience - allows for creation of self through a specific narrative, where the clothes worn and the significance of fashion itself becomes part of discourse. Through specific fashion choices, the individual relays more information than what can be found exclusively within semantics - clothing and fashion is representative of identity and the foundation for visual communication.

Methodologies: Capturing the New Approach to Fashion Studies

In order to address the research questions driving this project, I conducted an in-depth study of historical and cultural literature surrounding fashion, as well as contemporary, alternative approaches to fashion and identity construction in other academic disciplines. I researched blog imagery and the ways in which this new medium

assists with the construction of identity and reinforcement of originality, imagination and innovation for modern women. The two methodologies to be incorporated into the study are: (1) visual content analysis of three prominent fashion blogs and (2) feminist rhetorical analysis. These methods will be explicitly described in the next two sections.

<u>Method 1: Visual & Rhetorical Analysis of Fashion Blogs</u>

To better understand the practical application of fashion in marking difference, constructing identity, and illustrating agency, I will examine and analyze three prominent fashion blogs: *The Sartorialist* (Schuman), *Hanneli* (Mustaparta), and *Vogue Daily* (Vogue Daily). These blogs are continually mentioned in more traditional forms of fashion media (monthly publications), as well as frequently featured in fellow online fashion sources (blogs). In the context of this project, the visual rhetoric of blog images are used as a communicative artifact, in which

> …visual rhetoric is the actual image or object rhetors generate when they use visual symbols for the purpose of communicating. It is the tangible evidence or product of the creative act, such as a painting, an advertisement, a photograph, or a building… Visual rhetoric as artifact, then, is the purposive production or arrangement of colors, forms, and other elements to communicate with an audience (Foss 304).

In this study, the outfit acts as a tangible product symbolizing a specific visual rhetorical style to communication. Identity, as displayed through the visual rhetoric of clothing, is how individuals communicate their personal identity to others.

Blogger Hanneli Mustaparta was featured in a short article in the March 2010 issue of *Vogue* highlighting the newfound influence bloggers have on the fashion industry at large, profiling the ten bloggers "to watch." Mustaparta, a former fashion model and

15

current street style photographer, is fully entrenched within the fashion industry and often mentions personal friends ranging from fashion editors to designers to other models on her blog, *Hanneli*. She regularly posts on the blog and includes a narrative (in addition to photographs) with each posting. The narratives are often filled with personal anecdotes describing her ties to specific individuals or articles of clothing. Mustaparta creates an intimate environment for herself, the photographed subjects, and the reader. The following photo is emblematic of the tone in many of her blog postings:

© Hanneli Mustaparta, *Hanneli*, September 21, 2010
The Bag

Mustaparta often includes commentary in each posting, noting what she considers good style, as well as praise for her subjects. Her approach fosters a relationship between the individual being photographed and her blog readers throughout the world. Overall, a

great deal of Mustaparta's posts feature photos, video, and commentary from fashion shows, as well as traditional street style shots.

Scott Schuman, former fashion marketing and merchandizing specialist, photographs street style and features photos and commentary on his site, *The Sartorialist*, voted one of the "Top 100 Design Influencers" by *Time Magazine*. The site has been incredibly influential in the fashion industry today. In an interview from *Ready Made* magazine, when asked how he feels his blog has filled some sort of void within fashion, Schuman explains,

> I shoot it the way I see it. I'm not just reporting that this person is wearing this shirt on this day. I'm not trying to say that this person is the most stylish person in the world; I'm trying to shoot pictures that are real, but at the same time an idealized version. That's what I think a lot of people really get from it. Designers have told me when they're trying to design for a particular woman - and they haven't met her - they look at my site and they go, 'Oh, wow, that's the girl I want to design for' (Diamond 55).

Schuman uses his site as a space for inspiration and discussion, with emphasis on a comment-heavy section for readers. The site is image-intensive with very little narrative or Schuman's personal, written commentary; post titles are also very succinct and direct, usually stating the individual's name and location. His photographic subjects and style imagery are quite varied, however:

© Scott Schuman, *The Sartorialist*, October 13, 2010 and December 17, 2010
On the street….Olivia, London and *On the Street….Megan on Mercer St., New York*

One day Schuman will feature the high-end, Madison Avenue fashionista with sky-high stiletto shoes and Hermés bag, the next he will feature a downtown hipster outfitted in mismatched, vintage clothes and oxfords (i.e., a more street style approach). The site is content rich and provided meaningful texts throughout the six-month study period for this project.

Vogue Daily is a sub-website to the prominent fashion magazine *Vogue*, accessible via the publication's main website. The blog offers a more mainstream, dominant, in-group view of fashion in comparison to the more alternative representations on the Mustaparta and Schuman sites. Not only does *Vogue Daily* feature images from noted street style photographers, but the bloggers also include interviews with designers and fashion insiders, links to shopping websites, excerpts from the monthly publication,

and other noteworthy fashion industry "news" stories. [2]   *Vogue Daily*, in comparison to the minimalist layout of Mustaparta and Schuman's sites, features more advertisements, direct links to the magazine website, and a more boastful, mainstream approach to design. The blog appears more commercial due to its logos, constant updates, and multiple bloggers with a seemingly less individualized approach.   There are obviously many writers with a primary, mediated vision or goal, rather than more specific, artistic approach as found on the alternative fashion blogs. For example, the site often features images such as the following:

© Vogue Daily, January 15, 2011
Do Try This at Home: Tweaks and Tricks to Make Your Wardrobe Work for Pre-Fall

This posting explained to the reader how to assimilate their wardrobe into the pre-fall season. Bloggers explained which items are "in" and "out" - skinny pants, oversized

---

[2] It should be noted that Hanneli Mustaparta is also a photographer and contributor to the *Vogue Daily* website and has been featured in *Vogue* magazine. There is, however, a difference in the way her own fashion blog presents itself and the more mainstream, commercial vision of *Vogue Daily*.

coats, tunics, tweed and ethnic prints - and offered a roundup of fall looks to consider, as well as how to put the looks together. As will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, *Vogue Daily* bloggers often advise their readers on how to approach dress, rather than leave it to individual judgment and taste.

The content analysis of these blogs cover posts spanning from September 2010 until February 2011, from Spring 2011 ready-to-wear fashion week until Fall 2011 ready-to-wear fashion week, a significant time period in the fashion industry. My visual content analysis includes a study of various blog images and collected data of various representations of normative versus non-normative bodies within fashion. For the purposes of this thesis, "Content analysis may be defined as referring to any technique for the classification of *sign-vehicles*… The results of a content analysis state the frequency of occurrence of signs – or groups of signs – for each category in a classification scheme" (Berelson 201-202). More specifically, "Strictly speaking, content analysis proceeds in terms of what-is-said, and not in terms of why-the-content-is-like-that (e.g., 'motives') or how-people-react" (Berelson 203). Before delving into more specific feminist rhetorical analysis, including responses to specific fashion statements and issues surrounding "the gaze", the content analysis will provide an initial, benchmark overview, identifying what analytical classification categories were present during the study.

The sign-vehicles to be included in the content analysis are (1) white bodies, (2) non-white bodies, (3) men, (4) women, (5) hyper-thin bodies, (6) thin (i.e., average bodies), and (7) average (i.e., average-large bodies). Once I have conducted quantitative analysis of these seven categories, I then examine more nuanced sign-vehicle categories,

including (8) artfulness or creativity, (9) use of high fashion, and (10) use of Woodward's definition of street style. These final three categories work to solidify my understanding of what is traditionally known in fashion studies as being *inventive* style, incorporating multiple approaches to illustrate coexisting identities.

This data speaks to the third research question: What is the connection between high fashion, street style (as seen on most fashion blogs), and communication studies within the everyday? In order to understand the connection between high fashion, street style, etc. and communication in everyday life, I aim to study how fashion blogs incorporate these styles in concurrence with other cultural normativities (gender, race, ethnicity, body types, etc.) into coverage of fashion that actually represents the everywoman's everyday experience.

Method 2: Feminist Rhetorical Analysis

In order to understand motivations of the feminist, academic accounts discussed originally in the Waggoner and Hallstein piece. I will examine imagery on the three fashion blogs in conjunction with traditional feminist theory. Using Foss's work to guide this analysis, I turn to a feminist rhetorical approach and critique since,

> Scholars working from a feminist perspective suggest that most theories of rhetoric are inadequate and misleading because they contain a patriarchal bias - they embody the experiences and concerns of the white male as standard, thereby distorting or omitting the experiences and concerns of women. A primary goal of feminist scholarship is to discover whether existing rhetorical theories account for women's experiences and perspectives and to construct alternative theories that acknowledge and explain women's practices in the construction and use of rhetoric (Foss 331).

Fashion is part of a larger visual rhetoric that woman use to display their power. By examining these visual rhetorical clues through a feminist rhetorical approach, scholars can begin to understand the intricacies in fashion practices and their relationship to identity performance within the everyday.

I will also turn to literature on postmodernist critique to address issues of power surrounding socially constructed issues of gender, language and other cultural issues. Gibson links fashion to postmodern feminist theory, finding that:

> A crucially important strain in contemporary feminist theory would argue that the postmodern crisis is a crisis in the structuring of male reason with which women have no need to feel much concerned… we need to ask whether attitudes to fashion have not hitherto been comprehensively determined by idealist assumptions that are intrinsic to patriarchy and what Irigaray calls its 'cultural order' (Gibson 354-355).

Beyond postmodern theory, I will look at fashion in relation to new feminist approaches since,

> It is difficult to discuss fashion in relation to the feminism of today, because the ideologies about dress that have circulated within the women's movement seem never to have been made explicit. This may be one reason for the intense irritation and confusion that the subject provoked from the beginning… and still provokes (Wilson 230).

Irigaray's notion of cultural order, as well as the transient, ephemeral nature of fashion – the definition of postmodernism – will allow me to explore constructions of new fashion imagery on blogs. As such an inherent part of our cultural fabric, fashion can, and I argue, should, be analyzed not just through traditional feminist frameworks, but also through work in cultural, gender, and performance studies. This approach will allow for a more thorough exploration of such a culturally specific space.

Notions of culture, performance and fashion can also be connected to Hill Collins' assessment of culture. The modes in which we redefine and explain culture is applicable to the study of the fashion blogosphere, itself a distinct cultural space. Through examining this space, scholars can begin to understand how fashion blog culture creates new ideological frameworks for understanding identity. Such a space offers great (potential) contributions to communication and cultural study disciplines. Fashion is a significant symbol within Western culture and acts as a communicative tool to the outside world, displaying fluidity and individualized understandings of selfhood and identity. While Hill Collins frames her study through a Black feminist perspective, she makes several key, historically specific thematic arguments while working to understand cultural norms. Hill Collins uses Mullings to explore how:

> …culture is composed of 'the symbols and values that create the ideological frame of reference through which people attempt to deal with the circumstances in which they find themselves. Culture… is not composed of static, discrete traits moved from one locale to another. It is constantly changing and transformed, as new forms are created out of old ones. Thus culture… does not arise out of notion: it is created and modified by material conditions' (Hill Collins S21-22).

Fashion, as representative of culture, is material, transient, and constantly shifting to create meaning. Fashion *is* a cultural symbol.

Another significant characteristic of feminist critique utilizes the argument that sexuality is intrinsically tied to fashion. This notion has been presented by many prominent feminist writers, such as de Beauvoir and Wolf, however there is little written on the motivations for dress in feminist criticisms of fashion, outside of overtly gendering and sexualizing female bodies. Gibson addresses the foundational text of Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* and finds much to critique:

23

Her belief that the fashionable image is one of 'desirability', that it involves a 'female obsession with rendering oneself the aesthetic sex, with making oneself sexually attractive' seems to me to be at the very heart of such feminist objections to fashion. It is, surely, fundamentally mistaken; the 'aesthetics' of fashion are not primarily sexual in nature, nor are they designed, necessarily, to attract the male gaze. Rather, 'fashionable' dress is a complex lexicon where the intention of sexual enticement may be absent altogether, or, if present, be unimportant in comparison with other criteria. Women, it is often observed, dress 'for each other'… men too can shop, gaze at other male bodies and forms of dress, and participate in a series of activities which may or may not include the attraction of sexual partners (350).

The dichotomy of fashion today, especially combined with constantly emerging alternative modes of expression and new outlets for understanding contemporary fashion, creates a new level from which fashion can be studied.

Exploring the new criteria for evaluating fashion on sites such as *The Sartorialist* or *Hanneli* illustrates a shift in fashion theory and communication. Fashion blogs are the new frontier of the fashion industry, establishing an interactive space to discuss fashion practices, as well as a go-to spot for wide-ranging fashion imagery. In addition to this evaluation, I will also examine how other perspectives can be incorporated into feminist theoretical study of (the act of) clothing the body, and ultimately, how this relates to the study of communicating identity through sartorial performances.

To better understand fashion blog imagery and how it contributes to and exposes new ways to view identity, I will utilize feminist rhetorical analysis. Foss explains this as,

…the analysis of rhetoric to discover how the rhetorical construction of gender is used as a means of domination and how that process can be challenged so that all people understand that they have the capacity to claim agency and act in the world as they choose (158).

Using this type of analysis will allow me to deconstruct the role of gender and other

24

cultural classifications within texts on the three blogs, and will also allow me to break down the methods through which this interactive medium helps women to claim their agency and perform through their fashion choices.

Cutting a New Cloth: Goals and Directions for this Thesis

In order to fully explore the issues surrounding fashion, performance, identity and difference, this project will begin with a literature review, "Communicating Through Cloth: A Literature Review". I will use interdisciplinary texts from communication studies, fashion theory, fashion history, anthropology, cultural studies, and dance studies to move toward answering the research questions listed above. The review will focus on three key themes: (1) *Fashion as Agency*, (2) *Representations, Identification and Difference*, and (3) *Narrative through Clothing: Creating the Self*. This chapter identifies, synthesizes, and challenges the arguments made by scholars across various disciplines and provides a foundation for the remaining two analytical chapters.

The work of more traditional, second-wave feminist scholars provides a foundation for much of this project, and in chapter three, "Feminism and Fashion: A Critical Approach", I delve into a comprehensive discussion of feminist theory. I dissect arguments identified by female academics in Waggoner and Hallstein's 2001 article, as well as more foundational feminist texts that provide a mainstay for more recent feminist works. The chapter will examine established feminist perspectives, which insist that attention to fashion does little outside of emphasize patriarchal norms for feminine beauty and ideal bodies/physicality. By then introducing more contemporary feminist theory, including work by Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks, the chapter focuses on feminist

rhetorical analysis to examine both content found on the three blogs of study and interdisciplinary literature. Through dissecting fashion blog imagery, I will explore these images' improvements to feminist study. Both women's use of agency and a thorough exploration of identity construction will begin my attempts towards a new approach for studying fashion in communication studies. This chapter hopes to create preliminary stepping-stones for a new line of study.

In chapter four, "Performance and Identity through Clothing Choice in Everyday Life", I focus on theory surrounding identity formation, and apply notions of the everyday to blog imagery. The chapter incorporates visual and rhetorical analysis from the three blogs and illustrates how clothing helps women attend to individual agency and foster notions of difference within the everyday through, for example, high/low fashion choices and street style. Chapter four includes a more comprehensive textual analysis of blog imagery, as well.

After examining street styles, high fashion, and blog imagery, in addition to executing various methodological approaches, I come to conclusions about the ways in which individuals use their bodies and fashion practices as part of identity construction. The conclusion will provide insight into how alternative methods for clothing the body influence not only the everyday choices made by women through fashion practices, but also its contribution to the overall visual production of identity. By working to incorporate an interdisciplinary approach to study, fashion can be used to better understand identity politics and the performance and marking of difference in everyday life.

In approaching this project, I was drawn to the conflict between my own positionality that includes a love of a fashion, avid readership of blogs, and maintaining a space within both academia and feminism. As a female, feminist scholar-in-training, I see the problematics with gendered, raced, aged, and other marginalized practices fashion can potentially highlight. For example, I am quite feminine in nature, usually wearing skirts or dresses out of personal taste. Not only do I find skirts and dresses to be more comfortable, they are also representative of who I am. I can see the negative impacts of certain dress practices, but I have also loved fashion for as long as I can remember. My memories of childhood include a little girl throwing a temper tantrum, not willing to leave the house without socks that perfectly matched my dress, an act which both baffled and awed my unfashionable parents. Viewing my fashion practices through a limited, feminist framework may consider me a woman that has succumbed to a feminine, patriarchal and/or antiquated dress expectation. This, however, is not the case.

My personal approach to everyday dress has become more individualistic and idiosyncratic as I have aged. I mix patterns, styles, and genres, taking risks in my everyday dress to demonstrate who I am: woman, feminist, scholar, artist, student, quirky, stylist, and reader, both of academic literature and fashion magazines (in equal measure). My dress practices are a tactical approach to the everyday. As de Certeau points out,

> [Individuals] often used the laws, practices, and representations that were imposed on them by force or by fascination to ends other than those of their conquerors; they made something else out of them; they subverted them from within - not by rejecting them or by transforming them (though that occurred as well), but by many different ways of using them in the service of rules, customs or convictions foreign to the colonization with they could not escape. They metaphorized the

dominant order; they made it function in another register. They remained other within the system which they assimilated and which assimilated them externally. They diverted it without leaving it (32).

Through fashion practices, I enact what de Certeau writes of in the quote above, using fashion to exist within and navigate culture without ignoring my sense of self. By maintaining individualism, I also maintain my true, authentic self.

Chapter Two: Communicating Through Cloth: A Literature Review

Fashion illustrates the various facets of individual identity; however this perspective is often ignored or left unexplored in communications scholarship outside of a superficial overview of fashion, identity, and the self. By examining scholarship further, both within and outside of the study of communications, we find that there are methods used within a Western context that push the envelope, working toward a holistic approach to the study of fashion and communication, especially in relation to identity construction. This literature review explores various texts in both human and cultural communication scholarship in addition to interdisciplinary work from cultural studies, fashion theory, and anthropology that can be applied to the study of constructing identity. More specifically, an analysis of these texts will work towards understanding the negotiation of clothing to assemble and maintain intersecting identities and enabling agency within larger structures of power.

Fashion and communication have been of interest for quite some time, with authors such as Barnard and Davis writing on fashion methods to communicate culture and identity.[3] There has been, to some extent, an examination of fashion and its communicative characteristics outside of clothing's functional, protective purposes.

---

[3] See Malcolm Barnard's *Fashion as Communication, Second Edition* and Fred Davis' *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*.

