

UNCLOAKING THE ANXIETY BEHIND PROFESSIONAL DRESS

by

Julie Rubinger  
Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Psychology  
University of Winnipeg  
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## **Abstract**

Graduating from university is one of life's greatest milestones. Students expect their stress to subside upon graduation; however, the transition from student life to career track entails a new set of stressful circumstances, including how to dress professionally. Using a mixed methods approach, this study examined how recent graduates prepare their clothing for the professional workplace. Participants included 15 recent, professionally employed, post-secondary, female graduates who completed a demographic questionnaire, a modified version of a standardized anxiety scale, and a phone interview. In order to determine best wardrobe practices, research included interviews with five fashion advisors. Although results revealed recent graduates did not experience any quantitatively significant anxiety, interview responses demonstrated both concern and uncertainty. This research provides insight into the lived experience of recent female graduates. Findings may be used to assist retailers, create guides, and develop workshops for new graduates entering the professional realm.

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this research to two groups of people. First, I dedicate it to those who value the subject of fashion with sincerity—in particular, my mother and grandmother who have instilled my appreciation of fashion. Second, I dedicate it to all recent female graduates who struggle with getting dressed for the professional workplace. You were the inspiration for this project.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is in the visible, not the invisible (Oscar Wilde, as cited in Davis, 1992, p. 2).

Achieving a post-secondary education is a monumental step in one's lifetime. A common belief is that with a university or college education students will sufficiently be prepared for the demands of their future workplace. While this logic sounds reasonable, it is far from accurate; transitioning from the life of a student to a professional entails negotiating a whole new set of different stressful circumstances. Often forgotten is one of the most difficult responsibilities to practise: what clothing to wear. In the midst of so many other challenges, clothing choices are disregarded. However, what could be more important than expressing one's self appropriately? This research sheds light on the process of preparing dress for the professional workplace. In particular, this research explores how recent female graduates undergo this transition and if any significant anxiety is elicited.

Elizabeth Wilson (1985), one of the most respected fashion theorists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, titled her most notable book, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*. The book theoretically examines the meanings and implications of fashion in modern society. While it has been primarily recognized for its insightful content, it is the title of the book that has great significance. Dreams present deep, raw, and unrestricted thoughts of the mind. Often dreams may be so unconventional that they challenge the most fundamental of morals. This experience can be witnessed in the common dream of finding oneself naked. One may perform extremely corrupt acts, such as cheating, theft, and even murder within a dream, but it never emotionally immobilizes an individual like finding oneself undressed. This phenomenon of being "adorned

in dreams” poetically illustrates the weight of clothing in society, a weight so heavy that even in limitless dreams one must follow the laws of appropriate adornment.

Understanding the importance of clothing has been a demanding pursuit of fashion enthusiasts for centuries. Generally, as Lipovetsky (2007) so poignantly described it, “the question of fashion is not a fashionable one among intellectuals” (p.25). Nearly every academic studying fashion “has had repeatedly to justify” themselves (Wilson, 1985, p. 47). Even in today’s fashion-obsessed society, it “is matched by the silence of intelligentsia” (Lipovetsky, 2007, p. 25). Much of the marginality of fashion originates from the perception that it is “consumer culture’s witless obsession with the trivial and the unreal” (Barnard, 2007, p.2). Unforgiving statements, such as fashion is “the foam on the ocean of vulgarity” (Barnard, 2007, p. 2) or “thought to be like the play of shadows” in Plato’s cave (Barnard, 2007, p. 13), have made the examination particularly difficult. However, these claims have made academics like Wilson and the like only strive harder to illuminate fashion’s significance. Herbert Blumer’s (1969) paper, “Fashion: From Class Differentiation to Collective Selection” was one of the most widely acclaimed attempts to take “seriously the topic of fashion” (p. 275). Rather than simply brushing upon the idea like many of his preceding sociological colleagues did, Blumer’s argument focused on fashion, reciting fashion’s power to “influence vitally the central content of any field in which it operates” (p. 275). This declaration attempted to move the subject from perceived connotations of frivolity and united it with ideas of imperativeness and adherence. As more academics followed in Blumer’s footsteps, a scholarly appreciation started to develop over time.

While scholars began to recognize the value of fashion, an agreement about the function it played was not settled. The beauty—or to some the challenge—of addressing fashion is that

there is no singular prescribed approach. Fashion is a sum of “industry, manufacturing, marketing, design and aesthetics, consumption and lifestyle” (Entwistle, 2000, p. 55). Some fashion academics may argue that clothing is a method of economics, and an examination of the industry’s demands, supplies, and working conditions are at the forefront of understanding fashion. Others have suggested that clothing is not about business; it serves more of an anthropological purpose. In this case, fashion is about “a universal human propensity to adorn” (Entwistle, 2000, p. 42), and a consideration of clothing across cultures is required. Art historians have a different perspective; in order to understand fashion, they posit that one must pay attention to the influence of art throughout history (Hollander, 1978). This is because clothes are a manifestation and mediation of the fine art during particular historical periods (Hollander, 1978). The interpretations do not end here; the list goes on to include frameworks that focus on political, philosophical, and feminist perspectives. In fact, many of them overlap with one another to create interdisciplinary standpoints. However, if one is to examine the “adorned in dreams” case again, a key component to the experience is the relationship that the clothes, or lack thereof, have with the dreamer’s psyche. It is this psychological relationship that causes the dreamer to experience feelings of discomfort.

The psychological interpretation of fashion investigates the relationship between clothing and the psyche. Specifically, psychological literature is interested in why individuals choose to wear clothes, how individuals employ clothing, and how they respond to the clothing worn by others (Entwistle, 2000). The pioneer of the psychological analysis of clothes, J.C. Flügel, claimed that clothing was the gateway into an individual’s identity. Flügel (1930) enthusiastically recited his discernment in *The Psychology of Clothes*:

Clothes, in fact though seemingly mere extraneous appendages, have entered into the

very core of our existence as social beings. They therefore not only permit, but also demand, treatment from the psychologist; it is perhaps rather the absence of such treatment from our systematic handbooks of psychology that requires excuse and explanation. (p. 16)

Another influential book on the subject was Michael Solomon's (1985) edited work titled *The Psychology of Fashion*. Solomon addressed research that examined the role of the individual's psyche as a key component to the functioning of fashion. Excerpts by the likes of Fred Davis, Susan Kaiser, and Sandra Forsythe are gathered to provide the reader with a cohesive, broad understanding of the psychological investigation of fashion. Flügel, Solomon, and others illustrated a myriad of emotions that were produced through this clothing–psyche relationship. One of the most overlooked yet life-altering emotions in this relationship is anxiety.

How anxiety plays a role in clothing is an ambitious question. Previous literature has focused on a variety of different aspects of anxiety within the fashion industry (Arnold, 2001; Clarke & Miller, 2002; Klepp & Storm-Mathisen, 2005; Stacey, 2001), but none have paid adequate consideration to one of the most potentially anxiety-provoking clothing situations, preparing dress for the workplace.

Transitioning from being a student to a professional necessitates navigating through a whole new set of stressful conditions. Students must depart from their comfort zone and enter a new professional sphere, requiring them to learn a different workplace culture, skills, and dynamics. One of the challenging tasks a student must undertake is dressing for the professional office.