Fashion acts as a language of sorts, a medium through which the individual can speak. Eco explored this concept, claiming that one can,

> 'speak through' his clothes… using clothes to do the same sorts of things as he uses the spoken word to do in other contexts… [Lurie finds] that there are many different languages of dress, each having its own vocabulary and grammar (Barnard 29).

Using this understanding as a template, my thesis explores how fashion is essentially used as a language: telling stories; providing agency; and building identity, representations, and notions of difference.

In order to dissect impressions of fashion as language, this literature review will examine three thematic elements of fashion in relation to producing agency, narrative through clothing, and the role of fashion in representing difference and identity. The first thematic element is "Fashion as Agency", which will define fashion and agency in relationship to communications scholarship. I will then examine arguments made by foundational feminist scholars on the oppressive, non-functional role of fashion. The second thematic element of the literature review is "Representations, Identification, and Difference". This section will first incorporate work found in cultural and anthropological studies of dress norms in different cultural milieus. The text will also explore Jake Simmons' definition and use of disidentification in challenging dominant systems of power, as well as Lars Svendsen's examination of fashion as philosophy.

The final section of the literature review is "Narrative through Clothing: Creating the Self". This portion of the review will explore understandings of the body, especially foundational work outlined in both Hamera's scholarship and cultural/performance

studies. Drawing on this scholarship will help to uncover how scholars can better understand the body and its dress, which can thus lead to understanding narrative created through the clothed form. These notions will be expanded into a discussion of performance studies theory and Goffman's understanding of costume in his foundational work on performance and the everyday.

Fashion as Agency

The style in which individuals - and for the purpose of this study, women - clothe their bodies is an explanation of who they are. However, most literature within the communications field does not examine fashion outside of a traditional, critical feminist framework. Before delving into historical views of fashion and communication in relation to the act of agency, the term *agency* must be explicitly defined. According to Merriam-Webster, *agency* can be defined as "a person or thing through which power is exerted or an end is achieved." And as defined by Barker within cultural and communication studies, *agency* is "the socially determined capability to act and make a difference" (435). Clothing can thus be used as a form of agency, a thing through which the individual exerts power and a commodity that helps define social relationships. In fact, fashion allows for exploration and expression through a culturally defined medium, using clothing to reinterpret and redefine living within the everyday.

Communications scholars have already examined fashion within a feminist framework. But by using this method, the analysis of power and identity are limited in scope. In relation to feminist scholarship:

> Fashion has been a source of concern to feminists, both today and in an earlier period. Feminist theory is the theorization of gender, and in almost all known societies the   gender division assigns to women a subordinate position. Within feminism, fashionable dress and the beautification of the self are conventionally perceived as expressions of subordination; fashion and cosmetics fixing women visibly in their oppression (Kawamura 12).

This understanding of fashion and power is also illustrated by Waggoner and Hallstein, who approach the topic of negotiating fashion, feminism, and scholarly pursuits. The authors find that the female faculty members in their study identify "…everyday fashion practices [they] frequently engage in [are] resistant strategies designed either to thwart objectification or to embrace it in a manner that undermines its hegemonic potency" (33). There is a struggle between the notion that feminists should criticize beauty and fashion versus the innate "feminine" desire for these physical normativities. Wilson notes that,

> [Fashion] has also been one of the ways in which women have been able to achieve self-expression, and feminism has been as simplistic - and as moralistic - as most other theories in its denigration of fashion… Within feminism, fashionable dress and the beautification of the self are conventionally perceived as expressions of subordination; fashion and cosmetics fixing women visibly in their oppression… to discuss fashion as simply a feminist moral problem is to miss the richness of its cultural and political meanings (13).

Drawing upon Wilson's perspective, can an approach of study be taken that combines both a traditional feminist perspective and use of on-target or current fashion trends, without refining these sartorial choices to a realm of pure objectification?

The female body is historically a site of struggle and objectification, a site which places the attractive feminine body in opposition to brains and efficiency. According to Bordo, problems stem from,

> …the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity – a

pursuit without a terminus, requiring that women constantly attend to minute and often whimsical changes in fashion – female bodies become docile bodies – bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, 'improvement' (309).

Merely existing in the world, in a patriarchal society, places female bodies in a position of oppression and docility. The female academics discussed by Waggoner and Hallstein, for example, use fashion practices and their bodies as sites for both resistance and negotiation to, "…as de Certeau might suggest… 'manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them'" (40). Fashion, as in other social practices, exists within a hegemonic framework.

By using fashion as a tactic, as de Certeau outlines in his theory on power relationships within the everyday, individuals are able to redefine modes of expression and their relationship to the larger, dominant patriarchal order.   An interesting example would be the appropriation of clothing by women, mainly feminists, during the 1970s. According to Wilson,

Feminists in the 1970s were reluctant to discuss [fashion]. It was simply assumed that - in the jargon of the sixties - everyone now 'dressed to please themselves'; or else that fashion was *obviously* a humiliating form of bondage, confining women to narrow stereotypes of femininity and the 'beautiful', often even restricting their actual movements (66).

However, another mode of inquiry takes into account that women *do* have the ability and/or opportunity to clothe their bodies using various tactics, such as employing fashion to counter patriarchal expectations for the female form, propriety, and gendered expectations. Further, de Certeau finds that "…tactics introduce a Brownian movement into the system. They also show the extent to which intelligence is inseparable from the

33

everyday struggles and pleasures that it articulates" (xx). By approaching the use of fashion as tactic, the individual is able to define fashion's inextricable link to both pleasure *and* the overarching power system.

Clothing considered trendy or of high fashion can accomplish this tactical feat while also existing and maintaining an "au courant" space - fashion as tactic can re-imagine the body and the self. While the traditional feminist perspective dissuades women from conforming to the fashion machine, there are multiple ways of utilizing fashion outside of the constrictive norms second-wave feminists associate with fashion. As the famed *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour cites in the fashion documentary *The September Issue*, "I think what I often see is that people are frightened of fashion and because it scares them or it makes them feel insecure, they put it down." What Wintour describes is applicable within academia, as well. Much of what is written about fashion by academics, at least within communication studies, finds clothing to be superficial; these scholars often belittle its importance within the everyday experience. Since fashion can be scary, and is often surrounded by an aura of exclusivity, it is written of in a negative context. However, fashion is not just silly or naïve, but loaded with meaning that is worthy of exploration in many modes of scholarship.

When examining fashion from a postmodern perspective, scholars such as Negrin and de Beauvoir offer a critique of modern fashion practices using a framework centered on the utilitarian understandings of dress. This viewpoint is based upon the socially constructed nature of dress and the ways in which the clothed feminine body is marked in

Western societies. Negrin examines various feminist critiques of fashion, the female body and cultural, as well as utilitarian, norms for dress in the West. His critical analysis of the clothed body within a Western framework of cultural normativity would be critiqued by traditional feminist scholars such as Judith Butler or Simone de Beauvoir. In *The Second Sex*, for example, de Beauvoir finds:

> The purpose of the fashions to which [a woman] is enslaved is not to reveal her as an independent individual, but rather to offer her as prey to male desires; thus society is not   seeking to further her projects but to thwart them. The skirt is less convenient than trousers, high heeled shoes impede walking; the least practical of gowns and dress shoes, the most fragile of hats and stockings are the most elegant; the costume may disguise the body, deform it, or follow its curves; in any case it puts it on display. Costumes and styles are often devoted to cutting off the feminine body from any activity… Paralyzed by inconvenient clothing and by the rules of propriety - then woman's body seems to man to be his property, his thing… The function of ornamental attire is the metamorphize woman into idol (de Beauvoir 543).

As de Beauvoir writes, women are trapped within their fashion choices due to their participation in dress normativities established by patriarchy throughout history.

Contemporary high fashion, a prime example, would be considered restrictive to de Beauvoir, even highly gendered. One could argue, however, that the bending of propriety through fashion and its use by women in the everyday is a critique of the original intent of fashion, acting as a means for expression and resistance to both patriarchal systems *and* other feminists. In an interesting excerpt from the feminist magazine *Spare Rib*, one woman wrote:

> Recently I have been the target of a lot of criticism from women… because they do not like the way that I dress and wear my hair (i.e. Mohican, Bondage, etc.). they tell me that I am ignoring its racist and sexist overtones, that it is not 'feminist', and that I am allowing myself to be exploited by the fashion market…

35

> Is a woman any less emancipated because she chooses to wear make-up and stilettos? Is not the whole point of feminism to help a woman to realize her right to control her own life and make decisions for herself? If so, why are we as feminist oppressing women with a new set of rules…Would anyone with any individuality call that liberation (Wilson 236)?

The use of fashion can actually be a critique of other feminists, rather than solely against patriarchal, dominant systems of power. A woman can wear stilettos and still be considered a feminist. A love of shoes or high fashion does not equal exploitation by the fashion industry. As Wilson argues,

> Within feminism, fashionable dress and the beautification of the self are conventionally perceived as expressions of subordination; fashion and cosmetics fixing women visibly in their oppression… [but] to discuss fashion as simply a feminist moral problem is to miss the richness of its cultural and political meanings (13).

Just because a woman follows current fashion trends does not mean she is submitting herself to patriarchal expectations. Men, on the other hand, are not held to the same expectations and standards as women in fashion. Both men and women participate in gendered performances within the everyday, but the performances of women exist within a society rooted in patriarchy. For example, women are afforded opportunity for expression and critique through menswear clothing, yet men are not accepted into mainstream society when they wear skirts - this practice is considered abnormal, whereas a woman reenacting male dress norms is normalized. Merely existing within our culture and society, and its entrenched, accepted gender norms creates a problematic wherein standards are not universal for men and women. On the other hand, other styles for clothing and accessories may be used to express individuality, such as the use of heavy

36

eye makeup or wearing hats as a throwback to a cultural time period of interest. Using high fashion (and all it implies) maintains a space for possibility, to combat the supposedly "natural" meanings embedded within the female body and push boundaries for expected gendered dress.

Entangled within the clothed female body are notions of sexuality and gendered identity, which is aligned with a woman's agency. Fashion is considered inherently superficial and ornamental, but it has been historically shown that women use their clothing as a method of self-expression, means through which power can be exerted and an end (i.e., image, representation, etc.) can be achieved. Using examples from Waggoner, Hallstein, de Beauvoir, and Butler, scholarship within communications (primarily found within the last two decades) analyzes fashion through a feminist framework. One specific example from one of Waggoner and Hallsteins' interviews is a conversation with female academic Jill, who explained that feminist practices and fashion practices are in direct opposition with one another. Jill explained that:

> …fashion always implicates women, particularly in regard to sexuality… 'When I was in my 20s,' she recalled, 'I had just discovered feminism, and I went through a phase where I swore I would never get married… never have kids. I also, however, had a shoe fetish. I saw a pair of those shoes that are 'knock-me-down-and-fuck-me shoes'. I really wanted them. The entire time I saved the money to buy the shoes, I agonized over them because I thought I shouldn't want these. They weren't in line with my image as a feminist' (Waggoner and Hallstein 32).

Fashion and feminism maintain a complicated relationship, where a woman and her attire are inextricably linked with cultural expectations and normativities. Further, other scholars such as Steele find that fashion acts as a tool for fetishizing the female body

37

(Waggoner and Hallstein 26). Sexuality (as an often oppressive and agency-depriving factor in womanhood) is a recurring theme within feminist scholarship, where anything promoting a woman's sexuality is problematic; hence, fashion according to some of the opinions within feminist scholarship is itself problematic.

The struggle between women and identity construction in relation to fashion choices has existed as long as there have been clothes. As Crane identifies in his discussion of fashion imagery and a struggle for identity, in magazines

> … a woman is not conceptualized as a fixed identity but as a creator of 'heterogeneous and contradictory' identities when experimenting with clothes and products… that project different images of herself. From the perspective of postmodernist theories of gender, which view gender as constructed through playacting and performance, female gender may be performed in different ways. This perspective implies an important role for fashion in providing the wherewithal for commenting upon, parodying, and destabilizing gender identities without necessarily alleviating the social constraints imposed by gender (Crane 204).

Most of the feminist arguments against fashionable dress link clothing to sexuality and a submission to specifically assigned images or practices. However, identifying with femininity is no longer considered one particular thing. Fashion, in fact, allows for play with notions of gender and sexuality. The use of undergarments as outerwear, or masculine dress styles, can be a commentary or critique on societal expectations for acceptable female appearance. Taking a bustier and making it part of the everyday wardrobe questions the understanding that a woman is only a sexual being; wearing a bustier outside of the bedroom calls attention to the fact that women are expected to dress and behave in a certain way within certain spaces. Sexuality, when combined with

38

specific modes of dress, places power with the wearer, not the observer.

Representation, Identity, and Difference

Analysis of fashion can lead to the exploration of representations (contextual and cultural), identity, and the marking of difference. Through material properties of dress, we are able to explore fashion and dress as socially constructed within culture. By turning to Hansen, we find that social construction is intrinsic within dress choices and clothing styles across cultures,

> Because clothes are so eminently malleable, we shape them to construct our appearance. There is an experiential dimension to the power of clothing, both in its wearing and viewing. Our lived experience with clothes, how we feel about them, hinges on how others evaluate our crafted appearances, and this experience in turn is influenced by the situation and the structure of the wider context. In this view, clothing, body, and performance come together in dress as embodied practice (372).

The clothed body creates a space to mark difference and explore or negotiate identity: "Because of the contingent meanings of the dressed body, clothing readily becomes a contested issue… [the body shows] struggles over class, gender, and generation" (Hansen 375). Adopting styles that are historically or culturally specific can allow an individual to understand their culture through the aesthetic, creating a space to explicitly identify difference, or simply allow for the exploration of a specific style. A prime example of this act is the use of androgynous clothing styles as method to resist traditional notions of gendered dress, such as styles appropriated during the punk movement of the 1970s.

A more contemporary example of this re-appropriation of fashion is the utilization of street style. This approach to style demonstrates how fashion can be used to not only

39

provoke the senses but to critique or counteract mainstream notions of "acceptability" in fashion. Street style,

> …is understood as a progression of visually exciting, colorful, outrageous clothing from the David-Bowie-influenced Glam look of chunky platforms, showers of glitter, and makeup creating a unisex look, through to the Mohican and the sartorial anarchy of punks… Styles such as punk have become shorthand for, and icons and heroes of, street style in the popular imagination, with its do-it-yourself aesthetic, as a reaction against established mainstream fashion design (Woodward 87).

Fashion as discourse holds potential to turn preexisting structures and ideologies upside-down, with street style and other alternative, fashionable representations on popular blogs being merely one example of this. Fashion blogs showcase individuals that utilize Simmon's disidentification, taking a do-it-yourself or bricoleur approach to fashion in order to change structures. Structural change begins with the individual, and by using fashion in such distinctive ways, clothing holds power to incite change.

Different approaches to dress in the everyday are in line with a practice often written of within communication and cultural studies: in order to create greater social and cultural change, adjustments must first be made within the individual. In fact, using "A material politics of fashion… might involve a positive (rather than a moralistic or critical) thinking of fashion, in so far as it recognizes and works with fashion as an instrument crucial to the destabilization or deconstruction of identity politics" (Gibson 356). High fashion is not usually considered a site for resistance or tool for challenging identity politics. Within the academy, fashion for the sake of fashion may be considered impractical or inane, especially popular high fashion. High fashion could, on the one

hand, be considered a move to maintain material and capitalist societal expectations. But Simmons' disidentification may also be enacted by individuals through high fashion clothing choices, offering insight into how the clothed body can be used as a space for resistance against the dominant order.

Individuals constantly perform and negotiate their bodies in the face of normative, dominant discourses. Clothes accompany this act of negotiation and illustrate intersecting identities. Mixing various styles, for example, through the practice of street style, can demonstrate not only creativity, but also a struggle with identities, power, and patriarchy. The use of disidentification in the day-to-day can create change for the individual, while also offering an understanding of resistance through the body. Disidentification is, according to Simmons,

> … 'a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change, while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday 'struggle of resistance.' [Simmons] offers Munoz's approach because it illustrates that transformative potential of discourse that turns ideology around on itself by acting as 'a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology' (Simmons 335).

Fashion as displayed on prominent fashion blogs can be viewed as a tool for creating identity, combating the dominant understanding of how a woman *should* present herself. These images could even be considered a visual move toward structural change. Wilson explores, "…[fashion] as a cultural phenomenon, as an aesthetic medium for the expression of ideas, desires and beliefs circulating in society. Fashion is, after all, 'a form of visual art, a creation of images with the visible self as its medium'" (Wilson 9). The use of fashion in Western culture is both ideological and grounded in social construction.

41

The body becomes a canvas, with clothes acting as the paint, expressing and intellectualizing a visual presentation of internal, distinctive aspects of self. The meaning inscribed in fashion, as with identity, is fluid, constantly changing.

Fashion can also be explored as a philosophy, bridging a connection between clothing, the body, physical difference, and identity. According to Svendsen, "The shaping of self-identity in the postmodern era is in a crucial sense a *body project*. We can see the body to an increasing extent tending to become seminal for an understanding of self-identity" (Svendsen 75). The body project, as theorized by Brumberg, finds that

> …although young women today enjoy greater freedom and more options than their counterparts of a century ago, they are also under more pressure, and at greater risk, because of a unique combination of biological and cultural forces that have made the adolescent female body into a template for much of the social change of the twentieth century… The fact that American girls now make the body their central project is not an accident or a curiosity; it is a symptom of historical changes that are only now beginning to be understood (xxv).

While adolescent girls are using their bodies to negotiate social change, especially in relation to norms of female beauty, understandings of body aesthetics are continually changing. While some feminist scholars would consider clothing to be a detriment to this body project, I argue that fashion can actually aid girls (and women) in navigating our bodies within constantly evolving cultural norms. The body and the clothes it is swathed in not only tell a story, but also help the wearer to construct and display their identity in opposition to specific societal or cultural standards.

Fashion also allows women to communicate not just with others, but with culture itself: "We seek identity in the body, and clothes are an immediate continuation of the

42

body. That is also why clothes are so important to us: they are closest to the body"

(Svendsen 77). We can extend this argument to female academics, as well. One of the

participants in Waggoner and Hallstein aptly illustrates this:

> Marjorie stated, 'I will deliberately go to class one day all dressed up, and the next
> day dressed down. I want to keep my students guessing so that they can't pin me
> down. On the one hand, I want to express my authority, my expertise, my power.
> And then, I also like to say, Look, I'm also a person, I write, and I wear tennis
> shoes, and you're going to have to confront me as a person and not just put me
> into this niche as teacher'… In de Certeau's terms, she creates fissures or gaps for
> the audience (Waggoner and Hallstein 34).

The dialogue we participate in within the everyday is illustrated and accentuated by our

clothing, which help us to conform to and/or act out whatever scene we are currently

performing in. Fashion acts as a tool for individuals and ultimately, fashion and identity

are part of our cultural and socially constructed everyday fabric. Further,

> …fashion is an inherent part of human social interaction and not the creation of an
> elite group of designers, producers, or marketers. Because of its basis in
> individual social comparison, fashion cannot be controlled without underlining its
> ultimate purpose, which is the expression of individual identity. If self-identity
> were never in doubt and social comparison never took place, there would be no
> demand for fashion, and there would be no need or opportunity for style change
> (Kawamura 28).

Differences - such as images of non-normative bodies or subcultural clothing styles - can

be masked or amplified through the use of clothing, creating fissures in power dynamics

both for the self and in relation to the collective society. We are able to negotiate

meaning, as well as intersecting identities and differences, through individualized fashion

choices within the everyday. The example of fashion blogs illustrates a space where

individuals that enact the process of disidentification, or simply utilize an alternative

approach to fashion, can call home. These interactive spaces display how fashion is used

in our daily routines, taking the personal and creating a space for an outward negotiation

of identity.

<p style="text-align:center">Narrative through Clothing: Creating the Self</p>

Fashion, as well as individual garments, help to build a narrative, as well as allow

individuals to make sense of the world around them. Citing Douglas and Isherwood,

Barnard finds that,

> …man needs goods for communicating with others and for making sense of what is going on around him. The two needs are but one, for communication can only be formed in a structured system of meanings." They imply, first, that fashion and clothing may be used to make sense of the world and the things and people in it, that they are communicative phenomena. Second, they imply that the structured system of meanings, a culture, enable individuals to construct an identity by means of communication (Barnard 32).

Fashion creates a narrative, telling a story through measured assemblage of clothing,

accessories, and makeup. However, the body (especially the female body) is always

already deeply embedded with cultural meaning and expectations: "Its preexisting

meanings, as sex object, as object of the male gaze, can always prevail and re-appropriate

the body, despite the intentions of the woman herself" (Wolff 82).   Discourse

surrounding the female body influences how it is understood. The female body has,

> …preexisting meanings, as sex object, as object of the male gaze, can always prevail and re-appropriate the body, despite the intentions of the woman herself…. many ways in which contemporary discourses and practices rendered women inferior, put control of women's bodies into men's hands, and produced new sciences which redefined women and femininity centrally in terms of reproductive function, denying female sexuality while perceiving women as somehow closer to nature than men (Wolff 82-86).

Fashion is certainly meant to entice, titillate, or excite, but some fashion also holds a utilitarian purpose. However, new trends in fashion push clothing beyond simply the male gaze. This clothing is for the individual. As Wilson points out,

> In all societies the body is 'dressed', and everywhere dress and adornment play symbolic, communicative and aesthetic roles. Dress is always 'unspeakably meaningful'… Dress in general seems then to fulfill a number of social, aesthetic and psychological functions; indeed it knots them together, and can express all simultaneously (3).

The individual is able to create meaning through dress, whether it involves mixing various styles, shortening skirts, or working to dress *un*fashionably, all making a statement to others. Further, femininity and identity are fluid, which new fashion (and its accessibility via mainstream publications and fashion blogs) illustrates. With new fashion, the body is no longer the *only* thing on display.

I first examine the body as a part of Western cultural fabric, and the narrative of both the individual and the collective social group. Bordo finds that,

> The body – what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body – is a medium of culture. The body, as anthropologist Mary Douglas has argued, is a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body (309).

Wolff's approach moves to define the body as symbolic and its significant role as a communicative vehicle. This is also in line with Waggoner and Hallstein's earlier arguments:

> What constitutes the body, and what constitutes the female body and its experience, is already implicated in language and discourse… the female body, as discursively and socially constructed, and as currently experienced by women,

may form the basis of a political and cultural critique - so long as it is one which eschews a naïve essentialism and incorporates the self-reflexivity of a recognition of the body as an effect of practices, ideologies, and discourses (Wolff 93-94).

Our cultural understanding of womanhood and femininity are wrapped within ascribed meaning of the physical female body and the essentialness of this space and it is difficult to break away from these notions. Norms surrounding the feminine body are so entrenched within the cultural and social milieu; it is difficult to separate what is considered traditionally feminine (according to patriarchal expectations) and the many facets of womanhood. Stylistic examples including harsh edges, masculine or short hair, and androgynous clothing styles counter these understandings of femininity, seeking to redefine what is considered fashionable and feminist. Through dress, women - either as individuals a collective group - can assemble and re-appropriate our identities.

According to Erving Goffman, we constantly perform and narrate in our everyday lives. It is through these performances that we create a narrative within everyday cultural practices. Goffman postulates,

It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is, rather, recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role… It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves (19).

The stories we construct are dependent not only on context, but also the aesthetics (i.e., fashion or style) that aid our performances. Performance remains a significant factor in new discourses, and as Stuart Hall puts it, "…cultural practices [such as performance] are 'interwoven with all social practices; and those practices, in turn, [with] sensuous human praxis, the activity through which men and women make their own history" (Hall 60).

46

Through the performance of presentation in everyday life, individuals make their own

history, telling their own story through various methods, the use of clothing one of the

most significant and evident.

Scott Schuman, writer, photographer, and creator of *The Sartorialist* blog, touches

upon the role of individual characteristics of fashion that are used to create a larger story

or narrative, to crystallize fashion and culture at large. Schuman writes on his website,

> I thought I could shoot people on the street the way designers looked at people,
> and get and give inspiration to lots of people in the process. My only strategy
> when I began *The Sartorialist* was to try and shoot style in a way that I knew most
> designers hunted for   inspiration. Rarely do they look at the whole outfit as a yes
> or no but they try and look for the abstract concepts of color, proportion, pattern
> mixing or mixed genres. I'm always really happy when I meet a designer and
> hear that they use some of my photos for their inspiration (Schuman).

As Schuman identifies, an approach to style is about the individual differences within the

everyday. By piecing together idiosyncratic fashion items, colors, or textures, Schuman

explores a new approach to fashion that is both individualized and can be appropriated by

fashion lovers and non-fashion lovers alike. This argument is further emphasized when

Simmel refers,

> …to the need which people have to be both part of a larger social group and yet
> not to be so bound up in that group that they possess no individuality. People
> appear to need to be social and individual at the same time, and fashion and
> clothing are ways in which this complex set of desires or demands may be
> negotiated… fashionable clothing is used in western capitalist societies to affirm
> both membership of various social and cultural groups and individual, personal
> identity (12).

As Schuman identifies, these lesser parts of a more collective fashion whole comprise

each of our everyday performances, weaving together the larger cultural and social fabric

needed to maintain individualized identities within a technology-driven, increasingly less distinctly individualized world.

The notion of difference, those images deemed alternative or out-of-the-ordinary in the fashion industry, are not simply glossed over in the fashion blog world. Difference, an important characteristic when discussing fashion and communication, is often considered more acceptable in fashion, a space where that which is alternative can be considered beautiful or worthy of "art" status. Historically, "Social and political dissidents have created special forms of dress to express revolt throughout the industrial period. Today, social rebels have made of their use of fashion a kind of avant-gardist statement" (Wilson 13). There is no limit to the meanings that can be derived from fashion. Clothes are not simply a form of ornamentation or sexualize the female body. Wilson finds that "… it has been one of the ways in which women have been able to achieve self-expression" (13). Through this mode of self-expression, difference can/will be explored, with fashion blogging as representative of a democratic approach to fashion. What is considered "different" is often what *is* accepted and featured on blog sites as a point of interest.

Fashion maintains many of the same characteristics found within the act of performance, especially when examined through Hamera's lens of dance and performance studies. Performance enables individuals to negotiate meaning in the everyday, speaking and reproducing bodies and identities, and generating both order and understanding of the world. As Hamera explains,

48

…performance has the potential to remake the world and our abilities to know and theorize it… dance techniques are ideas of order, performative templates for generating artifice in/and community. They offer vocabularies for writing, reading, speaking, and reproducing bodies… organize communities around common idioms, rewrite space and time in their own images, provide alibis, escape clauses, sometimes traps, sometimes provision utopias (Hamera 208).

Fashion is representative of our performances of social and cultural norms, since the ways in which our bodies are clothed is both nuanced and socially constructed. Clothing can reproduce norms, but also has potential to create a space for community and better understanding of the self through the performative act of dress, changing socially constructed meanings of dress. Whether approaching fashion from a privileged, academic body or from an everyday, ordinary space, fashion allows for the performance and narrative of individual experiences and the possibility to create meaning, new discourses, and, at times, to question dominant (patriarchal) expectations.

Fashion is, ultimately, rich with meaning and a site for writing personal narratives, a mode of negotiating the various intricacies of our everyday lives. As Langellier and Peterson point out,

The embodiment of personal narrative makes textual and performative power - to select or suppress certain aspects of human experiences, to prefer or downplay certain meanings, to give voice and body to certain identities - not only visible, audible, and palpable but also discussable (152).

Through fashion and the emergence of new mediums, such as fashion blogging, our personal narratives as illustrated through fashion practices have now created a space that is up for discussion, examining the interlinking qualities of these identities, meanings, and voices. In combination with discussions of identity construction and the marking of

49

difference, we can begin to better understand how this new facet of the everyday helps

individuals to create and highlight the meaning-making processes.

Chapter Three: Feminism and Fashion: A Critical Approach

According to much of the scholarship written on fashion and communication from a feminist perspective, a love of fashion and (second-wave) feminist ideologies simply do not mix. The West has culturally understood notions of what feminists look like, as well as a particular aesthetic fashionistas are assumed to embody. For the most part, the two rarely intersect; in the game of fashion, feminists reside on the side that ultimately dissuades the use of fashion to personify the self. Fashion and beauty ostensibly fail to commingle with a traditional image of "the feminist". However, this image may be shifting. As Lee points out,

> The feminist is no longer always assumed to be a brown-rice-eating-dungarees-clad dyke. There is certainly no longer (though I doubt there ever was) just one feminism, but rather feminisms marked by a multiplicity of difference, of class, race and age; but also of varying theoretical positions - essentialist, culturalist, structuralist, separatist, Freudian, anti-Freudian, etc. (Lee 171-172).

Feminists and fashion-lovers *can* be located within the same individual; these are just two of many identities that I believe can exist within one person.

The importance of feminism within our larger culture and society concerns the act of change. While fashion has not been traditionally considered part of the change process - even thought of as moving feminist ideologies backwards - Barnard finds that through its very definition, fashion contributes to feminist efforts towards transformation: "As a noun, 'fashion' means something like a kind or sort, or a particular make or shape, as in

the definition of 'manner or demeanor' noted above…. a verb, 'fashion' has the sense of the activity of making or doing" (Barnard 9). Fashion *makes* something, and, further, helps to create or highlight specific identities through visual means, enacting specific performances. Clothing in this sense signifies the meaning-making process. Fashion facilitates the individual's inner understanding - and outer expression - of selfhood.

In line with this argument, I would first like to enter a comprehensive discussion of feminist theory in order to dissect the arguments originally identified by the female academic interviewees in Waggoner and Hallstein's piece, as well as more foundational feminist theory including works by Butler and de Beauvoir. I will unpack these established feminist perspectives, which insist that attention to fashion does little outside of emphasize patriarchal norms of feminine beauty and ideal physical bodies. Smith writes that,

> To examine the discourse of femininity is to examine the organization of relations among the mass media of women's magazines, advertising, television and movie images, and romances imaging, imagining and enunciating femininity; the productive and commercial organizations of fashion, cosmetic, and garment industries; and women's… local practices in their everyday words (53).

By examining the new medium of fashion blogs via feminist rhetorical study, these websites can be further explored as a significant space for imagining and organizing (fashion) practices that reach across cultures and foster a sense of community. The preview of blog imagery included in Chapter 1 illustrates how varied images and bodies represented on fashion blogs open a space of study, especially as these blogs continue to grow in popularity. Blogs may actually become the new fashion magazine, already a rich

site of study within many scholarly disciplines. In some respects, the bodies found in fashion blog imagery are not that different from those bodies featured in fashion editorials: there is often an emphasis on thinness, height, and whiteness. Yet these sites also include images of women that are raced or gendered, which does present an alternative view, as well as male bodies (not common in mainstream fashion editorials for the female subscriber). In this chapter, I will turn to interdisciplinary essays and books - including fashion theory, cultural studies, and anthropology - to create a holistic approach to understanding fashion, agency and identity within a feminist paradigm.

Feminism and Identity

From my previous readings of communications scholarship, very little thought has been given to the role of high or street fashion - and not just individual items of clothing, but the approach, itself - and identity construction. Scholarship tends to pit fashion and feminism against one another, two modes of study that cannot fully concur. As Wilson has discussed, two approaches to fashion and feminism emerged in second-wave arguments:

> The first of these was a whole-hearted condemnation of every aspect of culture that reproduced sexist ideas and images of women and femininity, all of which came to seem in some sense 'violent' and 'pornographic'; the other, by contrast, was a populist liberalism which argued that it would be elitist to criticize any popular pastime which the majority of women enjoyed (Wilson 230).

Fashion is historically considered to be a practice and interest of women. Outside of a claim that fashion culture fosters sexist or violent acts, notions of feminist ideologies have become entrenched in mainstream, negatively defined understandings of fashion

53

and its intentions. Fashion is either considered too feminine or oppressive, guilty of reproducing antiquated notions of womanhood, gendered identities and sexism. If we turn to discussions of third wave feminism, however, we find that,

> …third wave feminists define themselves first in terms of what they are not; namely, they reject the feminism of the second wave, claiming that it reflects almost exclusively the perspectives and values of white, middle-class, heterosexual women who define themselves primarily as oppressed victims of patriarchy… [but] young feminists claim that third wave feminism features a celebration of difference in terms of identity construction… [citing Walker] the lines between Us and Them are often blurred, and as a result we find ourselves seeking to create identities that accommodate ambiguity and our multiple positionalities (Shugart, Waggoner and Hallstein 195).

Little room has previously been given to understanding how identity can be manifested through a solid appreciation of clothes, rather than solely through highly gendered or sexualized everyday dress. However, fashion *is* significant to understanding how we perform our identities.

Inherent in conceptualizations of identity are preconceived notions of (female) selfhood saturated with gendered, raced, and sexualized expectations. Butler's scholarship is often devoted to the study of *being* within a society. She finds it nearly impossible to separate these practices and performativities passed down from generation to generation and argues,

> If one 'is' a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered 'person' transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained (Butler 4).

54

Since fashion is usually associated with femininity, many scholars argue it is impossible to separate fashion from continually reproduced and maintained gendered identity expectations. Fashion is, from many feminist perspectives, considered an accomplice to the shackles of patriarchy.

Scholarship on womanhood, as defined by de Beauvoir, sets forth an argument for obvious and inherent differentiations between man and woman, feminine and masculine. de Beauvoir has found that in Western, American culture a definitive understanding of femininity exists:

> The attitude of defiance of many American women proves that they are haunted by a sense of their femininity. In truth, to go for a walk with one's eyes open is enough to demonstrate that humanity is divided into two classes of individuals whose clothes, faces, bodies, smiles, gaits, interests, and occupations are manifestly different. Perhaps these differences are superficial, perhaps they are destined to disappear. What is certain is that they do most obviously exist (de Beauvoir xx-xxi).

Further, as de Beauvoir claims, there is always a subject and that which it exists against. From this viewpoint, there will always be the man and his other: woman. She writes that we will continue to define ourselves against these normative expectations.

When characterizing womanhood through de Beauvoir's standards, it is done so with recognition of the "other" status women maintain. She writes,

> Now, what peculiarly signals the situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all human creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilize her as object and to doom her to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and forever transcended by another ego (*conscience*) which is essential and sovereign. The drama of woman lies in this conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject (*ego*) – who always regards the self as the essential and the compulsions of a situation in which she is the inessential.

How can a human being in woman's situation attain fulfillment (de Beauvoir xxxv)?

If scholars begin to incorporate new modes of study by drawing attention to the fashioning of self through mediums such as blogs, the essential nature of woman as object is challenged. Rather than be objectified solely through aesthetic imagery, women featured on popular fashion blogs such as *The Sartorialist* or *Hanneli* are done so through a unique lens that focuses on the individual, not just within an oppressed, "othered", subjective state. Bloggers such as Schuman and Mustaparta work towards creating an inclusive and discursive space. In a magazine interview, Schuman explained that the importance of projecting an image through clothes is,

> …the power of the idea and how clearly you can articulate your point of view…
> A lot of corporations tried to do blogs, and a lot of newspapers, because they
> thought it was something they needed to do… My blogs started with no money,
> but I had a very good sense of view (Diamond 55).

Because many fashion blogs are started through grassroots efforts, the blog space features a section for comments where both the blogger and readers respond to images and converse in discussions of fashion. Blog space, which highlights the everyday lives we live, further dispels notions of other-ness. Instead, these sites help people to broadcast individualized presentations of the self, focusing on personal fulfillment and artful expression in a space that connects viewers, potential feminists and fashionistas throughout the world.

Another popular fashion blogger not included in this particular study is Tavi Levinson, a teen fashion blog phenomenon who presents an interesting perspective to

dress, creating a look quite individualized and idiosyncratic in nature. When asked about

her fashion philosophy on her blog, Tavi responded with the following:

> 'In my opinion, the most interesting fashion is the Anti-Fashion. No rules, no
> restrictions, no normalcy, no pleasing anyone… I have no one to impress and I'm
> not concerned about wearing something flattering to my body. I will dress as
> ugly and crazy as I want as long as I'm still young enough to get away with it'
> (Widdicombe 92).

As Levinson demonstrates, the fashion blog space allows for acceptance and diversity,

embracing fashion performances for what they are: performances.

Long-established understandings of feminism also place dress practices within a

static space with many limitations, unlike the variability offered in fashion blogging. In

regards to notions of the body and the way it is dressed, Bordo finds that:

> Through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of
> femininity – a pursuit without a terminus, requiring that women constantly attend
> to minute and often whimsical changes in fashion – female bodies become docile
> bodies – bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation,
> subjection, transformation, 'improvement' (Bordo 309).