Professional wear includes all dress that individuals wear when at the professional workplace (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993). Unlike leisurewear, professional wear requires one to be sensitive to a variety of different opposing dress needs. This pressure to dress “right” offers the wearer an excess of stress and anxiety (Clarke & Miller, 2002). Dressing inappropriately can lead to a multitude of unfortunate consequences, including hindering one’s self-perception, damaging the image one portrays to others, (Forsythe 1990; Rucker, Anderson, & Kangas, 1999), and even manipulating one’s own performance (Adam & Galinsky, 2012). This stress is particularly true for women, as they are more scrutinized for their dress than men (Entwistle, 2000; Molloy 1996), and due to an excess of clothing options, have more room for error in their ensembles (Davis, 1992). It is important for research to illustrate this occupational pressure because it can be both physically and emotionally challenging (Peluchette, Karl, & Rust, 2006). This tension may dampen the experience of one’s professional career and indirectly impair other areas of one’s day-to-day to life. This is particularly true for young women entering the office who do not have extensive experience dressing in the professional field and are still trying to prove themselves (Solomon & Douglas, 1985). With 46% of Canadian women working in the professional realm—that is, finance, real estate, public administration and health care (Statistics Canada, 2011)—researching this topic is becoming more present (Forsythe, 1990) and increasingly important.

While the anxiety within dress is apparent, it remains an undeveloped dimension within the study of fashion (Clarke & Miller, 2002). From an integrative social-psychological perspective, this research provides essential insights into the experience of preparing dress for the professional workplace. This study explores wardrobe decision-making, predominant stressors, potential solutions, and how it all corresponds to women’s social identities.

Theoretically, this research adds to fashion and social-psychological literature addressing dressing for the workplace. Practically, this research offers recent graduates an educational awareness that may help ease psychological and wardrobe difficulties as they transition into the professional realm. One should not allow the dilemmas of dress to monopolize one's time when there are so many other new stressors to tackle. The beauty is, dress can be controlled (Forsythe, Drake, & Hogan, 1985, p.276). With appropriate awareness and education, students may achieve the mantle of professionalism to which they have aspired, reach their career goals, and most importantly, feel good psychologically.

### **Theoretical Framework**

**An integrative social-psychological approach.** The word “fashion” is a challenging concept to define; there is no single encompassing classification. The difficulty in deducing a sole definition lies in fashion's interdisciplinary nature. Each explanation of fashion is rooted in its own, distinct theoretical viewpoint. Conceptual frameworks related to fashion vary depending on which academic discipline they are applied to. Fashion theories may be derived from history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics, and many other fields. According to Wilson (1985), to understand the multidimensional nature of fashion one must “attempt to view fashion through several different pairs of spectacles simultaneously” (p. 11). Similarly, Kaiser (1983) also suggested an approach that utilized a series of different complementary theoretical approaches; by composing a framework that synthesizes various viewpoints, the “study of dress can result in a stronger theoretical and more rigorous methodological orientation” (p. 2).

In order for fashion to function, there has to be an opportunity for a garment to be “in fashion.” In other words, fashion requires the presence of people. Ultimately, people are the decision makers of what constitutes fashion, what is appropriate, and what is not. Without a

group of social beings, there is no opportunity for clothing to transfer meaning. As Hollander (1994) puts it, “clothes are a social phenomenon; changes in dress *are* social changes” (p. 4).

Two social-psychological theories will form the overarching perspective of this research design: (a) social identity theory and (b) symbolic interactionism. Social identity theory is used to describe the anxiety experienced when transitioning from a student to a professional.

Symbolic interactionism is used to describe the uncertainty of knowing what to wear for the professional workplace.

**Social identity theory.** Developed by Henri Tajfel and colleagues in the early 1970s, social identity theory (SIT) is one of the most prominent social-psychological theoretical frameworks (Hornsey, 2008). It is an approach that is founded in the understanding that one’s identity is shaped through group interactions (Howard, 2000), refuting earlier notions that all social activities were initiated by solely personal motives (Hornsey, 2008). The inception of SIT began post-World War II, when a spiked interest on the subject of group dynamics developed in the field of social psychology (Hornsey, 2008). The theory originated based on results from a series of experiments in which participants were divided into arbitrary groups and then evaluated based on their reactions with their groups (in-groups) and other groups (out-groups). Tajfel’s research demonstrated that participants would favour those who were part of their groups, even arbitrarily (Hornsey, 2008). Tajfel and colleagues illustrated that people understand themselves by finding and partaking in similarities between others, as well as taking note of differences. In order to maintain “a positive distinctiveness between one’s own group and relevant out-groups,” a person needs to highlight the likenesses shared within their group and outline differentiation from others (Hornsey, 2008, p. 207). Moreover, an individual’s contributions to a social group and exclusions from another produce an “us and them” mentality (Hornsey, 2008).

Sabine Trepte (2006) explained that the established membership that individuals feel towards a certain social group, “alongside the value placed on it, is defined as social identity” (p. 255). The dynamics of social identities have big implications on how individuals function, particularly, on their self-concept and self-esteem (Tanti, Stukas, Cooke, & Campbell, 2011, p. 556; Trepte, 2006, p. 259). If individuals perceive their social group positively as well as their alliance, it enhances their self-esteem (Stets & Burke, 2000; Tanti et al., 2011). On the other hand, if people feel a disconnect between themselves and their social group, unfortunate psychological repercussions ensue. Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (2002) took this concept further and suggested that

we should not conceive of certain social identities as inherently attractive or unattractive. ...[Rather] the same group membership may be seen either as identity enhancing or as jeopardizing a positive sense of self, depending on whether it compares favorably or unfavorably to other groups that are relevant in that context. (p. 165)

Thus, a determining factor for seeking group membership, and subsequently a positive social identity, will depend on the context (Ellemers et al., 2002); the more desirable the group, the more critical it is for individuals to demonstrate their alliance or similarity to the group.

According to Tanti et al. (2011), one of the greatest shifts in social identity is the transition from student life into the working world. The difficulty of this transition is due to “a marked period of discontinuity” (Tanti et al., 2011, p. 556) in a person’s previous social identity, and confrontation with “more diverse and heterogeneous social situations with possibilities of new social group memberships, roles, expectations and responsibilities” (Tanti et al. 2011, p. 556). Ashforth and Mael (1989) defined this new “organization identity” as a social identity that combines both the individual and the organization's goals. The difficulty associated with

multiple social identities lies in the means of managing them; not all social identities are going to fit compatibly with one another (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Clothing is one of the most critical factors used to solidify one's social identity (Crane, 2000, p. 1). It is through the use of clothing that individuals curate their social identity and share it with the world (Davis, 1992, p. 16). As so memorably noted by Davis (1992), "dress, then, serves as a kind of visual metaphor for identity" (p. 25). The relationship between clothing and social identity can be used to modify an individual's perceptions of others as well as her or his own. Goffman (1963) described the manipulation of clothing to mould one's perceived identity as "passing." It is a technique whereby people will maintain a particular appearance to provoke others in believing that their social identity aligns or "passes" with a particular social group. On the other hand, individuals' physical appearance can also dramatically change how they understand their own social identity (Finkelstein, 1991, p. 185). In *The Fashioned Self*, Finkelstein (1991) discusses how Goffman's research captures this process. According to Finkelstein, Goffman's research described how an "individual's sense of equilibrium and self-hood can be dramatically altered" when he or she dramatically changes items of clothing (Finkelstein, 1991, p. 185). Goffman's research demonstrated that identity "is interwoven with appearance and how others regard that appearance" (Finkelstein, 1991, p. 185).