Fashion helps to challenge notions of feminine identity, but also exists within the

framework of accepted gender norms. The female body should not automatically be

relegated to a space of docility, a common, gendered misconception and assumption

when examined through a second-wave feminist lens. In many cases, feminist arguments

ignore the role of choice in fashionable dress practices, and the fact that a fondness for

clothing may exist outside of a predetermined subjugation for women. For example, let

us look to the following image:

© Scott Schuman, *The Sartorialist*, January 12, 201
On the Street…Black, White, Red, Florence

This example from *The Sartorialist* features a mix of gendered styles, as well as many other intersecting, stylish pieces. This woman has on menswear inspired pieces: a 3-piece suit, kicky oxfords, cloche, and tie. Yet she incorporates colors, impeccably styled hair, and a perfectly painted red lip. The close tailoring of the menswear suit does not hide her body, yet she is completely covered from head to toe. The bright pops of red in her shoes and bracelet provide a creative flair.

In the comments section of this post there are many notes on gender expectations and the subject's teasing of these expectations, including: "What a perfect pose. The tailoring is quite nice, too. There is a wonderful paradox of a demure look contrasted with masculine details" (*Pretty Kitty Publishing*); "I love how the little details - the hat, the red

at the sleeve (from what? chunky bracelet?) the shoes, the tightly tailored sleeves, the tee-ninesy little knot at the neck of the cravat - feminize this masculine look" (*flybynightkarmarepair*); "I dig this look. The little hat, the colour in the hair and touch of colour from the brogues. Plus I love a woman who is not afraid to wear a look that is very masculine" (*The Boy From Newcastle*); and "What I love the most is her looking fragile and being empowered by masculine touches. Her attitude is a winner, too" (*Demi*) (Schuman). Not only is this woman creative and artistic in her approach to dress, she plays with gender boundaries. She walks the line between overtly masculine and feminine, creating an entirely new look that is lauded by Schuman's readers.

The back-and-forth commentary emphasizes that this fashionable approach is anything but oppressive. But at the same time, I must acknowledge that the individual commentators and bloggers are framing the female subject within a culture and space that has specific notions of and for gender. This woman is being defined in terms of accepted gender norms of masculinity and femininity. However, this woman does play with scale, cut, color and style to re-appropriates the use of menswear. Through this post, Schuman and his readers acknowledge the ability to push boundaries of gender norms through fashion. The approach is, overall, playful and idiosyncratic – her style and individual nature shine through.

In the debate between fashion and identity, there appear to be two sides. As Wilson discusses in her scholarship on fashion and the postmodern body,

> For everyone clothes are compulsory. This produces two kinds of individual at
> each extreme of the spectrum: those who hate it all, who, were it not for social

59

pressure, would not bother with the aesthetics of their appearance and who experience fashion as a form of bondage; and those who live it as compulsion, the fashion freaks for whom dress is a source of passionate interest, who are its addicts; 'fashion victims', junkies of the art of self-adornment (228).

Regardless of where one stands in this debate, it is nearly impossible to escape fashion practices and the relationship these practices have with identity. There is certainly social pressure for women in their everyday performances and aesthetic presentation. In a posting from *Hanneli*, Mustaparta points out that there is an in between-ness to fashion. Just because culture has outlined specific, gendered expectations for dress, does not mean these expectations must be adhered to:

© Hanneli Mustaparta, *Hanneli*, February 16, 2011
Stella(r): Stella Greenspan sporting a unique and totally unpredictable look. She is such a gorgeous girl that she could easily wear something simple and still look great, but this shows her personality and awesomeness.

Self-adornment is ultimately about representing the self. As Stella exhibits in the photo

above, experimenting with texture, cut, and style is not only what makes fashion fun, but what makes it so individualistic. Rather than rest on her beauty laurels, Stella chooses to display her personality and identity – she seems to be making a conscious choice in her approach to dress. Aesthetic choice is based upon both individual power and personal preference, which fails to be discussed at length by feminist scholars. Just as there is a scale of sexuality according to Kinsey, as Wilson points out, there is a scale of fashion-ability. An individual's degree of interest in fashion – or any other form of expression – determines the amount of fashion-ability they will display. A person that hopes to make an emphatic statement with their clothes may lie on one side of the scale, whereas someone not interested lies on the other. There is certainly a vast in-between-ness to these extremes. To offer another example, as Waggoner and Hallstein discuss in their scholarship, the university or academic space is, "… the environment in which [feminist *academics*] work is one in which fashionable attire is often suspect" (29). This example illustrates how there is an expectation within the university environment; the individual woman must negotiate her expression of fashion-ability within this particularized space.

There have, however, been moves by some feminist scholars, such as Wilson, to examine new modes of analyzing dress, as well as dress' relationship to gender and sex(uality) norms. From a more traditional, second-wave argument by Brownmiller on feminism and dress a practice, the scholar writes:

> Why do I persist in not wearing skirts? Because I don't like this artificial gender distinction. Because I don't wish to start shaving my legs again. Because I don't want toreturn to the expense and aggravation of nylons. Because I will not reacquaint myself with the discomfort of feminine shoes… because the nature of

feminine dressing is superficial in essence (Wilson 234).

What if the uncomfortable shoes or nylons are used as a distinctive, styled approach to performing? Brownmiller's hostility implies that fashion has no function outside of oppression and aggravation. A woman may instead find skirts to be more comfortable than pants, ignoring the fact that skirts are traditionally considered more feminine. While notions of femininity are shrouded within specific fashions, other meanings can be ascribed to clothing, as well. Many women embrace the choice and alternatives within fashion:

> While feminists with one voice condemn the consumerist poison of fashion, with another they praise the individualism made possibly by dress. 'I thought the feminine ideal was to dress according to personal preference and choice, not according to a set of rules' wrote a correspondent to the *Sunday Times* (Wilson 237).

I agree with Wilson, for many of the arguments set forth by feminist writers omit the possibility for individual choice. By following rules outlined from a feminist perspective, women are again submitted to a system of rules and doctrines for defining selfhood that is not inclusive, but actually hinder the expression of selfhood.

Part of my critique of existing scholarship is that it reflects and is shaped by a dated, second-wave perspective. To approach the shift in examining fashion, I turn to feminist scholars of color, who have long addressed issues of race, privilege, gender and sexuality from a more inclusive, diverse perspective. These scholarly perspectives examine oppression and power through marginalization and a specific cultural space. For example, as Hill Collins claims,

One distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought is its insistence that both the changed consciousness of individuals and the social transformation of political and economic institutions constitute essential ingredients for social change… Knowledge is a vitally important part of the social relations of domination and resistance (Hill Collins 553).

Fashion, too, can be used as a site of resistance, using the female body and clothes to comment, critique, and question. In order to change social or cultural normativities, individuals must do so with knowledge and awareness. Looking at fashion consciousness, we see that women have been expected to dress in a particular style or fashion for centuries. As women work to change their dress on an individual level, a collective effort can take shape through the medium of fashion blogs, a constantly updated and viewed space that exposes the change in fashion norms and modes of visual identity construction. Making change visible helps women to push back against oppressors, the dominant system that continues to hold gendered, dressed, raced, and aged expectations for its members.

One of the most significant factors in inciting change and fostering a sense of control is the presence of community. Through her approach to making sense of the world and grappling with overarching power structures through community support, Hill Collins explains that it is,

… the larger issue of reconceptualizing power…. Black women's experiences as mothers, community othermothers, educators, church leaders, labor union center-women, and community leaders seem to suggest that power as energy can be fostered by creative acts of resistance… these Black female spheres of influence constitute potential sanctuaries where individual Black women and men are nurtured in order to confront oppressive social institutions (537).

By using this framework to deconstruct the role of fashion and blogging in fostering acts

of resistance, scholars can begin to unpack the methods through which individuals confront oppressive social institutions through, for example, dress. It is through creative acts of resistance that power can be re-conceptualized. Women that use various fashions to resist are working on an individualized level towards change. When all of these individuals can come together through one space – the fashion blog – power is fostered and a sense of community is formed. Hill Collins points out that this sense of community is key to confronting oppressive social institutions. Fashion blogs do this:

> The blog format allows for highly individualistic expression. For example, Rebecca Blood, a veteran blogger and writer about blogging, noted that the introduction of *Blogger*, a popular tool that made it easy to write freely about anything…. Like many other online communities… Bloggers embody a distinctive culture, where members are often passionate…. and are excited about getting to know like-minded people either through personal interactions or through the words on a blog (Wei).

The blog space brings together individuals with a similar viewpoint or love of an issue – in this case, fashion – to create a distinctive culture. The interactions between bloggers through comment sections produce an interactive space for readers, allowing them to write about their passions, narratives, and experiences. Relationships are developed through the written dialogue of the blog space.

Further, individuals are agents of power and can source their power through rhetoric, both visual and narrative, of blogging. As discussed during a fashion week panel on the emergence of fashion blogging, Constance White, style director of eBay, commented: "The impact [blogs are] having is the idea that the whole population is taking control and ownership of fashion" (Corcoran 30). Both bloggers and the subjects

they feature harness power through fashion choices, displaying ownership through rhetoric of dress. Meaning is displayed through clothes and the use of fashion to exercise agency helps take a practice deemed part *of* the system and restructures it as a tactical approach to subverting power. For example, the use of punk or alternative fashion in the everyday, in combination with more high fashion pieces, creates a look that cannot be defined as one particular style. Thus, the wearer is not submitting to cultural and societal expectations for how one *should* dress, as demonstrated by Stella in the image above.

Hill Collins' theory of Black feminist thought also illuminates the significance of an individual's ability to display uniqueness that is often constrained by systems of domination. Systemically, "Each individual has a unique personal biography made up of concrete experiences, values, motivations, and emotions. No two individuals occupy the same social space; thus no two biographies are identical" (Hill Collins 540). One part of our personal biographies is the clothes we wear and styles we project. By including these narratives of dress in scholarship, academics can take a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to studying fashion and identity. Since fashion is a complex, intersectional practice, scholarship on the communicative and identity-forming aspects of clothing should also be complex and intersectional. Fashion and style are two of the most significant methods toward self-expression that individuals perform in everyday life. Fashion choices help to conceptualize and demonstrate *who we are*.

On one hand, some feminists have declared fashion as hardly more than an oppressive tool of dominant systems of power. However other scholars question this

assumption, finding that,

> To care about dress and our appearance is oppressive, [the] argument goes, and our love of clothes is a form of false consciousness - yet, since we do love them we are locked in contradiction. The best we can do, according to this scenario, is to try to find some sort of reasonably attractive dress that will avoid the worst pitfalls of extravagance, self- objectification and snobbery, while avoiding also becoming 'platform women in dingy black' (Wilson 232).

Fashion blogs offer a space where individuals can enter the debate between fashion, feminism and communicating identity. Blogs offer a space where clothing and various modes of style are/can be displayed by women of many shapes, sizes, nationalities, ethnicities, and social classes. Focus is on individual style rather than objectification of female bodies within a framework of the male gaze.

Another interesting point of study is the interplay between discourse and fashion. On a broader level, the significance of discourse in understanding a woman's place within hierarchical systems of domination occurs through dialogue Blogs also provide ample space for this practice. Hill Collins notes that,

> Eventually such dialogues may get us to a point at which, claims Elsa Barkley Brown, 'all people can learn to center in another experience, validate it, and judge it by its own standards without need of comparison or need to adopt that framework as their own' (546).

We make sense of the world by judging our experiences against others. While individualism is maintained through fashion choices, in order to understand this individualism we need to first have some point of comparison. On *Hanneli* and *The Sartorialist*, women are identified for their expression of selfhood and idiosyncratic, intersecting styles. The blogs offer a platform to explore adornment as an unsullied form

66

of identity articulation. The performances on many fashion blogs validate individualist frameworks, but also create a collective space where people can discuss, judge against, and associate with other advocates for fashion. *Hanneli* and *The Sartorialist* further the sharing of experiences and fostering of community by preserving a sense of significance for individual authenticity through the discourse as found on their blogs.

When writing about feminist theory, it is important to include a discussion of privilege and its relationship to fashion systems. Even having a space to argue what it means to be a feminist involves privilege, especially since the second wave feminists that wrote of the hindrances of fashion were usually white, middle-class women in an advantaged position to begin with. These,

> …privileges of femininity in rationalized instrumental culture is an aesthetic freedom, the freedom to play with shape and color on the body, to don various styles and looks, and through them exhibit and imagine unreal possibilities… Such female imagination has liberating possibilities because it subverts, unsettles the order of respectable, functional rationality in a world where rationality supports domination (Young 110).

As Young points out, through aesthetic freedom there is the possibility for exploration and imagination; fashion helps to not only sustain this freedom, but create it. Aesthetic freedom generates a sense of liberation and establishes a space where power structures can be critiqued, commented upon, and questioned, in line with what feminists discussed in foundational writings from the 1950s through the 1970s. Fashion, then, furthers the feminist cause for aesthetic emancipation and the acceptance of our visual representation of individuality.

67

The Gaze

As argued within feminist scholarship, merely existing within a patriarchal system forces the subject (i.e., woman) to be viewed through an oppressive male gaze. Indeed, most popular, Western cultural gender norms are descendent from old-fashioned, patriarchal expectations for womanhood and femininity. Scholarship denouncing the male gaze can be traced to cinema studies, one of the first mass-scale formats for mediated imagery. In her foundational scholarship on women in film, Mulvey finds that,

> … visual pleasure in mainstream Hollywood cinema derives from and reproduces a structure of male looking/female to-be-looked-at-ness (whereby the spectator is invited to identify with a male gaze at an objectified female) which replicates the structure of unequal power relations between men and women (Gamman and Marshmant 5).

Since fashion has historically been blatantly sexualized and gendered - and notions of feminine and masculine are deeply inscribed within our culture - the fashion industry, too, has been seen as reproducing the "female to-be-looked-at-ness" commonly criticized by feminist scholars.

However, more recent scholarship has sought to question this assumption. Some scholars find that women are now able to re-appropriate gaze for the pleasure of the woman. Stacey asks,

> What is there to prevent [the woman] from reversing the relation and appropriating the gaze for her own pleasure? Precisely the fact that the reversal itself remains locked within the same logic. The male striptease, the gigolo - both inevitably signify the mechanism of reversal itself, constituting themselves as aberrations whose acknowledgements simply reinforces the dominant system of aligning sexual difference with a subject/object dichotomy (Gamman and Marshmant 6).

68

By using fashion to subvert the male gaze, individuals (and the bloggers covering them) have a new outlet for reacting against dominant structures of power that exist through a male-dominated perspective. The example of a woman wearing menswear illustrates this point. Wearing traditional menswear pieces such as an oversize blazer, roomy pants, loose-fitting shirt, broad shouldered silhouette, etc., a woman is able to represent selfhood in relation and opposition to gendered styles of dress. Women in the fashion industry have accepted the menswear style, applauding this dress technique for its innovation both commercially and in subverting aesthetic expectations for women. This style is no longer exclusively for men. Women can utilize this style trend, shifting the subject/object dynamic to one that supports "taking up space" and less about the actual body and its "looked-at-ness". Menswear dress styles can be equated to female empowerment through this lens.

When working to subvert larger systems of power, the power must first be identified and acknowledged. Foucault points out that,

> As far as this power is concerned, it is first necessary to distinguish that which is exerted over things and gives the ability to modify, use, consume, or destroy them - a power which stems for aptitudes directly inherent in the body or relayed by external instruments… if we speak of the structures or the mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise powers over others (Foucault 786).

Scholars cannot deny the existence of powerful, dominant ideological systems within contemporary Western society, long established and perpetuated throughout generations. But through creating a space - fashion blogs - that bring forth discussions of power, selfhood, and identity, first steps are taken to identify and affect the system.

69

In line with theories of feminists of color is the school of rhetorical theory which claims that scholarship should focus on systems of domination. Inhabitants of the West exist within a hierarchical, classed society. In order to subvert these systems we can utilize multiple methods for subversion and dissent. Two methods I focus on include: (1) fostering a sense of community and (2) critiquing and exerting power through acts of resistance. Foss notes that,

> To resist is to speak the unspeakable, which involves breaking the silence, telling the stories of oppression, recreating history, articulating marginalized experiences, and allowing secrets to become common knowledge. At the heart of the speaking the unspeakable is the notion of responsibility, of 'being responsible to our own power'… Empowered action, then, creates a vision that serves as a tool to resist domination (Foss 337).

Fashion speaks the unspeakable, articulating individual experiences. We are responsible for our own power. One of the best ways to exert and articulate power is through creating and/or maintaining a visual image. One of the most telling displays of visual rhetoric within the everyday is through fashion, since it is one of the first things others see. Since meaning is inherent in clothes, they allow us to communicate our identities with the outside world.

In this discussion I would also like to connect new technology with innovative directions in both fashion coverage and fashion's relationship to serious academic scholarship. Mulvey addresses the shift in media technologies in recent years and its impact on studies surrounding gaze. She notes that,

> These temporal shifts also apply to the revolutions in technology and communications that have transformed the world. It was, for instance, precisely after the publication of *Visual and Other Pleasures*, as I began work on the essays

for my next book… that my writing moved from a typewriter to a computer…. New media have mutated and reconfigured old spectatorships into new kinds of visual pleasures due to the spectator's new ability to manipulate the linearity and flow of film (Mulvey xxiii).

New media (i.e., fashion blogs) have worked to guide conversations on visual pleasure, gaze, identity and fashion. Daily visitors to popular fashion blogs are usually women who have turned the male gaze into the "female" gaze, not only creating looks for their own pleasure and as individualized modes of expression, but also for viewing by other women. The arguments against fashion and feminism should be reexamined now that the subject position has shifted. Ultimately, the heart of the feminist debate lies in the relationship between the subject and the dominant order, participants in power systems that help to maintain societal and cultural expectations, the *status quo*. As this change occurs, so should scholarship.

When discussing power systems and subject/object dynamics, it is important to include reference to Michel's Foucault's foundational scholarship on issues of power dynamics. Fashion, I argue, allows women to explore and express their individualized power and establish who they are through both visual and discursive means. Power, defined and maintained through discourse, is comprised of segments. Foucault finds that,

> …we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies (183).

Fashion can be defined as a segment, as identified by Foucault, since dress practices are a

71

tactic through which the individual can comment and critique normativities of gender, race, class, and other cultural performances. Establishing a space for the discussion of these discursive routines allows individuals to challenge dominant discourse via tactical, aesthetic approaches to the everyday. Through blog discussions, for example, momentum for ideological change within fashion can develop.