Under the assumption of SIT, it was predicted that students have fostered a strong social identity of being and dressing as students. This student social identity is unlike the professional social identity that students are anticipating to embark in, particularly in its characterization of dress. Due to the stark differences between student and professional social life, this research study projected that students would have a challenging time transitioning into a professional.

Specifically, this challenge would be illustrated in the difficulty of preparing dress for the professional office.

**Symbolic interactionism.** Initially established by George Herbert Mead, but later “named and popularized by Herbert Blumer” (Oliver, 2012, p. 410), symbolic interactionism (SI) is a socio-psychological theory founded in the principle that “all awareness of ...reality is actively constructed” (Oliver, 2012, p. 411). Furthermore, “meaning does not inhere in ‘things’” so much as people create meaning and attach to it things (Oliver, 2012, p. 411). It is this human-developed meaning—otherwise known as a symbol—that provokes one to act and react towards objects in certain ways (Oliver, 2012). According to SI, clothing, like all objects, is endowed with symbols (Forsythe, 1990, p. 1580). What is important for the wearer is “to understand the nature of responses to clothing cues in order to influence...[one’s] impression in the desired manner” (Forsythe, 1990, p. 1580). It is only when the “wearer and perceiver assign the same meaning to a clothing symbol, then meaning communication is said to occur” (Kaiser, 1983). This action of trying to fit one’s intentions with symbols is noted as fitting one’s “line of action” (Kaiser, 1983, p. 2).

According to Kaiser (1983), the application of symbolic interactionism within dress serves two central purposes: “(1) the negotiation of identities and (2) the definition of situations” (p. 2). Kaiser posits that clothing allows people to negotiate the appropriate identity they wish to illustrate in a situation; for instance, dressing for the professional office. It is important to note that while clothing can certainly assist in solidifying identities, it can also hinder or inhibit one from assimilating into an identity (Kaiser, 1983). Second, Kaiser claims that the symbolic meaning of clothing helps to categorize not only an individual’s identity, but also the nature of

the situation. Kaiser suggests that it specifically identifies several variables in an environment including:

1. Degree of formality, e.g., the “appropriate” dress for a dinner party;
2. Identities of, and relationship between, participants (e.g., power or status differences);
3. Degree of familiarity with a situation, i.e., how unique or unfamiliar a situation is to a person;
4. Salience of a situation, or the degree of regard that individuals hold for it (e.g., the attire in a job interview);
5. Possibilities for overt actions, such as physical activities. (p. 2)

When an individual’s lines fit with the situation, he or she will interact with others in any given situation more effortlessly and successfully (Kaiser, 1983).

Based on the assumptions of SI, this research proposed that recent graduates are trying to compose the ideal professional wardrobe by finding garments that symbolically represent how they want to be perceived and how they perceive the professional realm. Recent graduates intend for this wardrobe to convey to the professional community exactly whom they want to project. It was predicted that recent graduates would experience anxiety and distress trying to prepare their dress, as they are unfamiliar with the appropriate symbols of the professional wardrobe and the specific image they want to portray.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Clothing and Identity

**Clothing and identity in theory.** For even the most unacquainted fashion students, the relationship between clothing and identity bares some familiarity (Davis, 1992). To some, the idea that “the clothes we wear makes a statement is itself a statement that in this age of heightened self-consciousness has virtually become a cliché” (Davis, 1992, p. 3). Though awareness of the relationship between identity and clothing is ubiquitous, it continues to be satiated with obscurity. Its consideration has established one of the greatest deeply rooted debates in fashion literature. As Entwistle (2000) noted, on one side of the theoretical debate, you have artifice, a position that believes “our clothes cannot always be ‘read,’ since they do not straightforwardly ‘speak’ and [they] can therefore be open to misinterpretation” (p. 112). From this standpoint, the wearer is considered to be concealed by her or his clothing (Entwistle, 2000).

Philosopher Michel Foucault (1977), who pioneered the social constructivist mode of thought, argued that social regimes are what determine individuals’ experiences and knowledge with their dress and body (see also Entwistle, 2000, 2001). Although these societal establishments are not conscious in a person’s day-to-day experiences, it is internalized into an individual’s “movements, gestures, attitudes, [and] rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body” (Foucault, 1977, p. 137). Thus, clothing practices are not necessarily intimate with one’s identity, but rather “are part of the capillary like operations of power which work to render bodies docile, obedient” (Entwistle, 2001, p. 39).

On the other side of the theoretical debate is the notion of authenticity. This is an outlook that supports the belief that “the clothes we choose to wear can be expressive of identity” (Entwistle, 2000, p. 112). The acknowledgment of clothing displaying identity became

“increasingly popular in the nineteenth century, although the idea stretches back much further” (Entwistle, 2000, p. 121). Historically, this interest began within the cult of Romanticism, a concept based upon the idea of narcissism (Entwistle, 2000, p. 122). The rise of the bourgeoisie in the 19th century also produced increasing attention to individual identity (Entwistle, 2000, p. 122). With prominence placed on “their own enterprise and initiative” (Entwistle, 2000, p. 122), the idea of an authentic identity became emblemized.

Barnard (2007) perceived clothing as a means of offering individuals an awareness of their own identity. Barnard identified garments as an extension of a person’s body that illustrated his or her distinctive intention to themselves and others. Fashion theorist Fred Davis (1992) argued that clothing acts as a means of translating identities to others, acting as an induction of an individual’s nature. Entwistle (2000) agreed with Barnard and Davis’s frameworks and suggested “the body has become a site of identity...our bodies as containers of identities and places of personal expression” (p.138).

Georg Simmel (1957), a sociologist and one of fashion literature’s most noted theorists, agreed with the engagement of individuality among clothing choice; however, he did not discount the social cohesive structures at work. Paradoxically, he argued that the clothing one wears is fuelled by both imitation and differentiation. According to Simmel, people are in a constant struggle between the demands of the self and the demands of the public, “but in no case do we find any single force attaining a perfectly independent expression” (p. 541). While the clothing one wears encapsulates aspects of the individual’s personal choice, it signifies relationships that the individual has with greater social structures. For Simmel, these dualistic forces were not strictly represented in fashion, but rather in nearly all aspects of life. In order to

find satisfaction in fashioning one's appearance, "a precarious balancing act between individuality and conformity" is compulsory (Negrin, 2008, p.16).

**Clothing and identity in reality.** Despite the debate among theoretical explanations of identity and clothing, the reality of dress is far less convoluted (Guy & Banim, 2000). In day-to-day life, humans have been seeking identity in their appearance for centuries (Svendsen, 2006). Whether it is displayed through tattooing, makeup, or clothing, humans have always tried to invest identity within their appearance. This ingrained lesson of "being yourself" influences individuals to become and continue to be their own unique person by a means of their belongings. In more recent times, this identification of the self has been at the centre stage. Lars Svendsen (2006) claimed in *Fashion: A Philosophy* that the postmodern era has been highly focused on the shaping of one's identity through appearance. Svendsen cites Oscar Wilde to highlight this development: "To be really medieval one should have no body. To be really modern one should have no soul" (p. 76). Svendsen thus suggested that appearance and identity have built a dependent relationship on one another, a relationship that has become stronger now than ever.

In "The Dressed Body," Entwistle (2001) coherently cultivated the embodied practice of clothing research. Entwistle argued that fashion academia too often grants full attention to social structural theories of the body and clothing; theories that do not study the *experience* of the dressed body, but rather "reduces individuals to puppet-like actors" (2001, p. 35). Entwistle argued that if clothing is both "social and personal," it needs to be theorized as both a "discursive and practical phenomenon" (2001, p. 35). When clothing is studied from an "experiential dimension," the relationship between identity and clothing is not only remarkably transparent,

but at the forefront. It becomes clear that dress “marks the boundary between self and other, individual and society...[acting as] the visible envelope of the self” (Entwistle, 2001, p. 37).

However, the relationship between clothing and identity is not the same for everyone. As many may already presume, women have a distinct relationship with their clothes. Throughout history, women have been coupled with the idea of clothing (Entwistle, 2000). Some theorists suggested that this was due to women’s reputation of being interested in all things frivolous; others claimed it was because women had a closer relationship with their bodies; and some even suggested it originated because a woman’s wardrobe was initially an emblem of her household wealth (Entwistle, 2000). Accompanying this lengthy relationship, two prominent rationalizations developed. First, an understanding that “what a woman wears is still a matter of greater moral concern than what a man wears” (Entwistle, 2000, p.22). Second, as Davis (1992) notes, women have established an “elaborated code” of clothing (p. 39). There are numerous patterns, styles, textures, and silhouettes, all of which allowed them “considerably more symbolic scope and play” (Davis, 1992, p. 39). In other words, women experienced potentially a greater variability of identification within their clothing. However, Davis declares that this is not all positive. With the ability to “speak more” with one’s clothing (Davis, 1992; Lurie, 1981), women “could more easily (through mismatches, exaggerations, neglect, or obsessive preoccupations with detail) ‘make mistakes’ and be thought gauche, fussy, dowdy, vulgar, or whatever, as the reigning canons of taste at the time may have ruled” (Davis, 1992, p. 41). The possibility of making more “mistakes” creates considerable pressure for a woman to dress “right.”

Alison Guy and Maura Banim (2000) examined the relationship between a woman’s identity and her clothing in “Personal Collections: Women’s Clothing Use and Identity.” After

an in-depth explorative analysis of 15 women's wardrobes, including personal accounts, clothing diaries, and wardrobe interviews, Guy and Banim discovered that a woman's identity is critical to the presentation of her clothes. Specifically, when asked about their clothes, responses fell into three categories—the woman I want to be, the woman I fear I could be, and the woman I am most of the time—and each dimension tapped into a woman's perception of herself. Women would express not only how their identity was managed through their clothing, but also how their clothing managed their identity (Guy & Banim, 2000). No matter which direction participants were discussing, there was always a “continuity of identity” (Guy & Banim, 2000, p. 325).

Sophie Woodward (2007) also recognized that the relationship between a woman's clothing and her identity is one that needs to be studied in great depth. Woodward attempted to uncover the ubiquitous and yet underdeveloped area of women getting dressed. Through a comprehensive ethnographic procedure of visiting women's homes to examine their wardrobes, she explained that it is the *way* women wear clothing, style them, and ultimately inhabit them, which creates identity. To Woodward, one's wardrobe is an “individual aesthetic,” each garment illuminating a different dimension of identity (pp.11-12). This is not to say that the communication of clothing is clear-cut; on the contrary, it is still an extremely difficult thing to translate (Woodward, 2007). Despite convolution in the presentations of identities, research has illustrated that there is a common understanding in the responses and judgments of clothing.

### **Clothing and Identity Perceived By Others**

**Perception of clothes.** As Woodward (2007) mentioned, when looking into the mirror, a woman may ask herself “does this go?” (p. 10). It is a question that inquires if the clothing an individual wears fits the image they wish to portray. Ironically, such a carefree question elucidates a fundamental law of clothing: the way one dresses matters (Finkelstein, 1991). Even

in the most sober of situations (e.g., a job interview), appearance retains the centre stage (Finkelstein, 1991).

How clothing influences the perception of others has been a large area of interest among fashion academics (Finkelstein, 1991; Forsythe, 1990; Forsythe et al., 1985; Ryan, 1966; Rucker et al., 1999; Solomon & Douglas, 1985). Uniformly, researchers have come to the understanding that humans make assumptions about others' personal characteristics based on their physical appearance (Ericksen & Sirgy, 1985; Finkelstein, 1991; Forsythe et al., 1985; Rucker et al., 1999; Ryan, 1966). In *Clothing: A Study in Human Behavior*, Ryan (1966) illustrated that clothing can offer others' insight into an individual's "sex, age, occupation, socioeconomic status, organization(s) to which the individual belongs, marital status, intelligence, values, attitudes, and personality of the subject" (p. 37). No matter what the particular costume is, people will be "socially differentiated" depending on the repercussions of the clothing worn (Finkelstein, 1991). Ryan mentioned one particular study developed by Hout in 1954, in which participants were asked to look at a series of images of people dressed up. Dressed bodies composed of a head and a clothed body, with each image varying in the garments worn. Researchers then matched different heads with different clothed bodies asking participants to assign personal characteristics to each image. Results revealed that participants would characterize people differently depending on the clothing they were wearing. Ryan noted that Hout's study along with several others have demonstrated this effect of clothing manipulating the perception of others' opinions.

Gathering information about a person's clothing is particularly important when there is not enough other evidence to guide one's judgment (Entwistle 2000; Forsythe et al., 1985). Interestingly, the more you know individuals, the less you will judge their character based on

their clothing (Ryan, 1966). Conversely, the less one knows about a person's character, the more clothing will seep into your perception of that individual. Furthermore, in situations like interviews or first meetings, dress can play an even more critical role. While it is clear that appearance plays an important part of forming perceptions of others, what constitutes a positive image is always under investigation (Finkelstein, 1991).

According to Forsythe et al. (1985), variations of perception are based upon the details and dimensions of a garment. Every characteristic of a clothing ensemble is said to symbolically translate a different personal feature about the wearer. Forsythe et al. gave examples regarding texture and colour. Texture could provide information regarding gender, as fine fabrics demonstrate an air of femininity, while more rough fabrics illustrate masculinity. Colour could demonstrate personality, as some colours convey formality and authority, while others promote creativity and a carefree attitude (Forsythe et al., 1985). Along with texture and colour, Flügel argued that the visual proportion of a garment was a critical implication to the manifestation of clothing (as cited in Finkelstein, 1991). According to Flügel (1930), the sheer size of a garment could indicate the power the wearer wishes to attain.