Smith understands the power relationship between fashion and discourse as acts of opposition in the everyday. Rather than look at these relationships as layered over the base and superstructure concept outlined by Foucault, she takes, "…the concept of a discourse of femininity… envisages a web or cat's cradle of texts, stringing together and coordinating the multiple local and particular sites of the everyday worlds of women and men with the market process of fashion" (Smith 53). Just as identity studies is a cat's cradle of texts and meanings, studies of fashion practices maintain a space of multiplicity. Fashion is by no means a static space, since modes of fashionable dress change from season to season. But on blogs, fashion in the everyday – which is an intersecting web of both individualities and identities – creates a site both local and wide-scale to explore these layered texts and how fashion is used by the individual in a specific space and time. In opposition to fashion as presented on a consumerist, market level, fashion blogs display and contextualize fashion in the everyday, as well as practices of dissention and empowerment through individual dress practices. By examining feminist and identity studies in combination with fashion theory and practices, scholars can better understand both notions of gaze and fashion's communicative possibilities.

Feminism, Fashion, and the Postmodern

When discussing fashion and feminism, it is important to mention postmodernism. Postmodernism does, after all, take into consideration the significance of power relations, time, place, and problematics associated with objectivity. Fashion exists within dominant structures of power and contributes to individual understanding of the surrounding world, as well as the ways power, performance, and presentation of the self exists. In fact,

> …fashion, with its constant change and pursuit of glamour enacts symbolically the most hallucinatory aspects of our culture, the confusions between the real and the not-real, the aesthetic obsessions, the vein of morbidity without tragedy, of irony without merriment, and the nihilistic critical stance towards authority, empty rebellion almost without political content' (Wilson 63).

With fashion, as well as many other aspects of everyday life, individuals are able to reassert the fluid, symbolic nature of our everyday existence. Just as we, as individuals change, our clothes often do as well.

There is no purely objective way to examine the world. Fashion outside of the elite group of individuals at fashion publications and design houses remain within a subjective space. Therefore, use of clothing by the individual as a tool to negotiate the world exemplifies the postmodern. As bell hooks discusses in her scholarship on feminism and minority status, "The overall impact of postmodernism is that many other groups now share with black folks a sense of deep alienation, despair, uncertainty, loss of sense of grounding even if it is not informed by shared circumstance" (hooks). Just as certain raced, gendered or aged groups feel alienation, there is also a similar

73

disenfranchisement for women enamored by fashion, yet also consider themselves academic. Waggoner and Hallstein illustrate this in their discussion of fashion and agency:

> Many of them [female faculty], describing the basis of this perception, maintained that if women choose to adorn themselves in stereotypically feminine fashions, they are read as women who subscribe to patriarchal conceptions of how women should look, but if they choose not to wear makeup and elaborate adornment, they are read either as women who are intentionally rejecting conventional femininity or… women who are lazy, neglectful, and 'letting themselves go' (30).

This dichotomy between the fashionable and unfashionable is still present in academic environments today. By turning to alternative forms of study, scholars can begin to move away from hostility towards fashion to an environment with greater inclusion and acceptance.

In broad-spectrum critiques of culture there has been a turn to postmodernism as a method to define what *is* and *is not*. Wilson explores this factor through fashion, where,

> … aesthetic forms have come to be stereotyped as 'feminine' and how they are then almost automatically judged as less important, less worthy, less 'great' than more 'masculine' kinds of art. For example, throughout the nineteenth century anything 'detailed' or 'ornamental' was judged feminine and inferior… [however] the postmodern breaking down of aesthetic divisions has opened a space for the reappraisal of what was traditionally seen as the feminine (Wilson 5).

Since fashion is allocated to the realm of ornamental and feminine, it has been adversely viewed within academia. However, as Wilson further points out,

> …feminists have begun to explore the meanings of fashionable and other kinds of dress…gone against the grain of a traditional feminist suspicion of fashionable dress: many feminists reject fashion because the way in which it reinforces the sexual objectification of women; for its associations with conspicuous consumption and the positioning of women as economic chattels, as property, and because it is held to be uncomfortable and to render women helpless (high heels

74

and pinched-in waists, for example, can impede movement). It is alleged that it has an association with privilege and wealth and hence unacceptable class and race connotations (Wilson 5).

Turning to postmodernism expands upon the significance of alternative modes of dress (e.g., punk fashion, traditional African styles of dress, etc.). Rather than turn to grand narratives to understand the world, we can look inward to our individual histories and narratives to explain how and why we navigate through the everyday. For some scholars,

> [This fragmentation] appears to refer to the bombardment of the individual by culture and information from multiple sources. This then is seen as an experience that is impossible to convert into a meaningful whole. This is the fragmentation of knowledge… At other times, it is the fragmentation of identity that is discussed; this, too, has more than one meaning… to mean that identity is always to some extent a fiction (Wilson 7).

Fashion bloggers such as Schuman and Mustaparta continue this fragmentive process by displaying alternative modes of dress to highlight new representations and definitions of identity. The individual narrative as expressed through fashion in this framework helps with understanding and contextualizing a larger, more meaningful world.

Through a postmodern approach to fashion we can articulate both dress and the body it sheathes. As subjects, women in particular ought to include examination of individual style when considering selfhood, for:

> Our dress constitutes our 'appearance'; the 'vestimentiary envelope' produces us as social beings…'clothing and other kinds of ornamentation make the human body culturally visible… clothing draws the body so that it can be culturally seen, and articulates it in a meaningful form… Clothing is a necessary condition of subjectivity… in articulating the body it simultaneously articulates the psyche'. Dress is the cultural metaphor for the body, it is the material with which we 'write or draw' a representation of the body into our cultural context. Indirectly, at least, then, the postmodernism debate has helped rescue the study of dress from its

lowly status, and has created - or at least named - a climate in which any cultural or aesthetic object may be taken seriously (Wilson 6).

As Wilson identifies, without clothes we have no cultural, visible metaphor to represent both ourselves and to communicate with larger society. The ways in which individuals construct an image helps to write the narrative of identity. Without narrative through cloth, individuals have limited modes of communication outside of semantics. Through the incorporation of new languages of dress (i.e., blog and alternative imagery), scholars can thoroughly address the complexities of everyday life, as well as identity politics specific to Western culture. By ignoring the alternative meanings found within fashion, we ignore the possibility for new routes of scholarship and understanding dress practices, as well as identity construction, itself.

Chapter Four: Performance and Identity through Clothing Choice in Everyday Life

Through performance within the everyday, an individual's identity(ies) becomes evident since it is through performative choices that we communicate to and with others. The contemporary fashion blog epitomizes and displays the performance of fashionable dress from a cross-section of individuals and groups while also emphasizing the shift towards a new approach to fashion studies. Rather than approach the study of fashion, communication and identity on just a basic level, this project will examine fashion through ordinary efforts of fashion bloggers, individuals entrenched in the fashion industry, living and breathing the power of clothing and how a fashionable perspective can be applied to larger issues of identity performance. Before delving into fashion blog imagery analysis, this chapter will focus on theories surrounding identity formation, material culture, and performance in everyday life. By incorporating visual analysis from the three fashion blogs of interest (*The Sartorialist*, *Hanneli*, and *Vogue Daily*), I will illustrate how clothing facilitates agency and fosters positive notions of difference through intersecting fashion choices.

While some scholars find fashion to be a mask or costume in a detrimental sense, fashion can also be considered an asset in constructing the physicality of self within the everyday. Craik finds that,

> …if we follow Mauss and Bourdieu, we can regard the ways in which we clothe the body as an active process or technical means for constructing and presenting a

bodily self… The 'life' of the body is played out through the technical arrangement of clothes, adornment and gesture (1).

Constructing identity through clothing is an active negotiation with the self, as well as within larger social and cultural contexts. Further,

The aesthetics of fashion are informed by the modernity of urbanism and consumerism (and subsequently by postmodernity). Fashion plays off the preoccupations, contradictions and taboos of western culture. Several other elements are also invoked in definitions of fashion: individuality… gender identity, and imperialism. According to Wilson, fashion is a flexible means of expressing the ambiguity of capitalism, identity and art (Craik 7).

I will examine the concept outlined by Craik to further examine the imagery featured on *The Sartorialist*, *Hanneli*, and *Vogue Daily*, three cutting-edge, content-rich popular fashion blogs. In addition, this analysis will explore issues of modernity, contradictions to modes within feminist scholarship, and visual commentary displayed by subjects (and bloggers) on each site. By examining the construction of identity through clothing, fashion can be understood more thoroughly as a communicative method for creating identity in Western contemporary culture.

A New Imagery

By analyzing images from popular, high-traffic blogs admired by individual fashion followers, a new perspective for understanding identity through fashion emerges. An exploration of fashionable intersections, such as street style and designer high fashion, offers a new layer of analysis to style and communication. Blog imagery extends contemporary examples of an inventive mode of dress, using the body as a site of resistance, while also countering hegemonic, patriarchal expectations for female dress

78

norms.

Scholar Andrew Hill, who specifically studies street style and presentations of self, finds that, "We should… be living in an age in which the way in which people dress stands as a testament to the individualism celebrated in our era… an era of remarkable sartorial expressiveness, richness and heterogeneity" (Hill 67). Through unpacking street style, Hill emphasizes the innovative and individualized nature of this dress style and its subcultural style roots:

> Current street style is still conceptualized in terms of… core duality: the innovations of subcultures (which is now alleged to have given way to the creativity of individuals) is defined in opposition to the mainstream, which is seen as sterile, conformist, frequented by unimaginative fashion victims (Woodward 87-88).

Blogs are representative of this distinctive aesthetic, the ways in which women (and men, although not to be discussed in detail within this project) perform their identities and individuality through a marriage of transecting styles. Pairing visual analysis of *The Sartorialist*, *Hanneli* and *Vogue Daily* with contemporary fashion theory on street style and high fashion adds an additional layer to analysis within communication by looking at everyday experiences, new technologies, and their central relationship to fashion performances.

Before moving further in this examination, I will address the role fashion plays as both philosophy within communications and mode for identity construction by the everywoman. Utilizing Svendsen's work in fashion philosophy studies, a strong link has been established between fashion and identity:

'Identity' is one of the seminal concepts for describing the function of fashion. Fashion allegedly contributes to the formation of identity. Our identities have become problematic - they are no longer something we take for granted. This is linked to a general focusing on self-realization (137).

Svendsen claims that fashion helps construct our individuality and, in essence, become ourselves. While the significance of fashion may be undermined in some communications scholarship and considered futile, fashion theorist Kawamura points out that, "Fashion may be socially frivolous but it is not sociologically trivial. Fashion is the result of a great deal of influence which collectively determines the social structure of society" (13). The way individuals dress within the everyday is an amalgamation of diverse identities, times, places, socioeconomic statuses, and cultures.

Negative second-wave feminist connotations surrounding fashion, in fact, emphasize what makes dress practices so individualistic and captivating. On one hand, Bordo does point out that, "The construction, of course, is always homogenizing and normalizing, erasing racial, class, and other differences and insisting that all women aspire to a coercive, standardized ideal… the ruling feminist mystique" (311). Throughout the content analysis and study for this project, what Bordo writes of was evident. An idealized body seemed to exist on the sites, and there was a more homogenized representation of bodies, at least in relation to thinness, gender, class and race throughout *The Sartorialist*, *Hanneli*, and *Vogue Daily* (than originally thought). But despite these representations of the female body, the sites also offered a captivating, content-rich site of study for creativity and artfulness through dress.

A relationship also exists between fashion (including individual items of clothing)

and the essence of the self within physical embodiment.   Kawamura believes that,

> Fashion in our epoch denaturalizes the body and thus divests itself of all essentialism. This must be good news for women since essentialism ideologies have been oppressive to them.   Fashion often plays with, and playfully transgresses gender boundaries, inverting stereotypes and making us aware of the masque of femininity (12).

Through fashion choices individuals can dissent and play with stereotypes, boundaries, senses of the body, and ultimately, construct a visual representation that highlights intersecting, mixed identities reflective of our most authentic selves. One detrimental part of this notion, however, is the continued perpetuation of normativities surrounding the ideal female physical form. As written of in mainstream fashion - and represented on various fashion blogs - the female body is continually presented as tall and thin. So in this sense, fashion can also be seen as essentializing a specific body type, rather than solely working to transgress specific aesthetic expectations.

Historically there has also been a model associating fashion primarily with social standing, but contemporary forms of expression through clothes - street style, high fashion, or other multifaceted/mixed modes of dress - create more than *just* an image of social standing. Kawamura (via Davis' scholarship),

> …argues that the model used by classical theorists is outdated because although what people wear and how they wear it can reveal much regarding their social standing, this is not all that dress communicates, and under many circumstances, it is by no means the most important thing communicated.   He shares with Blumer the view that it is to the collective facets of our social identities that fashion addresses itself. His focus is on a relationship between fashion/clothing and individual identity in modern society (31).

Just as speaking can reveal a great deal about an individual, presentation through the

81

visual language of fashion can be powerful, playful, and telling of our identities. For example, just because a woman carries the newest Gucci bag or wears Converse Chuck Taylor sneakers does not necessarily signal belonging to a particular class or subcultural group. These distinct items can be worn together or in combination with other fashions to say something entirely new, creating new meaning with each combination or stylistic use. Privilege is extended to those individuals that can afford a specific, trendy bag or the newest, coveted shoes - this can also be tied to class issues, in general, surrounding fashion.

There is a link, historically, between socioeconomic status, class systems, and fashion. In many of the images presented on *Hanneli*, *The Sartorialist*, and *Vogue Daily*, women are adorned in high-end fashion pieces. These styles do afford the wearer a specific privilege. High fashion, ready-to-wear, and haute couture are not accessible to all individuals. Wilson explains that,

> Fashion speeded up and proliferated to keep pace with modern life. Going off in one direction it matched and expressed the compartmentalized, obsessionally sub-divided life of the bourgeoisie. There were morning gowns, tea gowns, dinner gowns, walking dress, traveling dress, dress for the country, dress (later) for different kinds of sport, deep mourning, second mourning, half mourning; costumes that no longer reflected a clear rank or status, but rather a socially defined time of day, or occasion, or an individual state of feeling. Dress was no longer a gorgeous covering of rich stuff, but was both used as an indicator of social conformity, and, paradoxically, also individualized to the wearer's taste and personality (35).

While individual style and taste are intrinsic in fashion, as well as my own arguments for the performance and identity-construction possibilities available through dress practices, I acknowledge that many of the images on fashion blogs - as part of this study - are not all-

encompassing and available to everyone. Just as second-wave feminists argued against the patriarchal system of domination, it could also be argued that a hierarchical exclusivity exists within fashion today. However, this study looks beyond the class associations of fashion practices to explore the relationship between identity construction, selfhood, and a creative arrangement of clothes representative of both individualism and authenticity.

Members of the fashionable elite, as another illustration of this process, play with conceptions of acceptability within fashion narratives. Designers, as well as individuals that simply employ distinctive fashions, work to challenge gender and sexuality norms while also embracing diverse approaches to attain external, aesthetic "beauty" or the "ideal" body. Famed designer Jean Paul Gaultier,

> …a punk-influenced Paris couturier of the early 1980s, dressed his models in a 'motley fusion of punk pilferings, slattern sophistication and B-movie anecdotes: his mannequins interspersed with 'real' girls of all shapes and sizes'. He showed 1950s corsetry as outerwear, put together everything that doesn't 'go', subverted the whole idea of fashion showing… Gaultier enunciated the classic contradiction of the aesthetic of the ugly: 'It's always the badly-dressed people who are the most interesting' (Wilson 132-33).

Gaultier is a prime example of how an approach to the examination of fashion that includes intersecting disciplines, such as fashion theory, new technologies, fine art studies, and cultural studies is missing within communications scholarship. While a person uninterested in fashion may consider Gaultier's use of corsetry vulgar or ostentatious, the designer demonstrates how individuals can utilize certain items of clothing to contradict expected norms for female dress. Just because a particular style is

(or is not) aesthetically appealing does not mean it lacks validity, taste, or worth.

Exploring fashion as communicative tool should also focus on the transformative power of clothing. In scholarship discussing approaches to fashion and identity, there has generally been great examination of costume and performance. For Wilson,

> The question of costume… is one of enormous importance for those who wish to appear to have what they do not have because that is often the best way of getting it later on… appearance replaced reality. Whoever wished to crash high society could, provided they look the part (Wilson 33).

Using dress to communicate and shape identity, individuals illustrate an ability to express power through clothing; individuals can communicate through their fashion performances, and as described by Wilson, to further social standing. Performance is one of the ways to create change. While this is not the primary focus of this project, I note issues of class and socioeconomics as part of the progression of fashion in relation to the performance of various cultural markers, including gender, sexuality, race and class.

One negative assumption of fashion as communicative tool is its susceptibility to stereotyping specific groups, including fashion enthusiasts. As has been pointed out,

> Repeatedly we read that adornment of the body pre-dates all other known forms of decoration; that clothes express the mood of each succeeding age; that what we do with our bodies expresses the *Zeitgeist*. Too often, though, the relationship that of course exists between social change and styles of dress is drawn out in a superficial and cliché-ridden way. The twenties flapper becomes the instant symbol of a revolution in manners and morals… the New Look symbolizes women's return to the home…. The disappearance of the top hat signals the arrival of democracy (Wilson 47).

There may be a tendency to define the relationship between fashion and its wearer cursorily, but by considering an approach to fashion and communication studies that is

nuanced or inventive, scholars can begin to unpack the influence of clothing on an individual sense of the surrounding world. Fashion may be labeled materialistic by some feminists, but bloggers such as Schuman and Mustaparta demonstrate how transformative, performative, and effective fashion can be in communicating who we are. Fashion cannot always be relegated to an un-feminist, materialistic cliché.

In line with these assumptions is the belief that individuals unconcerned with fashion are *not* active participants in constructing and communicating through dress. From an anthropological perspective, the:

> Widespread desire 'to move with fashion' and be 'in style' now makes notions of fashion and style converge on the dressed body, directing our attention to the combination of garments that construct identity on the surface, and in so doing, objectify it. This is how dress becomes implicated in life projects, and why there is nothing quite like it… to enrich our cross-cultural understanding (Hansen 387).

While fashion is aesthetic, it is not necessarily superficial, oppressive or objectifying. Fashion, as both an aesthetic and process, is embedded within everyday life. What individuals put on their bodies before they venture into the world each day helps to construct who they are in relation to others. Clothing is part of being and thus, inescapable. In order to construct a particular image on the surface, there must first be an address of the identity from within to properly perform selfhood.