The difficulty in determining the symbolic meaning of garments stems from their variability. The symbolic implications of clothing changes throughout time, culture, societal shifts, and their relation to one another (Davis, 1992; Finkelstein, 1991; Ryan, 1966). In the current postmodern era, the relationship between a garment and a specific meaning has lost strength (Negrin, 2008). Negrin (2008) described this complicated relationship in *Appearance and Identity: Fashioning the Body in Postmodernity*:

Compared to earlier epochs, in contemporary culture, there is a much more tenuous link between dress and that to which it refers. In premodern times, there was a clear and

unequivocal relation between dress and that which it signified.... However, with the advent of modernity and the breakdown of the apparently naturally ordained social order, it became increasingly difficult to ascertain a person's social standing from their mode of dress...Rather than reflecting the "natural" order of things, as in premodern times, or creating social distinctions, as in the period of modernity, sartorial elements are now seen as "free-floating" signifiers that are infinitely commutable since they are no longer associates with any external referents. (p. 21)

Therefore, it is important to note that while there are certain classic guidelines to the meaningfulness of dress, there is no static rubric. As time has progressed, the meaning has become more and more convoluted, and consequently, challenging to decipher. Further, in order to understand such symbols, one must take into account a plethora of different variables, including aesthetics, culture, and history.

**Perception of clothes in the workplace.** There is a long history of literature that has focused on the relationship between clothing selection, professional reputation, and advancement in the workplace (Forsythe et al., 1985; Rucker et al., 1999). As early as the beginning of the 20th century, research has been devised to investigate how people perceive work attire and how it has impacted professional mobility (Rucker et al., 1999, p.60). Investigation revealed "the importance of 'appropriate' or 'proper' occupational attire and that it ...generally had a positive impact on overall assessment of potential and current employees as well as on rating individual traits" (Rucker et al., 1999, p. 60). Following this discovery, more researchers began to see the benefit of studying appearance management, as it was clearly an underdeveloped yet extremely useful body of knowledge. Morris, Gorham, Cohen, and Huffman (1996) devised a study that examined the effects of teachers' clothing on students' perceptions. Morris et al.'s

findings illustrated that when teachers dressed in more formal attire, they were perceived as more intellectual by their students, especially the females. Harp, Stretch, and Harp (1985) were also interested in the impact of clothing on others' perception in workplace, but unlike the school setting, they decided to investigate the repercussions of television anchors. Harp et al.'s results revealed that dress played a significant role in the credibility and retention allotted to anchors by viewers. Overall, literature on clothing impression and the workplace revealed that workplace clothing manipulated the perception of others, and certain styles of clothing received more positive responses than others (Ericksen & Sirgy, 1985).

An interest in the perception of job appearance literature spiked in the late 1970s, as the representation of women in the workplace increased (Ogle & Damhorst 1999; Rabolt & Drake, 1985). Academics, employers, and everyday women were curious as to how women entering the professional sphere should dress and what would be the most advantageous clothing choices. According to Rabolt and Drake (1985), this was a particular subject of interest because there was a “paradox” among women’s professional clothing (p. 372). Unlike men, women do not have an outlined professional uniform with a well-defined meaning—the business suit (Rabolt & Drake, 1985; Solomon & Douglas, 1985). On the contrary, women have considerably more options of potential “looks” (Davis, 1992) and no “equivalent code” (Solomon & Douglas, 1985). While one might think this symbolic freedom should be liberating, it can often be puzzling (Davis, 1992; Hollander, 1994; Davis, 1992). According to Solomon and Douglas (1985), this creates a great deal of ambiguity when dressing for the professional office:

While certain styles such as a dark formal suit clearly connote a professional image, the question arises as to how far deviations from these norms are acceptable and what they may signal. For example are other colors permissible, or more feminine accessories such

as a frilly or lacy blouse? Can jewellery be worn, and if so, how much and how flashy? (p. 393)

**Perception of clothes on women in the workplace.** John T. Molloy (1996) explained in *New Women's Dress for Success* that when career women dress “poorly or inappropriately, it almost ensures failure” (p.xi). If one is to “dress for failure” in the workplace, it could create an illusion of less competence and potentially dampen one’s career (Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Coats, 2003). Conversely, when women dress “successfully,” they have a significant advantage over their coworkers (Molloy, 1996, p.xiv). Molloy stressed that this relationship between success and clothing is particularly true for women because when men dress poorly it simply “does not destroy a man’s career the way it does a woman’s” (p. xi).

When investigators began to study what constituted successful women’s dress attire, results indicated they should “adopt male props and symbols” (Rucker et al., 1999, p. 61). Masculine outfits encompassed suits, darker colours, and more angular silhouettes (Rucker et al., 1999). Women who assumed this masculine presentation “were best at conveying images of being forceful, self reliant, dynamic, aggressive, and decisive as well as eliciting the most favorable hiring recommendations” (Rucker et al. 1999, p. 61). In particular, Forsythe’s (1990) research found that the incorporation of masculinity into a woman’s professional work attire was a successful method of receiving more positive responses from employers. Women who wore more masculine attire were viewed “as more forceful, aggressive and so on” (Forsythe, 1990, p. 1579). Contrarily to masculine garments, feminine attire was “often regarded as anything from annoying distractions to severe barriers to success” (Solomon & Douglas, 1985, p. 393). Further investigation demonstrated that dressing for the workplace was not strictly about appearing masculine, but rather de-emphasizing womanliness (Rucker at al., 1999, p. 62). Literature

revealed that women who wore tight or revealing clothing suggested sexiness, and thus were considered unprofessional (Rucker et al., 1999). Wookey, Graves, and Butler (2009) discovered that professionally dressed women were viewed “as more intelligent and capable than are sexually dressed women for high status jobs” (p. 116). Concurrent with this, Glick, Larsen, Johnson, and Branstiter (2005) argued, “emphasizing sexiness had severe costs in terms of others’ reactions” (p. 394). However, while women were advised to dress masculine and not too sexy, they were also told not to “abandon evidence of femininity to the point of gender norm violation” (Rucker et al., 1999, p. 61).

According to Finkelstein (1991), the additional energy that women have to put into their appearance to incorporate masculinity while maintaining their feminine nature is simply a reflection of the additional work that women have to put into their professional occupations for the equal response. Solomon and Douglas (1985) agreed with this manifestation of inequality and suggested that the positive effects of wearing masculine clothing facilitates a patriarchal structure that promotes masculinity and degrades femininity; however, they did claim that the degree of masculinity required in the professional office varied according to the wearer’s specific environment. In more male-dominated fields, women needed to dress more masculine to align with the group, while in more female-dominated fields this may not be the case (Solomon & Douglas, 1985). It is important to note that most of previous literature examining the role of dressing for workplace specifically probed the interview process (Ogle & Damhorst, 1999). Research regarding this preliminary process “may specify more limited and formalized codes than might be expected in dress...during an ordinary day on the job” (Ogle & Damhorst, 1999, p. 81).

## **Clothing's Influence on Behaviour**

The relationship a person has with his or her clothes is often perceived as an affiliation that is strictly dictated by the wearer. The wearer making decisions about style, managing ensembles, and initiating purchases demonstrates this control. While this authority may be true, research has revealed that this relationship is not simply one sided; clothing also has power. One of the basic consequences clothing has on the wearer's behaviour is allotting self-confidence (Solomon & Douglas, 1985), as most people can relate to feelings of conviction when putting on a new attractive outfit. Adam and Galinsky (2012) decided to flesh out this idea of clothing affecting the wearers' behaviour even further and proposed a framework entitled *enclothed cognition*. This theory claimed that clothing does not just influence the perceptions of others, but it actually transforms the wearer. This "transformation" is not merely an alteration of aesthetics, but a change in the functioning of one's mind and consequently behaviour. Adam and Galinsky tested this theory by asking people to perform attention-related tasks wearing different types of garments. When participants wore a white lab jacket described as a doctor's coat, they performed exceptionally better at the tasks than when wearing an identical jacket described as a painter's coat. It is important to note that the coat was the same in both instances but simply described as belonging to a different profession. Adam and Galinsky's results revealed that people "embody" the clothes they wear.

The value of enclothed cognition lies in the implication it has for clothing selection. One can use clothes as a means of nurturing the mind. When one puts on clothes, the mind moulds to the suggestion of the clothes. If one is to dress well, he or she will embody the conviction that the clothes project, and consequently, an improved performance (Solomon & Douglas, 1985).

If one is to dress in clothes that are not suitable, he or she will be left feeling inadequate. Thus, in order to perform efficaciously, dressing appropriately is necessary.

Though it is satisfying for the wearer to understand the effects of clothing on the perception of others and the reality of one's own behaviour, insecurity about what to wear is intensified. If clothes have the ability to modify one's behaviour, the value placed on the wearer to choose the best attire gains new perspective. Conversely, the fear of wearing improper clothes becomes more than a simple fashion faux pas—it becomes professionally threatening.

### **Clothing and Anxiety**

Anxiety can be defined as “the pressure a person experiences from a stimulus” (Reilly & Rudd, 2009, p. 229). Generally, the more pressure an individual receives, the more anxiety he or she will experience. Appearance produces an excessive amount of pressure on the wearer. If a person does not promote the most favourable appearance, he or she can experience a great deal of embarrassment, scrutiny, exclusion, and consequently, anxiety.

Research studying anxiety and clothing tapped into four categories: body size, age, consumption, and decision-making (Arnold, 2001; Clarke & Miller, 2002; Klepp & Storm-Mathisen, 2005; Stacey, 2001). Each category emphasized a different location of anxiety within the fashion system.

Body size research focused on how a woman's dress size “carries with it all kinds of psychological baggage” (Stacey, 2001, p. 95). Stacey (2001) discussed how dress sizes create feelings of anxiety within the wearer. This anxiety originates from a woman's inability to fit into her “ideal size” (Stacey, 2001). This ideal beauty size is a contemporary cultural standard that women reference in order to maintain their appearances (Rudd & Lennon, 1994). Moreover, the imbalance of individuals' actual size clothing and their ideal clothing size leaves the wearer with

a decreased sense of self-worth and subsequent emotions of worry and anxiety (Stacey, 2001). Unfortunately, “even though you know it’s just a number, it does a number on you” (Stacey, 2001, p. 25).

On the other hand, Klepp and Storm-Mathisen’s (2005) *Reading Fashion as Age: Teenage Girls’ and Grown Women’s Accounts of Clothing as Body and Social Status* offered light on the relationship between anxiety and fashion through the examination of age. Klepp and Storm-Mathisen illustrated how women strive to dress age-appropriate in order to avoid embarrassment. Each female age group has a certain appropriate style; women strive to not dress too young or too old for their age (Klepp & Storm-Mathisen, 2005). Of course, strategies of avoidance vary depending on the age, but nevertheless, most women remain anxious about achieving “appropriate” dress for themselves.

While this research discussed how physical characteristics influence anxiety within fashion, it did not focus on the societal influences of fashion. Arnold’s (2001) *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety* attempted to add insight into how a person’s anxiety is mediated by the fashion industry, illustrating how the exclusivity of fashion can be alienating and anxiety-provoking. Agreeing with Simmel’s theory of fashion, Arnold suggested that those who do not understand or partake in fashion would become an outsider, and those who do will gain even more power (p. 13). According to Arnold, fashion “can be used in this way as a means to assert a type of visual and stylistic power by those who feel alienated from the main flow” (p. 13).

Conversely to Arnold’s approach, Clarke and Miller (2002) attempted to understand this social anxiety by investigating women’s daily decisions regarding what to wear. Through participation observation, ethnography, and interviews, Clarke and Miller observed that women experience anxiety when deciding what to wear and illustrated that they use support and

reassurance to alleviate this anxiety. Unlike other research, Clarke and Miller claimed that the contemporary uncertainty of knowing what is "right" or "normative" to wear produces stress. This is especially true in situations where the risk is high for social embarrassment. What this research failed to express is what the "normative" was, how the "norm" varied depending on context, and what social pressures inform this decision process. An understanding of these questions would be useful for everyday wear, especially for areas of dress that confuse women—professional wear (Entwistle, 2007; Solomon & Douglas, 1985).

Solomon and Douglas (1985) suggested that in order to combat stress towards dressing "right" for the professional office, women would have to attempt to diminish as much risk as possible. Specifically, Solomon and Douglas predicted that "the apprehension may in turn lead to a high degree of conservatism in clothing choice; perhaps a preference for dark formal colors, plain accessories, and a minimum of jewellery in order to escape even the slightest possibility of negative criticism" (p. 396). This is particularly true for young women entering the office who do not have extensive experience dressing in the professional field and are still trying to prove themselves (Solomon & Douglas, 1985). According to Solomon and Douglas, once a professional identity is established and solidified, one will not experience as high of a level of apprehension for dressing for the professional realm. This is due to two reasons: (a) she has maintained a professional position for a long period of time and therefore can be confident that she is aware of the appropriate clothing to wear, and (b) she no longer needs to use clothing as a means of illustrating her position, as her role is accepted (Solomon & Douglas, 1985). However, how women precisely experience and mediate this situation is still up for discussion.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

This study explored the experience of recent female graduates preparing dress for the professional workplace. Primarily, this research probed their psychological experience. In particular, this study aimed to understand if the experience provoked anxiety, predominant stressors, the decision-making process, potential solutions, and translations of identity for recent graduates. Research questions included:

- How do recent female graduates experience the process of dressing for the professional workplace?
- Do they experience anxiety when choosing clothing for the workplace?
- What current challenges do recent female graduates encounter when dressing for the professional realm?
- Which strategies are employed to overcome the difficulties of dressing for the professional office?

#### **Methods**

This research used a mixed methods design, utilizing a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques, with a concurrent approach (Creswell, 1994). Anxiety towards dress can be both quantified and qualitatively explored; therefore, a design that measured both forms of data was deemed most applicable. A concurrent approach allowed for time efficiency and offered a broader perspective to the problem. Each technique was not equally weighted; essentially, this research aimed to explore the qualitative experience within dress decisions, and the quantitative analysis was designed to support this investigation. The qualitative method was weighted more heavily because the research is primarily interested in why the participants feel the way they do.