Fashion and Performance in Material Culture

One recurring argument against fashion is its role in the consumerist materialization of culture and the correlation between clothing, buying, and understanding the self. While fashion is undeniably a consumerist ritual, fashion

practices such as street style appropriate clothing into an expression of the layered identities we hold and maintain. Fashion, as noted on many blogs, is not just about buying the newest *en vogue* item, but about considering how we use individual pieces of clothing to represent aspects of the self, as well as the ways in which these multifaceted objects help to structure our image:

> It seems that whenever someone has something to sell to women - be it clothes, careers or contraception - we are urged to change ourselves into the 'new woman' of the moment, by   adopting whatever definitions of liberation or modernity is current and buying whatever signifies that we have not been left behind as the 'old woman' (Lee 168).

New approaches to fashion, however, do not only work to sell a new identity, but use what we already have. This practice requires the individual to be open in demonstrating various complexities, identities, and/or personalities through clothes. Fashion will always have trends, what is considered "in" or "out". But many fashion blogs exists to move closer to a diverse, more informed way of examining the art of dressing, and, thus examining and acknowledging the self.

Through fashion, we can not only accept the self, but work to explore the art and fantasy that clothing can evoke. Barthes points out in his work on the fashion system that, "…there is another vision of fashion which rejects [the] system of equivalences and sets up a truly abstract and poetic function. This is a fashion of idleness, of luxury, but which has the merit of declaring itself a pure form" (101). Fashion is capable of poetry, performance, luxury, and fantasy; these are some of the reasons fashion is so appealing. Through fashion choices individuals can externally announce who they are, although

these choices do exist within a system of accepted norms surrounding the female body.

Further, fashion begins to speak as a vocabulary of sorts, part of the communicative process of the everyday. In an article on fashion visionary Daphne Guinness, the importance of her performance and poetry through clothing was explained, emphasizing this point:

> But what she is best at, and what her personal art truly is, is merely getting dressed. She does this without concern or hesitation. She throws on a couture dress the way another person would put on a pair of sweatpants… 'I treat clothing or a piece of jewelry like it was a piece of art,' she says, 'even though people who collect clothes get a bad rap because they're told it's all vanity'…. She belongs to a rare group of women who can conduct entire conversations with their style (Blasberg 402).

Fashion can reveal the most pure, authentic form of self, but this does require willingness on the part of the wearer. Acknowledgement is a significant part of the fashion process, just as it is in fostering social change.

Another key component of fashion in contemporary society lies within fashion's ties to consumer culture. Since fashion is a material good, it is often considered part of the patriarchal, consumerist system that elicits oppression of women, tying them to material possessions and wealth. As identified by Wilson, "The attack on consumerism perceives our world as a seamless web of oppression; we have no autonomy at all, but are the slaves of an iron system from which there is no escape" (53). But fashion is not only about consumption on a materialist level. An entire culture exists around secondhand or vintage clothing, and blogs show the reader how clothes already owned can be used in new, inventive ways.

Buehler discusses secondhand fashion, shopping habits and identity, identifying through interviews that meaning-making can occur through both dress and consumption. In one of the interview excerpts,

> Tamera [the interviewee] is different and she uses secondhand shopping to convey that. It is a tool for her, a way of expressing herself and living differently. According to Tamera, secondhand shopping matters; it is a part of her life that helps contribute to her uniqueness and allows her to express herself in a way that sets her apart from others (Buehler 64).

Buehler explains that secondhand clothing helps individual shoppers to approach fashion, express identity, create narratives, and maintain a sense of individuality along with consumption, but through new, more approachable means. In many cases, though, consumption, especially of fashion and accessories, is tied to the desire for upward mobility and attainment of a specific aesthetic or class status. For example,

> Bourdieu stresses that the driving force behind symbolic consumption is not primarily the imitation of the higher classes by the lower, rather the distinguished strategies used by the higher classes with regard to the lower classes. He describes how the acquisition of an aesthetic object, whether it be a painting or fashionable clothes leads to the object being altered 'into a reified negation of all those not worthy to own it, through lacking the material or symbolic means required for acquiring it' (Svendsen 48).

Since fashion is a material good that many feminists consider part of the overarching patriarchal system of domination, it is also negatively regarded as hegemonically reproducing power, beauty, aesthetic ideals, and a desire for upward (class) mobility. Fashion is thus adversely defined as superficial or frivolous. However, textual and visual rhetorical examples discussed in the next section will question these class-based and material assumptions. While there are still representations of specific body types and

88

socioeconomics in fashion blogs, there are also additional, alternative representations of women that utilize their clothing for purposes of agency sand individualized expression.

An Analysis of Fashion Blogs

In order to illustrate how fashion blogging frames fashion not as an insignificant entity, but rather a wide-ranging mode of presenting the self, this section will include figures from the image analysis conducted on *The Sartorialist*, *Hanneli* and *Vogue Daily*, as well as notable images and written text from the six-month period of study. These images illustrate the importance of fashion blogging and how this new, discursive space re-imagines fashion as not only art, but space for the expression of individuality. Blogs have emerged as a significant site in discourse surrounding fashion, communication, and social functions in a constantly updated, technologically-focused social world:

> The emergence of a public, textually-mediated discourse marks a new form of social relation, transcending and organizing local settings and bringing about relations among them of a wholly different order… This creates a new kind of public arena in which relations are mediated by objectified extra-local forms… Discursive images and statements are constant across geographically and temporally separated settings and accessible to anyone with the appropriate competencies (Smith 42).

Whether examining dress from the front row at New York fashion week or a living room in Denver, communication has been opened through blogging to allow for inclusiveness, at least for those individuals that desire to contribute to the conversation.

Before dissecting specific images from the three sites, I will provide a brief overview of the image analysis findings. Each fashion blog was examined and mined for patterns from September 2010 through February 2011, Spring 2011 through Fall 2011

ready-to-wear fashion week. The bloggers from *The Sartorialist*, *Hanneli*, and *Vogue Daily* featured images, both taken by the individual blogger and sourced from other fashion websites. The fashion week coverage included images from urban spaces such as New York, Paris, London, and Milan, although there were also posts including images taken in non-urban spaces. *The Sartorialist* also included images from Italian men's fashion week, however these images are not of significance to this study's focus on fashion, women and communication.

Each blog was analyzed through its photography/imagery, titles and narrative texts for each posting. Ten sign-vehicles that were utilized in the analysis: (1) white bodies, (2) non-white bodies, (3) men, (4) women, (5) hyper-thin bodies, (6) average (thin) bodies, (7) average-large (average) bodies, (8) artfulness or creativity, (9) use of high fashion, and (10) utilization of Woodward's definition of street style. For purposes of better understanding the approach to this study, I have provided descriptions, definitions, and understandings below that were used throughout the analysis and period of study.

White Bodies

I felt it necessary in my analysis of the three blogs to account for the many types of bodies featured and represented on each site. Without knowing the back-story for each of the photographed subjects, I had to approach this study by categorizing individuals that appeared to exhibit an image of "whiteness", versus individuals that appeared "not-white". By using Nakayama and Krizek's article on strategic rhetoric of whiteness, I turn

90

to the following critical naming of whiteness: "Our critical move is attained through a nominalist rhetoric; that is, by naming whiteness, we displace its centrality and reveal its invisible position" (292). In order to understand and appropriately classify the various bodies represented on *Hanneli*, *The Sartorialist*, and *Vogue Daily*, I needed to first recognize these various embodiments. As Nakayama and Krizek also point out,

> 'In the realm of categories, black is always marked as a color… and is always particularizing; whereas white is not anything really, not an identity, not a particularizing quality because it is everything - white is no color because it is all colors'… Thus, the experience and communication patterns of whites are taken as the norm from which Others are marked (293).

By accounting for white and non-white bodies on the three blogs, my goal was to consider how normative and non-normative the bodies on each site appeared.

Non-White Bodies

When accounting for non-white bodies, I also used Nakayama and Krizek's scholarship on critical naming and analysis of whiteness rhetoric. I did not want to approach this analysis by marginalizing any groups, but did account for bodies that appeared "not" white in order to provide numerical statistics on the various body types and classifications on each site. These statistics do keep in mind Nakayama and Krizek's identification of bias, in that "…we see a struggle over *who* gets to label *whom* in the social construction of identity" (302).

Men

This study does not specifically address the role of men in fashion, choosing instead to focus on women's representations, identities, and use of agency through dress

practices. However, in order to provide honest statistics from each blog, I felt it

necessary to also account for the men featured on each site.

Women

Since this study does focus on the representations of women on three prominent

fashion blogs, I accounted for the number of women included in each blog posting, as

well as other more clarifying characteristics such as body type, race, and use subjective

classifications (i.e., use of street style, high fashion occurrences, and artful or creative

approaches to dress).

Hyper-Thin Bodies

My initial categorizations for the body types featured on each blog were "Thin",

"Average", and "Average-to-Large". However, these classifications were problematic

since corporeal standards within the fashion industry are quite skewed. What would be

considered a thin body in fashion is actually a hyper-thin body for individuals outside of

the fashion industry. A great number of the women in the fashion industry, at least as

represented on blog sites are tall and incredibly thin. This is not necessarily found in

such large quantities outside of fashion:

> Many contemporary American women covet an unrealistically thin body build for
> themselves… The rising significance of the thin ideal is apparent from the
> changing perceptions of the ectomorphic body type. In the fifty years since
> Sheldon and Stevens (1942) conducted their somatotype research, the negative
> characteristics associated with the thin, or ectomorphic, body build have
> dwindled. In the early 1940s, Sheldon and   Stevens   found   that   ectomorphic
> individuals were perceived negatively by others as   nervous,   submissive,   and
> socially withdrawn. By the late 1980s, however, this perception   had   changed.
> Compared to individuals with endomorphic and mesomorphic body types,
> ectomorphic individuals were rated most positively and considered to be the most

sexually appealing... The emergence of the slender body type as a beauty standard for women is especially salient in the mass media… (Turner et al.).

The bodies represented on fashion blogs usually err on the side of hyper-thin or ectomorphic, and the continual appearance of these body types works to create acceptance and an expectation for shockingly thin female bodies. As explained by Turner et al. above, hyper-thin bodies are now the normative physical standard for women in the West.

Average (Thin) Bodies

The categorization of average bodies in this study is, in actuality, thin bodies. The average woman in America today is a size 14, however most "average" bodies in the fashion industry are probably no larger than a size 8 or 10. In an interesting passage from *The Body Project*, Brumberg charts the shift in body expectations for young women less than a century ago:

> By the 1920s, both fashion and film had encouraged a massive 'unveiling' of the female body, which meant that certain body parts - such as arms and legs - were bared and displayed in ways they had never been before. This new freedom to display the body was accompanied, however, by demanding beauty and dietary regimens that involved money as well as self-discipline. Beginning in the 1920s, women's legs and underarms had to be smooth and free of body hair; the torso had to be svelte; and the breasts were supposed to be small and firm. What American women did not realize at the time was that their stunning new freedom actually implied the need for greater internal control of the body (Brumberg 98).

A majority of the women featured on fashion blogs, especially those that are members of the fashionable elite, fit the characterizations described by Brumberg. The female body in fashion is usually smaller and thinner, thus the classification of "average" bodies would be considered thin outside of the industry.

93

Average-to-Large (Average) Bodies

According to an article from the *Los Angeles Times* discussing the fashion industry's obsession with small sizes, "… the average U.S. woman, who's 162.9 pounds and wears a size 14, is treated like an anomaly by apparel brands and retailers -- who seem to assume that no one over size 10 follows fashion's capricious trends" (Vesilind). Throughout my analysis, women that would be classified as having an average sized body outside of the fashion industry were counted as "Average to Large" based on the standards listed above. This differs wildly from the normalized 24- or 23-inch waist in fashion sample sizes (the equivalent of a size 0).

Artfulness and Creativity

When accounting for artfulness and creativity in the visual analysis of the blog content, I turned to creativity's established definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which relates the term to imagination, inventiveness, and the use of original ideas. In a magazine interview, Schuman explained that when he is photographing his subjects on the street, he is "…fully open to being surprised by someone's unique style. I do love it when people break rules" ("Ask the Expert: Scott Schuman")! Subjects that displayed a sense of art, uniqueness, idiosyncrasy, and originality were accounted for in this category.

Use of High Fashion

The use of high fashion was prevalent on the three blogs, especially since the sites are devoted to an everyday study of the fashion industry in cosmopolitan centers. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, high fashion can be defined as "a popular or

the latest style of clothing, hair, decoration, or behavior (i.e., the latest Parisian fashions)". High fashion on the blogs included use of haute couture designs, as well as high-end, ready-to-wear designs (as opposed to mass marketed retail fashion).

Utilization of Street Style

As previously discussed, street style can be defined as an approach to style that includes visually exciting, colorful, androgynous or outrageous clothing. The style itself incorporates various subcultural looks, a "do-it-yourself" approach to dressing within the everyday. When tallying the usage of street style in the blog imagery, I kept Woodward's definition in mind, as well as classifications found in contemporary publications such as *Vogue*, *Elle*, and other popular, mainstream fashion publications.

Once the number of images and sign-vehicle inclusions were accounted for, percentages were calculated to determine the frequency of occurrences on each site.[4] The figures were fairly surprising, especially as a regular reader of the blogs both for the purposes of this study and pure, fashion-obsessed pleasure.[5] For sign-vehicles "Artfulness and Creativity", "Use of High Fashion", and "Use of Street-Style", I utilized definitions provided at the beginning of this thesis, although with this type of analysis there will almost always be an element of subjectivity. A subjective approach is espoused by some scholars, such as Schutz, who finds that

---

[4] See Appendix A for complete image and sign-vehicle analysis chart.

[5] Some of the postings in any given month would include multiple photos, with more than one individual in each photograph. The number of people in each image was accounted for, rather than simply the number of images. Postings with multiple images of the same individual were only counted once.

> …the social sciences should focus on the ways that the life world – the world every individual takes for granted – is experienced by its members… From this perspective, the scientific observer deals with how the social world is made meaningful. The observer's focus is on how members of the social world apprehend and act upon the objects of their experience as if they are things separate and distinct from themselves (Gubrium and Holstein 216-217).

My position as both scholar and observer of fashion practices for pleasure creates what I think of as a more holistic approach to this study. Acknowledging a subjective perspective, I note in the analysis that many of the photographed subjects utilized more than one of the sign-vehicles outlined above. The use of more than one signification was tallied within each categorization.

Throughout all three blogs, there was overwhelming inclusion of certain sign-vehicles, most notably: white, thin, female bodies. Schuman, on *The Sartorialist*, featured a greater number of men in postings, even including stills from some of the menswear shows from early spring 2011. *Hanneli*, on the other hand, almost always featured women in her postings, with a greater occurrence of non-white bodies than Schuman.[6] Hardly any images of average or large female bodies were featured on the three sites during the six-month period of study. The only significant occurrences of average to large bodies were images of men or profiles on specific entertainers or designers. The images featured on *Vogue Daily* included a greater occurrence of high fashion, with many postings featuring multiple photographs of models from specific high fashion or couture shows. Mustaparta, on the other hand, featured a greater number of

---

[6] See Image Analysis Chart for figures.

traditional street-style imagery, with far fewer overall postings than Schuman[7]. The few fashion shows featured by Mustaparta were high-fashion, but from more alternative, lesser-known brands in the West.

On *Hanneli*, for example, the six-month period of study produced a 47.5 percent average use of street-style aesthetic; *The Sartorialist* featured a 26.66 percent average; and *Vogue Daily* featured an average street style occurrence of 30.16 percent. The *Vogue Daily* site had a much larger occurrence of "Use of High Fashion" with a 64.83 percent average. *Hanneli* and *The Sartorialist* both averaged a 38 percent occurrence of explicitly high-end fashion items. For representations of artfulness or creativity, *Hanneli* produced the largest average number of 45 percent from September 2010 through February 2011. Artfulness and creativity measured at a 35.83 percent average on *The Sartorialist* and 34.16 percent average on *Vogue Daily*.

Vogue Daily, in opposition to the other two sites, featured not only posts specific to fashion and street style, but also lifestyle, entertainment, health, and beauty features. Less attention was paid to alternative or varied, artistic images outside of specific stories on artists or designers. The site also offered less of a personal commentary on fashion and trends; the site itself ran like a mainstream publication. *Vogue Daily* is an offshoot of the influential, mass-marketed fashion tome, *Vogue*, but the site did include some alternative postings, such as posts devoted to model style off-the-runway in line with

---

[7] E.g., Schuman averaged anywhere between 19 to 37 posts in a given month, whereas Mustaparta on average featured only 10 postings per month.

Woodward's street style. In opposition to *Hanneli* and *The Sartorialist*, *Vogue Daily* offered a greater number of minority representations, including various races and ages.[8] The number of postings on *Vogue Daily* was also drastically larger than the number of updates on *Hanneli* and *The Sartorialist*, although *Vogue Daily* does employ multiple bloggers. In September 2010 alone, there were 125 blog postings, covering profiles of designers, model street-style, current runway trends, and health/beauty features.

Creating the Image: Analysis and Study

The importance of fashion blogs in the new landscape of fashioning identity is a terrain that provides a rich, diverse site of study for scholars. In combination with modes already used to examine fashion and identity, the fashion blog creates a study space that offers a new site for communicative analysis, cultural examination of fashion, and selfhood. The following excerpts are representative of many trends found during the six-month study period and present either poignant imagery or narratives that illustrate how fashion molds identity.

<u>Individuality, Identity, & Fashion: Blog Posts</u>

In a post from January 2011, Schuman featured a female subject on *The Sartorialist* with a whimsical, mottled approach to fashion:

---

[8] See Appendix A.

© Scott Schuman, *The Sartorialist*, January 31, 2011
On the Street....Corso Concordia, Milan

As Kawamura writes of fashion within social and cultural systems, "Personal appearance defines the woman's social position and also influences the way she comes to think of herself" (11). This woman seems to maintain a confidence in her sense of self, as well as a sense of adventure through style. By wearing multiple layers and styles (menswear, feminine scarf, a Western-style hat, and imaginative, quirky jewelry), this woman demonstrates that her style cannot be officially defined through one categorization. By wearing so many intersecting styles, she illustrates her various personalities and identities. Even removing one piece of her ensemble would completely change the message communicated through her fashion choices. Just as with language, fashion

99

communicates the wearer's identity through either the addition or omission of "words". In this case, specific items of clothing act as a fashion vocabulary.