## **Participants**

The Research Ethics Board approved this research project, as it met the requirements of federal guidelines and the Ryerson REB (see Appendix A). This study investigated perspectives of two unique groups: (a) recent graduates working within the professional realm and (b) fashion advisors within the Toronto, Ontario, fashion industry.

Inclusion criteria for the study stipulated that all participants be female, English-speaking, over the age of 18, graduates of post-secondary programs within the last seven years, and currently employed in a professional occupation. As their clothing invokes more judgment and is more prone to errors, women were the focus of this study (Davis, 1992; Entwistle, 2000; Molloy, 1996). In addition, when women dress for the workplace, they are required to be sensitive to a variety of different and opposing dress needs (Rabolt & Drake, 1985). This pressure to dress “right” in the office offers the wearer an excess of stress and anxiety (Clarke & Miller, 2002; Molloy, 1996). Recently graduated women were chosen because they did not have an extensive experience in the professional realm nor had they built a solid professional social identity (Tanti et al., 2011). Additionally, having more recently transitioned from student life to professional life, this study cohort was more familiar with casual and leisure forms of dress. A period of seven years after graduation was determined as appropriate as it allotted a sufficient amount of time for women to settle into a position in the professional workplace.

In order to ensure that the participants met inclusion criteria, two measures were taken: (a) a detailed recruitment letter was sent to introduce the study and (b) a demographic questionnaire was completed. The recruitment letter specifically asked for women who were in professional occupations and had graduated from their post-secondary institutions within the last seven years. In addition, participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire prior

to the study. The demographic questionnaire probed information regarding their sex, age, education, year graduated, and other background information. Participants were asked to return the demographic questionnaire via email prior to the official study commencing.

Fashion advisor participants included women in the Toronto fashion industry who had a robust understanding of professional womenswear. The group of fashion advisors selected was employed in different practical backgrounds. Recruiting a diverse group of fashion advisors allowed for a variety of experience, and consequently, a well-rounded picture of the professional wear sphere.

### **Sample**

Recent graduate participants were recruited from three different sources. The first source was a professional media organization encompassing a team of writers, advertisers, event planners, and graphic designers whose services have been utilized by a variety of different businesses. Offices are located in Canada, U.S., and Australia. This research utilized only employees from their Toronto location. The company production manager of the media business organization sent out the recruitment letter via email to all female employees (see Appendix B). The recruitment letter outlined the purpose of the study, background, risks, benefits, confidentiality, the principal investigator's contact information to call or email regarding questions, and expected time commitment to participate. Participants were assured that their choice of participation would not impact their relationship with the manager or the company. Those individuals who met the selection criteria and were interested in participating were asked to contact the primary researcher via email. Interested employees were thanked and asked to fill out two forms: (a) an informed consent form (explaining the process of the study, confidentiality, and contact information; see Appendix C) and (b) a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix

D). Upon completion, forms were to be emailed to the principal investigator. To obtain informed consent, participants were asked to read the complete form and sign or type their name at the bottom to confirm. On the demographic questionnaire, participants were asked to simply put an “X” next to the answers that applied to them. At this time, participants were also asked to identify prospective dates and times to schedule a preliminary call with the principal researcher. This preliminary phone call was arranged in order to provide an opportunity to answer questions, reconfirm consent, and arrange a mutually agreeable time and date to complete the study. After the completion of the study, participants were asked to share their home address in order to receive compensation, a \$10.00 coffee gift card. This gift card was a nominal token of appreciation and incentive to participate.

Due to an insufficient number of participants, recruitment efforts were expanded to a secondary source, which included undergraduate and graduate students from Ryerson University's School of Fashion. A mass email was sent out from the School of Fashion administration office to all recent undergraduates and graduates. Those who wished to participate completed the same steps, methods, and procedures as previously outlined. Lastly, to meet sample targets, a snowballing technique was utilized. Snowballing is a form of recruitment that that involves asking people to participate by “reference from one person to the next” (Streeton, Cooke, & Campbell, 2004, p. 37). This communication of contact turns into a cyclic rotation, affirming its title (Streeton et al., 2004). This recruitment method works best when the researcher has established relations with a group of people who know others well that would align with the recruiting criteria (Streeton et al., 2004). This method was deemed appropriate since the primary researcher was a graduate student, enabling an accessible network of others who were transitioning from school to the professional realm. People who wished to

participate completed the same steps, methods, and procedures as previously performed.

Fashion advisor participants were recruited through email communication from a variety of fashion retail, publishing, and boutique locations. Potential participants were all initially contacted via email. This recruitment was established by means of the researcher having already built a relationship with the advisors. Two of the advisors worked with the principal researcher, one had met through friends, and the remaining two were colleagues at an internship.

### **Instruments**

**Recent graduate participants.** Recent graduate participants began the study by completing a brief demographic questionnaire and informed consent form. Upon completion of these documents, a qualitative, open-ended phone interview was administered to investigate the experience of dressing for the professional realm. Phone interviews were audio-recorded for analysis purposes. Phone interviews allowed for accessibility, convenience, and comfort, as participants were able to choose an environment where they felt most at ease. Interview questions asked participants to describe:

1. what they wore to their first professional interview and how they made that decision;
2. the clothing they regularly wore to work;
3. how they choose what to wear to work;
4. how they felt when thinking about what they are going to wear to work;
5. how long it takes to decide what to wear;
6. the challenges when deciding what to wear to work, such as size, colour, comfort, style, and price;
7. the apparel solutions they have discovered and would recommend to others;
8. why work attire is important;

9. how their dressing habits for work differ from those for casual, everyday occasions; and
10. their favourite outfit to wear on an important day at work and why.

Following this, participants were asked to complete the quantitative procedure, a modified version of a standardized anxiety scale questionnaire titled the State-Trait Inventory for Cognitive and Somatic Anxiety, or STICSA (Ree, French, McLeod, & Locke, 2000). This instrument was used to quantify if women feel anxious about getting dressed for their professional job. This questionnaire is a revised version of the State Trait Anxiety Inventory Self-Evaluation Questionnaire (STAI), one of the most frequently administered anxiety scales in clinical research (Gros, Antony, Simms, & McCabe, 2007; Tluczek, Henriques, & Brown, 2009). The STAI was revised due to an “inability to adequately discriminate between the symptoms of anxiety and depression” (Gros et al., 2007, p. 370). To combat this confounding characteristic, Ree et al. (2000) devised a questionnaire specifically identifying “pure anxiety”—the STICSA (Gros et al., 2007, p. 370). The STICSA is composed of 42 statements: 21 statements measure anxiety in a specific circumstance (State Anxiety), and 21 statements measure the general characteristic of anxiety (Trait Anxiety). Responses for State Anxiety items identify if an individual is *currently* experiencing anxiety. Responses for Trait Anxiety provide indication as to if an individual *generally* feels anxious towards a certain event or experience (e.g., towards making decisions about work attire). There are two sub-scales within both the State and Trait anxiety scales: 10 cognitive (psychological) anxiety-detecting statements (STICSA-C) and 11 somatic (physically) anxiety-detecting statements (STICSA-S). The cognitive sub-scale items “aim to capture features of anxiety that are directly related to thoughts (e.g., worry, intrusive thoughts, difficulty concentrating),” while “the somatic cluster aims to capture features

that are directly related to physical experiences (e.g., sweating, palpitations, muscle tension)” (Van Dam, Gros, Earleywine, & Antony, 2013, p. 71).