Mustaparta's site, on the other hand, featured more alternative images in line with the street style photos and discussions included in Woodward's text. A more punk/alternative/carefree approach is highly valued on *Hanneli*, in part due to its frequent appearance on the blog. As an example:

© Hanneli Mustaparta, *Hanneli*, November 16, 2010
Tilda on Crosby Street.: Tilda Lindstam in a cool ensemble, I love the pattern of her pants and the leopard bag together. There is so much going on that it works really well together. Her father had sewn the Swedish flag on the back of her jacket. Aww!

On top of featuring this type of imagery in the first place, Mustaparta's narrative validates the uniqueness of Tilda's look, emphasizing and identifying the style merits in mixing patterns and subcultural styles. Mustaparta's personalized narrative of the look also

creates a sense of closeness between not only the subject and blogger, but between the blogger and reader.

The image of Tilda would be clearly defined as street style using Woodward's definition, especially because,

> Current street style is still conceptualized in terms of the same core duality: the innovations of subcultures (which is now alleged to have given way to the creativity of individuals) is defined in opposition to the mainstream, which is seen as sterile and conformist, frequented by unimaginative fashion victims (Woodward 87-88).

In comparison to more mainstream looks featured in fashion periodicals and sites such as *Vogue Daily*, the image of Tilda is clearly a more alternative, idiosyncratic approach to fashion and style. In fact, an image of this woman would not appear out of place on an album cover for the Sex Pistols, the popular, alternative punk band that emerged within the 1970s scene credited with the emergence of street style's popularity.

Tilda not only pushes against mainstream conceptions of what is acceptable fashion, she subverts dominant power through her more unconventional approach to dress. And by featuring this woman on her blog, viewed by thousands, Mustaparta works to critique the powerful fashion industry through inclusion and praise for Tilda's unique visual rhetoric. While Mustaparta also features mainstream and high fashion posts on her site, the use of images of Tilda and other unorthodox fashion connoisseurs helps to define fashion in opposition to power and notions of acceptability in terms of gender, sex, race, class, etc.

Another image from *Hanneli* featuring more alternative methods of dress and beauty is the following image of Jade from a September 2010 fashion week posting:

Jade: I love her sophistication mixed with the green hair. This could have easily tipped towards looking emo, but the simple outfit colors and very light makeup makes it look extremely cool and chic.

While Mustaparta lauds Jade for her sophistication and use of high fashion, she also included a woman with green hair on her website; this type of imagery is not as common in mainstream fashion publications such as *Vogue* or *Elle* magazine. Depending on the season and featured designer runway looks, colored hair or intense makeup and dress may be considered *en vogue*. However, "coolness" is defined by Mustaparta through the mixing of styles and less mainstream approaches to beauty, pointed out in her narrative. Mustaparta's admiration and feature of this look furthers the argument that fashion and identity are inextricably linked, since Jade is performing specific, intersecting identities,

including the unorthodox. Many women would not be keen to express such attention-grabbing looks under our current system of conceptualized, appropriate female dress and beauty.

<u>Fashion and Gender Norms: Blog Posts</u>

As an example of the illustration of difference in gender norms within mainstream fashion, *The Sartorialist* featured a posting on the high fashion show of Dries Van Noten in September 2010. The show encouraged gender-bending approaches to fashion and Schuman's coverage amplified the "cool-factor" of incorporating alternative, high fashion menswear within the everyday:

At Dries Van Noten: The take away from this show? Steal your Dad's clothes, all your dad's clothes. His shirts, his jeans, his sportcoats are all fair game now. The great thing about this show and this look is that you don't have to wait till next Spring to dress like this. Layering oversized shirts, knits and sportcoats in Fall weights and textures can be a new and super cheap way to update your wardrobe.

These images not only feature less mainstream feminine fashion styles, but also a commentary by Schuman on the interconnected nature of gender and dress and the significance of a less feminine approach to dress as commentary. Interestingly, Schuman provides a "how-to" for his readers, explaining how women can achieve this look at home, outside of the high fashion realm. Further, Schuman brings forth a discussion to the blogosphere on the importance of gender and fashion, encouraging his readers to embrace this less mainstream approach to *un*feminine style.

Drawing upon Butler's understanding of the relationship between sex and gender, Schuman emphasizes the distinction between male and female-ness, but also encourages a more ambiguous approach. According to Butler,

> Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders… The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it… *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one…Can we refer to a 'given' sex or 'given' gender without first inquiring into how sex and/or gender is given, through what means (Butler 9)?

As Schuman identifies, gender is constructed but can also be explored by both men and women. He encourages play with implicit, culturally constructed gender norms. Whether a man or a woman, the menswear approach to dress is endorsed by Schuman, and this look is featured repeatedly on *The Sartorialist*. While Schuman does not expressly state that sex and gender are culturally constructed and defined, he does not expect his readers to follow these predetermined gender norms through his endorsement of fashion experimentation, specifically related to the incorporation of male dress norms into the female wardrobe.

One occasion when the *Vogue Daily* bloggers emphasized individuality and a more diverse approach to fashion (based more so on personal taste) outside of *just* consumption, is included below. In September 2010, a *Vogue Daily* blogger featured on-the-street style images from the Spring 2011 New York fashion week and provided a multi-raced, multi-cultural representation of its attendees. In a post titled "Street Style: New York Fashion Week Fallout", the following imagery and text was presented:

© Phil Oh, *Vogue Daily*, September 18, 2010
Street Style: New York Fashion Week Fallout: Autumn is in the air, and while the New York shows are officially over, that hasn't stopped us from being inspired by the fall fashion we saw parading down the city's streets. From tailored blazers and structured trenches to stacked bracelets and oversize clutches, layering of textures and patterns is in full effect. Elongated hemlines are just right for breezier days, especially when paired with a cinched waist or a silky button-down. Stylish gals still love a staggering heel, but wedges paired with tapered trousers are also fitting. Lest you forget, this is most definitely the season of the skirt, and whether knee-length or floor-skimming, the forecast is fashionably ladylike.

The posting offers the reader four very different women, all with unique styles within the genre of "ladylike" fashion. While the blogger's narrative gives advice to the reader on what is appropriate for Fall 2010 fashion, and how to incorporate popular New York style into everyday life, the post still offers the reader a more hands-off approach to dictating fashion trends (in comparison to the usual tone found on the site). The images represented are those of the tall, thin female body, and a feminist may find the espousing of ladylike fashion tips to be problematic, as it reinforces gendered norms and stereotypes. Yet there are and will always be multiple approaches to dress. Just because a woman enjoys ladylike fashion does not mean she is succumbing to expectations for

femininity within a patriarchal system of power; a feminine style of dress may simply be personal taste. As mentioned in Chapter 3, an approach to identifiable, distinctive style can be tactical rather than submission to authoritative, male-dominated expectations for dress and/or the body. The act of dressing can and does offer a move toward defining the self in relation to – and, at times, in despite of – systems of power.

<u>Fashion and Class: Blog Posts</u>

A posting by Schuman from February 2011 offers commentary on fashion, art and unique style pairings to create a new look (i.e. representation of identity). This traditional street style shot from Milan is accompanied by a brief narrative from Schuman, a rare occurrence on *The Sartorialist*:

© Scott Schuman, *The Sartorialist*, February 25, 2011
On the Street....viale Piave, Milan: I love the Missoni/Zara mix.

This post was one of the few during the period of study when Schuman commented on a photograph in his blog. The posting is demonstrative of the power of Schuman's opinion within the fashion industry and the high regard he holds for the mixing of high fashion (Missoni) and everyday, easily attainable style from mass retailers (Zara). Schuman commends his subject for mixing high/low fashion, for being inventive with not only the individualized mixing of items, but the subject's approach to fashion in general. This woman mixes ladylike pieces (the pleated skirt and silk blouse) with more street style-appropriate items (chunky platform shoes, oversized coat). She demonstrates a comfort level with fashion, not afraid to mix highly tailored pieces with what could be found in any mass retail fashion outlet. Not all women can afford Missoni, which emphasizes class issues embedded in the fashion system, but Schuman still identifies the more significant act of mixing fashion identities, representative of our own intrinsically mixed selves.

Schuman's photograph brings together the use of clothing to elevate everyday style to "fashion" or "art", and the ideologies that are communicated through fashion's wear. An example from Kawamura finds that, "Although [Spencer] does not make an explicit distinction between clothing and fashion, he implies that what is important is not the actual clothes that are worn, but the wearer's position in society, which has the power to transform clothing into fashion" (Kawamura 22). The woman in the posting above elevates affordable, mainstream clothes to the level of *fashion* by pairing them with high-end, exclusive designer pieces. Just as the subject mixes styles, she also represents her

identities: the lady, the downtown street style maven, the fashionista, and the everywoman. Not all women have the same opportunities as the subject above, or the means to afford high fashion or haute couture. Yet this woman's mixing of identities through clothing styles still offers an alternative representation of new approaches to fashion.

The approach to fashion on the *Vogue Daily* site at times provides a dissimilar perspective, written with an eye towards joining fashion, consumption and mainstream trends with notions of acceptable, seasonable dress. Many of the images on *Vogue Daily* are photographed in retail locations, rather than on the street. In a September 2010 posting on current trends at the high-end New York City retailer Jeffrey, the following was presented:

© Phil Oh, *Vogue Daily*, September 8, 2010
Tales From the Sales Floor - What's Selling at Jeffrey's: It's hardly surprising that a fountain sits smack-

bang in the middle of Jeffrey's footwear department, since the NYC outpost has always been a shoe lover's oasis. Right now, a spot at water's edge gives a bird's-eye view of the latest arrivals on the shoe mezzanine, and it's where I find shopper **Marybeth Kennedy** sizing up a pair of comfy Lanvin moccasins. "I want something I can wear with rolled-up pants," explains Kennedy, who has already invested in a Céline tote and is working her way down the list of new season must-haves… Advertising exec **Chantelle White,** for example, has come in from a power lunch at the nearby Standard Grill in search of "something Twiggy might have worn." She zones in on a pair of square-toe patent leather Prada pumps. Later that afternoon, a pair of off-duty models takes a turn around the shop. "I need something I can run up the stairs in at the end of the night," says **Raica Oliveira,** who's in the mood for something sensible after a summer of tottering around in Louboutin's vertiginous thigh-highs. The Brazilian model has asked to try on a pair of Fendi utility boots and by the looks of it, function could well be afoot very soon.

This posting is both trifling and feeds into what feminists have previously written of in their tirades against oppressive, consumptive fashion practices. While posts on *Hanneli* and *The Sartorialist* do mention specific designers or devote particular posts to high fashion shows, the posting above solely works to entice the reader into buying a particular pair of shoes for the upcoming season. The narrative paints a frivolous picture of fashion practices, women, and the consumerist attitudes continually associated with fashion. The posting encourages women to work towards attaining a particular aesthetic, not necessarily exploring individuality through clothes. This posting was disconcerting, both for this study and as a person that enjoys the possibilities afforded through fashion. However, by more deeply examining the *Vogue Daily* site, I was encouraged upon finding posts in line with the perspectives found on *Hanneli* and *The Sartorialist*, with a more individualized approach to dress rather than just a constant furthering of consumerist attitudes.

<u>Fashion and Literal Performance: Blog Posts</u>

In another posting from *Vogue Daily*, bloggers presented readers with alternative imagery of feminine and masculine fashion. In a posting from late October the following

110

image and narrative appeared:

© Stephen Meisel, *Vogue Daily*, October 28, 2010
From the Archives: Dressing up with Vogue: With Halloween fast approaching, we decided to take a closer look at the whole idea of dressing up—and how better to do that than flipping through some of our favorite, fantastical fashion portfolios shot exclusively for *Vogue* magazine over the years? From Kirsten Dunst as Marie Antoinette to Karolina Kurkova as Marilyn Manson to Natalia Vodianova dressing up as Alice from *Alice in Wonderland*, we hope you find a little inspiration in these images—just don't fall too far down the rabbit hole...

This posting is written to inspire readers to participate in traditional costume norms associated with Halloween, a time when explicit performance through fashion is accepted. However, the interesting part of this post lies in the fact that this gender-bending, flamboyant, costumed image was originally included in a fashion editorial for *Vogue* magazine. This image was not originally intended to be part of a Halloween story, but was featured in a regular monthly editorial. The photo presents an alternative image of fashion boundaries and illustrates Woodward's scholarship on the origins of street

111

style in punk fashion and glam, David Bowie-inspired clothing performances. This *Vogue* editorial comments and critiques expectation for dress, and the level of theatricality that can and is involved in everyday dress practices. This image helps validate the use of performance in dress through its offering of a different imagery.

<p style="text-align:center">Discussion Posts: What Is Fashion?</p>

Besides presenting a rich source of imagery of the contemporary fashion industry, blogs also create a space where community is fostered through a discussion of meaning by both the blogger and individual readers. In a February 2011 posting from *Hanneli*, Mustaparta presents a narrative and images from a gathering for high fashion design house Miu Miu during Milan fashion week. As a member of the fashionable elite, Mustaparta is offered an insider's view of the fashion industry. Her coverage of this intimate event offered both photos of the Miu Miu collection and un-posed shots of some of the most fashionable, influential individuals working in the fashion industry today. This included *Vogue* editor André Leon Talley; Shala Monroque, a former fashion editor at *Pop* magazine and current art consultant; and Tavi Gevenson, teen fashion blogger and influential member of fashion's new guard:

© Hanneli Mustaparta, *Hanneli*, December 12, 2010
Miu Miu Musings: When Shala Monroque invites for discussion on *What is Fashion* in   collaboration
with Miu Miu, you know it will be interesting, fun and visually pleasing. André Leon Talley told stories of
his time assisting Andy Warhol and Diana Vreeland. I could have listened to him for hours and hours…
What is fashion to you?

After dissecting this post, one of the most interesting aspects that surfaced was not simply

the inclusion of varied styles of dress and raced, aged, and gendered bodies (although the

bodies featured do lean towards thin and classed, especially since the individuals were

attending an exclusive event for a high fashion house). What I found most interesting about this post was Mustaparta's final question to the reader in the narrative: "What is fashion to you?" Asking this question opens the discursive space, allowing the reader to determine not only what fashion is individualistically, but to also engage in a discussion of how dress relates to the reader's selfhood and perception of identity. As reader Cindy responded,

> For me, there are some major definitions for what is fashion…First, fashion is art. The designer's form of expression, exactly the same way a painter does… Then, fashion is also a kind of communication. It gives us the opportunity to say who we are, our personality and opinion, and who we want to be. It expresses values of society and defines generations. And last, there is the simple love for fashion! You really can fall in love with a dress, a bag or shoes, which enchant the heart and make you think about it all the time, haha. That's just wonderful (Mustaparta)!

Meanings imbued within fashion practices are not simply about creating an aesthetically pleasing exterior, but through communicating and expressing both values and individual versions of cultural norms. As Cindy points out, "It gives us the opportunity to say who we are." Combined with a love of fashion and dress, these participants elevate fashion practices to "art" status. Inviting the blog audience to participate in an intimate industry discussion, Mustaparta helps to open a dialogue and, thus, push the boundaries of how fashion, art, performance, and identity construction engage within the everyday.

Through clothing, individuals not only display who they are, but highlight the way the body is situated in line with fashion, identity, and greater societal norms and expectations. As Dant (in Simmel) explains, the way

> … people adopt clothing fashions - ignoring them, embracing them to excess,

114

striving to lead fashion or at least be 'in' fashion, or by standing apart from the whole thing - as reflecting the way in which individuals orient themselves to society… fashion represents society, something mutable and changing against which the consistency of personality can emerge (Simmel 89).

Just as our society and culture moves and changes, fashion does, as well. It is through specific fashion practices – as well as other cultural modes and routines - that the individual's personality and identity can emerge. Scholars can simply work to understand how these practices and performances help individuals to navigate their everyday experience in a system embedded with cultural expectations for the female form.

Chapter Five: The Final Posting

Through an examination of fashion practices and a scholarly focus on new mediums that present more alternative imagery, communications scholars can add another layer to the study of fashion and identity. Who we are as individuals, and the many identities we possess, become evident using this new mode of study, a study which progresses as our society and its technologies do. Our identities as, "… expressed in dress [become] not only an answer to the question of *who* one is, but *how* one is, and concerns the definition of the self" (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 2). Through dress, individuals can define and organize their visual representations of identity within larger social and cultural normativities, since:

> The definition of dress and the classification system we present unites two major human acts (modifying the body and supplementing the body) that invite sensory responses to and interpretations of the resulting outward similarities and differences of human beings…. On the basis of this heavy weighting of visual impact and what we know about theories of communication, we can expect dress to precede verbal communication in establishing…. identity (17).

While Eicher and Roach-Higgins are referring mostly to the gendered identities that clothing communicates, their theory can be taken one step further. By using new mediums (i.e., fashion blogs) to approach and interpret fashionable dress, individuals and scholars can utilize intersecting styles to exhibit our many innate identities, not simply those expected or required by dominant ideological systems.

Examining how individuals perform identities, especially as illustrated on

116

Hanneli, *The Sartorialist*, and *Vogue Daily*, scholars can begin to chart the shift in representations. While these sites are not as diverse as I hoped they would be, the sites still represent a change in fashion, one where there is emphasis on individuality with dress, even if the bodies and images presented on the sites do not exactly reflect the everywoman. There were limited images featuring women that were not tall or incredibly thin, but there were various races, ethnicities and genders presented, as well as different approaches to dress including street style and immensely creative or high fashion apparel.

Presenting identity is part of our modern cultural and societal everyday lives, and it is through dress practices that we can be brought to self-realization. Svendsen finds that, "Aesthetics, then [become] a center for the formation of identity… Fashion is of course central to this ideology of aesthetic self-realization. Fashion has functioned as an arena where we could find ourselves or, more precisely, invent ourselves" (Svendsen 141-42). Whether seeking to invent or accurately represent identity, fashion offers the individual a multitude of possibilities for expression. It is through these possibilities that we create meaning.

Waggoner and Hallstein posit in the conclusion of their study that while all women participate in fashion practices due to their implication within the larger cultural system, the problem lies within the degree to which women use their agency in everyday dress (39). On this point, I completely agree with Waggoner and Hallstein's argument. But what was so disenchanting about their study was that the female academic

117

participants seemed to, more often than not, buy into traditional feminist notions that fashion hardly exists outside of an oppressive system. Yes, in some instances, fashion can be inhibiting or oppressive. But I think that women today are much more informed and cognizant of their everyday fashion choices, and work towards a new performance through fashion. Fashion blogs illustrate this shift to a more informed performance and participation with fashion culture, at least in terms of the ways dress can be used to play and perform.

No matter which side you fall on in the fashion debate, one thing is certain: It may never be possible to completely subvert notions of gendered identity through aesthetic dress practices. Yes, there are methods that question or critique gender norms, as demonstrated in the posting on Dries Van Noten on *The Sartorialist* mentioned in Chapter 4. Yet gender norms are so ingrained in our cultural mindset that, beyond bringing attention to these highly problematic norms, we will most likely be unable to completely revolutionize them. The imagery presented in mainstream fashion publications, as well as on fashion blogs, exists within cultural and societal notions of gender acceptability, placing male-dominated style in a space of acceptability. Ultimately, men and women are held to different standards when it comes to aesthetics, which is in itself problematic. Yet in other respects, fashion blogs do also present new imagery, such as a more inclusive space for race, ethnicity, and experimentation with dress. The *Miu Miu Musings* and *At Dries Van Noten* posts illustrate this shift toward a new imagery.

118

Fashion blogs, as also pointed out in Chapter 4, offer a new space for study, representing a more holistic approach to styling and understanding the self. While this medium does have its limitations, often representing white, thin, female bodies, some sites such as *Hanneli* or *Vogue Daily* do communicate alternate imagery that is representative of larger sections of culture. Sites such as *The Sartorialist* also offer diverse viewpoints, which, for example, embrace men in the fashion industry, finding that they, too, have a place within studies of fashion, performance, and identity. While not examined in detail for this study, it will be an interesting topic to explore in future projects. Just as women have to navigate the everyday within and through their use of dress, men must maintain and navigate this space as well. Whether being discussed from the male or female perspective, "Fashion is ambivalent - for when we dress we wear inscribed upon our bodies the often obscure relationship of art, personal psychology and the social order" (Wilson 247). Who we are is inscribed upon our bodies and in extension, our bodies as defined and represented through dress.

After examining *Hanneli*, *The Sartorialist*, and *Vogue Daily* for this study, I was slightly surprised by both the analysis outcome and the way I now view these blogs. While I read these blogs (among others) for my own fashion-obsessed pleasure, I was also slightly disappointed in some of the findings. The bloggers did provide a rich imagery and site for study, but when accounting for actual figures, such as the various sign-vehicles used in the image analysis, I longed for greater inclusion of race, age, and body type, rather than just fashion-ability, street style, and creativity. While the three

119

fashion blogs included in this study present new images and representations for dress practices, they are still entrenched within dominant ideological systems that place certain modes of physicality above all others. The prevalence of thin to extremely thin bodies on these websites was disconcerting, since the images seemed to perpetuate the imagery already presented and accepted in fashion: the tall, thin, classed white female body. Yes, raced, sized, and aged individuals were presented. But I had hoped to see even more of these representations, as well as images of women like *myself* in the blog imagery.

Another prevalent occurrence on these three sites was the amount of privileged, classed imagery presented to the viewer. Fashion is often considered an elite space, with high fashion and haute couture catering to wealthy consumers - most individuals cannot afford a quilted Chanel handbag or Missoni jacket. The women photographed and included in this project all maintain a space of privilege. These women can afford high fashion, which is not accessible to most women. This, in itself, creates a division between groups - those who can afford fashion and those than cannot. Overall, *The Sartorialist*, *Hanneli*, and *Vogue Daily* seemed to address those individuals that can afford the best fashion each season, wearing high fashion designer pieces (as identified by the bloggers in their posting narratives). There were some occurrences and images of women not wearing expensive, high fashion clothing, but this was rarer than the privileged bodies presented throughout the six-month period of study. On the creativity front, however, I was able to source imagery that illustrates what I am writing about in this project: an inclusion of new modes of dress that can be used in future analysis of

communication, identity construction, and clothing.

Clothing allows individuals to communicate and to say something without uttering a single word. The key lies in working to understand the various echelons of communication through clothes, as complex and layered as onionskin. As identified through the types of imagery featured on alternative fashion blogs, as Merleau-Ponty identifies, "…the human body is not only an object of observation, but also a meaning-creating subject and a medium of culture. Clothing does not just drape the flesh, but extends it" (Alapack 977). While clothing cannot be considered the sole marker of an individual's identity, the informed and deliberate acts of many women and their dress practices are telling of the approach to and performances within everyday life.

The multiplicity of identities available through fashion is what makes the study of clothing and dress practices so interesting, especially since the possibilities within fashion are essentially limitless. With a growing popularity of fashion blogging in more mainstream media, I hope these sites of study will be included in scholarship, further developing the study of representation and its contributions to the overall study of fashion, communication, and identity. It is through incorporating an interdisciplinary approach that scholarship can fully unpack the intricacies of contemporary fashion practices, performance within the everyday and new modes of representation in our ever-changing technological society.

Works Cited

"Agency." *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. 2008. Merriam-Webster Online. 2

  February 2011 < http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agency>.

Alapack, Richard J. "The Epiphany of Female Flesh: A Phenomenological Hermeneutic

  of Popular Fashion." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 46.6 (2009): 977-1003.

"Ask the Expert: Scott Schuman." H&M Magazine. Web. 15 April 2011

  <http://www.thesartorialist.com/pdf/hm.pdf>.

Barker, Christopher. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. London: SAGE

  Publications, Inc. (2003).

Barnard, Malcolm. *Fashion as Communication*, Second Edition. London: Routledge

  (2002).

Barnes, Ruth and Joanne B. Eicher. "Introduction." *Dress and Gender: Making and

  Meaning in Cultural Contexts*. Ed. Ruth Barnes and Joanne B. Eicher.

  Providence: Berg Publishers, Inc. (1992), 1-7.

Barthes, Roland. *The Language of Fashion*. Ed. Andy Stafford and Michael Carter.

  New York: Berg (2004).

Berelson, Bernard. "Content Analysis in Communication Research." *Media Studies: A

  Reader*. Ed. Paul Marris and Sue Thornham. New York: NYU Press (1996),

  200-209.

Blasberg, Derek. "The Real Daphne Guinness." *Harpers Bazaar* (March 2011): 398-'

  405.

Bordo, Susan. "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity." *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press (1993), 309-26.

Brumberg, Joan Jacobs. "Introduction: The Body as Evidence*.*" *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*. New York: Random House (1997), xvii-xxxiii.

Buehler, Keeley. "Refashioning Old Clothes: Secondhand Fashion, Meaning, and Liquid Modern Consumption." MA thesis. University of Denver, 2010. Print.

Butler, Judith. "Introduction." *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York: Routledge (1993).

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge (2006).

Charmaz, Kathy. "Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods." *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry, Second Edition.* Ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. (2003), 214-248.

Conquergood, Dwight. "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research." *The Drama Review* 46 (2002): 145-56.

Corcoran, Cate T. "The Blogs that Took Over the Tents." *WWD* 6 February 2006: 30. Print.

Craik, Jennifer. "The Face of Fashion: Technical Bodies and Technologies of Self." *The*

Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion. London: Routledge (1994), 1-16.

Crane, Diana. *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2000).

"Creativity." *Oxford English Online Dictionary*. 2010. Oxford University Press. 2 April 2011 < http://oed.com/view/Entry/44075?redirectedFrom=creativity#eid>.

Davis, Fred. *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (1992).

de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press (1984).

de Beauvoir, Simone. "Chapter 18: Social Life." *The Second Sex*. Middlesex: Penguin (1975), 528-554.

Diamond, Ilana. "A Question for the Sartorialist: Scott Schuman." *Ready Made* August/September 2008: 54-55. Print.

Eicher, Joanne B. and Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins. "Definition and Classification of Dress: Implications for Analysis of Gender Roles." *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts*. Ed. Ruth Barnes and Joanne B. Eicher. Providence: Berg Publishers, Inc. (1992), 8-28.

Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. New York: Longman (1989).

"Fashion." *Oxford English Online Dictionary*. 2010. Oxford University Press. 3 January 2011 < http://oed.com/view/Entry/68389?rskey=gU50lt&result=1&is Advanced=false#eid >.

Foss, Sonja K. and Cindy L. Griffin. "A Feminist Perspective on Rhetorical Theory: Toward a Clarification of Boundaries." *Western Journal of Communication* 56.3 (Fall 1992): 330-349.

Foss, Sonja K. "Chapter Fourteen: Framing the Study of Visual Rhetoric: Toward a Transformation of Rhetorical Theory." *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. Ed. Charles A. Hill and Margeurite Helmers. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. (2004), 303-313.

Foss, Sonja K. *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc. (2009).

Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry* 8.4 (1982): 777-795.

Gamman, Lorraine and Margaret Marshment. "Introduction." *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*. Ed. Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment. Seattle: Real Comet Press (1989), 1-7.

Gibson, Pamela Church. "Redressing the Balance: Patriarchy, Postmodernism, and Feminism." *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations, and Analysis*. Ed. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson. London: Routledge (2000), 349-362.

Goffman, Erving. "Chapter I, Performances: Belief in the Part One is Playing." *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books (1959).

Gubrium, Jaber F. and James A. Holstein. "Analyzing Interpretive Practice." *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry, Second Edition.* Ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. (2003), 214-248.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms." *Media Culture & Society* 2.1 (1980): 57-72.

Hamera, Judith. *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference and Connection in the Global City.* Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan (2007).

Hansen, Karen Tranberg. "The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspectives on Clothing, Fashion, and Culture." *Annual Review of Anthropology* Vol. 33 (2004): 369-92.

Hill, Andrew. "People Dress So Badly Nowadays: Fashion and Late Modernity." *Fashion and Modernity.* Ed. C. Breward and C. Evans. Oxford: Berg (2005), 66-77.

Hill Collins, Patricia. "Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination." *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. London: HarperCollins (1990), 536-46.

Hill Collins, Patricia. "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought." *Social Problems* 33.6 (1986): S14-32.

Holbrook, Mark. "Logged On." *Vogue* (March 2010). Web. < www.vogue.com>.

hooks, bell. "Postmodern Blackness." *Postmodern Culture* 1.1 (September 1990). Web. 2 April 2011. <http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Postmodern_ Blackness_18270.html>.

"Individuality." *Oxford English Online Dictionary*. 2010. Oxford University Press. 2 April 2011 < http://oed.com/view/Entry/94639?redirectedFrom=individuality#eid>.

Kawamura, Yuniya. "Chapter 1: Introduction." *Fashion-ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies.* Oxford: Berg Publishers (2004), 1-18.

Kawamura, Yuniya. "Chapter 2: Sociological Discourse and Empirical Studies of Fashion." *Fashion-ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies*. Oxford: Berg Publishers (2004), 19-37.

Koda, Harold, and Richard Martin. "Haute Couture." *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art (2000). 12 February 2011 < http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/haut/hd_haut.htm>.

Langellier, Kristin M. and Eric E. Peterson. "Shifting Contexts in Personal Narrative Performance." *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*. Ed. D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications (2006), 151-168.

Lee, Janet. "Care To Join Me In An Upwardly Mobile Tango?: Postmodernism and the 'New Woman.'" *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*. Ed. Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment. Seattle: Real Comet Press (1989), 166-172.

Madison, D. Soyini. *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc. (2005).

Madison, D. Soyini and Judith Hamera. "Performance Studies at the Intersections." *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies.* Ed. D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. (2006), xi-xxv.

Mulvey, Laura. *Visual and Other Pleasures, Second Edition*. London: Palgrave

    MacMillan (2009).

Mustaparta, Hanneli. *Hanneli*. Hanneli.com, 2009. Web. 2010-2011.

Nakayama, Thomas K. and Robert L. Krizek. "Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric."

    Quarterly Journal of Speech, Vol. 81 (August 1995): 291-309.

Negrin, Llewellyn. "The Self as Image: A Critical Appraisal of Postmodern Theories of

    Fashion." *Theory Culture Society* Vol. 16 (1999).

Schuman, Scott. *The Sartorialist*. thesartorialist.blogspot.com, 2005. Web. 2010-2011.

Shugart, Helene A., Catherine Egley Waggoner, and D. Lynne O'Brien Hallstein.

    "Mediating Third-Wave Feminism: Appropriation as Postmodern Media

    Practice." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18.2 (June 2001): 194-210).

Simmons, Jake. "Performing 'Of' and 'In': Charting a Body of Ambiguous

    Performances." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 28.3 (July 2008): 330-43.

Smith, Dorothy E. "Chapter 1: Femininity as Discourse." *Becoming Feminine: The

    Politics of Popular Culture*. Ed. Leslie G. Roman and Linda K. Christian-Smith.

    London: The   Falmer Press (1988), 37-59.

Svendsen, Lars. *Fashion: A Philosophy*. London: Reaktion Books (2006).

The September Issue. Dir. R.J. Culter. Perf. Anna Wintour, Hamish Bowles, and Sarah

    Brown. A&E Indie Films, 2009. DVD.

Triggs, Teal. "Framing Masculinity: Herb Ritts, Bruce Weber and the Body Perfect."

Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader. Ed. Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson. Berkeley: University of California Press (1992), 25-29.

Turner, Sherry L., Heather Hamilton, Meija Jacobs, Laurie M. Angood, and Deanne Hovde Dwyer. "The Influence of Fashion Magazines on the Body Image Satisfaction of College Women: An Exploratory Analysis." *Adolescence* 32.127 (1997): 603-615.

Vesilind, Emili. "Fashion's Invisible Woman." *Los Angeles Times* 1 March 2009. Web. 17 April 2011. < http://articles.latimes.com/2009/mar/01/image/ig-size1>.

Vogue Daily. Vogue Magazine and Condé Nast Digital, 2008. Web. 2010-2011.

Waggoner, Catherine Egley and D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein. "Feminist Ideologies Meet Fashionable Bodies: Managing the Agency/Constraint Conundrum." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21 (2001): 26-46.

Wei, Carolyn. "Formation of Norms in Blog Community." *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs.* Ed. Laura J. Gurak, Smiljana Antonijevic, Laurie Johnson, Clancy Ratliff, and Jessica Reyman. June 2004. 20 April 2011 <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/visual_blogs.html>.

Widdicombe, Lizzie. "Tavi Says: Fashion Dictates from a Fourteen-Year-Old." *The New Yorker* 20 September 2010. 88-95.

Wilson, Elizabeth. *Adorned in Dreams*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press (1984).

Wilson, Elizabeth. "Fashion and the Postmodern Body." *Chic Thrills: A Fashion*

Reader. Ed. Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson. Berkeley: University of California Press (1992), 3-16.

Wolff, Janet. "Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics." *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance.* Ed. Jane C. Desmond. Durham, NC: Duke University Press (1997), 81-99.

Woodward, Sophie. "The Myth of Street Style." *Fashion Theory* 13.1 (2009): 83-102.

Young, Shelagh. "Feminism and the Politics of Power: Whose Gaze is it Anyway?" *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture.* Ed. Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment. Seattle: Real Comet Press (1989), 173-190.

Appendix A: Blog Image Analysis Chart

Website	Total No. of Posts	Total No. of Bodies	White Bodies	Percent	Non-White Bodies	Percent
The Sartorialist						
September 2010	19	25	20	80%	5	20%
October 2010	37	44	40	91%	4	9%
November 2010	37	36	28	78%	6	17%
December 2010	23	23	22	96%	1	4%
January 2011	34	50	45	90%	5	10%
February 2011	26	61	56	92%	5	8%
Hanneli						
September 2010	10	14	10	71%	4	29%
October 2010	10	10	8	80%	2	20%
November 2010	10	10	9	90%	1	10%
December 2010	6	13	9	69%	4	31%
January 2011	10	9	9	100%	0	0%
February 2011	10	11	10	91%	1	9%
Vogue Daily						
September 2010	125	171	139	81%	32	19%
October 2010	65	79	63	80%	16	20%
November 2010	90	100	86	86%	14	14%
December 2010	92	75	58	77%	17	23%
January 2011	72	72	64	89%	8	11%
February 2011	165	203	166	82%	37	18%

Website	Men	Percent	Women	Percent	Thin Bodies	Percent	Average Bodies	Percent
The Sartorialist								
September 2010	5	20%	18	72%	18	72%	5	20%
October 2010	14	32%	19	43%	25	57%	3	7%
November 2010	13	36%	21	58%	25	69%	8	22%
December 2010	5	22%	18	78%	20	87%	3	13%
January 2011	19	38%	13	26%	21	42%	10	20%
February 2011	6	10%	21	34%	26	43%	1	16%
Hanneli								
September 2010	1	7%	11	79%	11	79%	1	7%
October 2010	1	10%	9	90%	10	100%	0	0%
November 2010	0	0%	10	100%	10	100%	0	0%
December 2010	2	15%	8	62%	8	62%	1	8%
January 2011	0	0%	9	100%	9	100%	0	0%
February 2011	0	0%	10	91%	10	91%	0	0%
Vogue Daily								
September 2010	25	15%	146	85%	149	87%	18	11%
October 2010	16	20%	63	80%	64	81%	14	18%
November 2010	29	29%	71	71%	75	75%	25	25%
December 2010	10	13%	65	87%	63	84%	12	16%
January 2011	13	18%	59	82%	64	89%	8	11%
February 2011	29	14%	174	86%	166	82%	32	16%

132

Website	Average-Large Bodies	Percent	Artfulness/ Creativity	Percent	Use of High Fashion	Percent	Use of Street-Style	Percent
The Sartorialist								
September 2010	0	0%	4	16%	13	52%	4	16%
October 2010	0	0%	18	41%	13	30%	14	32%
November 2010	1	3%	14	39%	16	44%	12	33%
December 2010	0	0%	15	65%	11	48%	10	43%
January 2011	1	2%	19	38%	8	16%	13	26%
February 2011	0	0%	10	16%	15	25%	6	10%
Hanneli								
September 2010	0	0%	3	21%	5	36%	6	43%
October 2010	0	0%	5	50%	5	50%	4	40%
November 2010	0	0%	7	70%	4	40%	5	50%
December 2010	1	8%	2	15%	4	31%	3	23%
January 2011	0	0%	7	78%	4	44%	5	56%
February 2011	0	0%	4	36%	3	27%	8	73%
Vogue Daily								
September 2010	4	2%	62	36%	105	61%	53	31%
October 2010	1	1%	30	38%	48	61%	24	30%
November 2010	0	0%	30	30%	53	53%	26	26%
December 2010	0	0%	30	40%	61	81%	17	23%
January 2011	0	0%	22	31%	46	64%	26	36%
February 2011	5	2%	60	30%	141	69%	71	35%