Given the focus of this research project, namely overall feelings and psychological thoughts when making decisions about professional attire, only the Trait Anxiety portion was administered to participants (STICSA-T). Particularly, this research was interested in examining STICSA-T total scores and cognitive sub-scale scores. On the STICSA-T, participants were asked to indicate how often each statement was true to them. Participants were given the following four options to respond a statement: (1) Not at all, (2) A little, (3) Moderately so, (4) Very much (see Appendix E).

In regard to psychometric characteristics, the STICSA has received “high reliability and validity... as a measure of anxiety” (Gros et al., 2007, p. 376). In addition, “each of the four subscales—State-Cognitive, State-Somatic, Trait-Cognitive, and Trait-Somatic, had excellent internal consistency based upon Cronbach’s alpha coefficients (alphas > .86) and acceptable inter-item correlations” across both clinical and college samples (Gros et al., 2010, p. 277). The STICSA also had significant positive correlations with other anxiety identifying questionnaires, providing additional justification for its validity (Gros et al., 2007). Overall, the STICSA has been valued as a measure of anxiety with excellent psychometric properties.

**Fashion advisor participants.** Fashion advisors’ interviews comprised of a series of questions that explored the state of office attire, how women experience their work wardrobe, and opinions toward the evolution of professional wear. Interview questions asked participants to describe:

1. how they coach new female graduates entering the professional workforce;
2. what they recommend recent graduates wear to the office, and if so, specific key pieces;

3. if they witness any anxiety from women who are creating a professional wardrobe;
4. women's greatest insecurities about their clothes;
5. the biggest mistakes women make when curating their professional wardrobe;
6. how a woman's professional wardrobe differs from her casual wardrobe; and
7. where professional dress for women is going.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis included four stages: (a) quantitative analysis of demographic questionnaire, (b) qualitative analysis of open-ended questions, (c) quantitative analysis of modified standardized anxiety questionnaires, and (d) qualitative analysis of fashion advisor interviews.

**Demographic questionnaire for recent graduates.** After demographic questionnaires were received from participants, they were saved into a distinct folder on the primary researcher's computer. Once all demographic data was received, all participants' folders were resaved using the assigned numerical codes. These numbers ultimately became the identification of the participants. This relabelling of data was performed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants. In order to analyze demographic data, all information was transferred into an Excel spreadsheet. Horizontal columns identified participants' codes, and the vertical columns listed demographic questionnaire categories. All Excel cells were appropriately filled in with designated data, and general statistics were computed, including averages and ranges.

**Open-ended questions for recent graduates.** Interviews with recent graduates were digitally audio-recorded. Recorded data was saved on the device's memory card and copied to the principal researcher's computer in a distinct file. Once all interview data was received, all

participants' folders were resaved with assigned numerical codes. Subsequently to indexing the data, information was transcribed.

Following the transcription of the first three interviews, independent coding commenced, the most prominent method of analyzing qualitative data (Flick, 2007). This organization process involves identifying the essential points within the data and comparing and contrasting them among participants (Flick, 2007). This classification structure provides “a comprehensive understanding of the issue, the field, and last but not least the data themselves” (Flick, 2007, p. 100). The principal researcher and supervisor reviewed transcripts independently to determine common themes and assign codes, subsequently consulting together to discuss and confirm congruence (Creswell, 2012). Coding involved examining three domains: literal, interpretative, and receptive meaning. According to Mason (2002), understanding these three meanings is essential when “reading” the data. Literal reading means analyzing your data “in their literal form, content, structure, style, layout, and so on” (Mason, 2002, p. 149). Interpretive reading involves asking more in-depth questions about the meaning behind the words and what it implies (Mason, 2002). Reflective reading is a more integrative approach where the reader incorporates his or herself as a “part of the data” (Mason, 2002, p. 149). This process involves asking the researcher to ask him or herself how he or she may be influencing or affecting the results. Since the primary and secondary researcher had synonymous coding results, the primary researcher solely continued to transcribe and code the remaining interviews.

**Modified questionnaire for recent graduates.** Questions from the modified version of the STICSA-T were asked during the phone interview. Participants provided their responses from the four options, and the primary researcher tallied responses. These values were then transferred into an Excel spreadsheet (see Table 2). The very left column identified the

participants' codes, and the subsequent right columns illustrated their scores. Adding up the values of all the responses totalled the STICSA-T complete score: one point for response one ("Not at all"), two points for response two ("A little"), and so on. Adding up the responses from the particular sub-score questions totalled the subscale scores. The STICSA-C sub-scale score is composed of 10 cognitive questions (questions 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16, 17, 19), and the STISCA-S sub-scale score is composed of 11 somatic questions (questions 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 12, 14, 15, 18, 20, 21). When these two sub-scale scores were added together, the total STICSA-T score was received. Therefore, each participant received three sets of scores for the anxiety questionnaire: (a) a total STICSA-T score, (b) a cognitive sub-score (STICSA-C), and (c) a somatic sub-score (STICSA-S). This research was specifically interested in looking at STICSA-T and STICSA-C sub-scale scores, as this research predicted a *general psychological* reaction to dressing for the workplace. Based on the appropriate cut-off values (Van Dam et al., 2013, p. 71), scores were ranked on their significance. According to Van Dam et al. (2013), the appropriate cut-off score for STICSA-T is 43 for "researchers seeking to identify probable cases of clinical anxiety" (p. 82), and 40 for those "seeking to identify the possibility of clinical anxiety" (p. 82). Regarding the sub-scales, cut-off sub-scores for STICSA-C is 23 and 18 for the STICSA-S. Those scores that totalled greater than the cut-off scores were considered significant.

**Open-ended questions for fashion advisors.** Interviews with fashion advisors were recorded via three routes: (a) email, (b) audio-recorded during face-to-face interviews, and (c) manually typed during a face-to-face interview. Recorded interviews were saved on a memory card and transferred to a computer where they were also saved. Following this, the primary researcher transcribed all interviews. In regard to email and manually typed interviews, data

was also saved on to a computer. All interviews were saved in a distinct file. Once all interview data was received, all participants' folders were resaved as assigned numerical codes. Coding began after transcription of the first three interviews. The primary researcher and the secondary researcher coded data from the first three interviews independently and then gathered together to evaluate congruence between their results (Creswell, 2012). Similarly to recent graduates' interviews, coding involved examining three domains: literal, interpretative, and receptive meaning. As coding results were aligned among researchers, the primary researcher continued to solely transcribe and code the remaining interviews.

## Chapter Four: Results

### Recent Graduate Participants

**Demographics.** In total, 20 subjects participated in this research study: 15 recent graduates and five fashion advisors. Recent graduates ( $n = 15$ ) included three from a media-oriented professional business who worked as advertisers, event planners, managers, and writers; five Ryerson University School of Fashion alumni, most of whom were working in the design realm; and seven participants who worked within the finance and legal community. All participants were female and had received a post-secondary degree or diploma; 33.3% had a graduate degree. The median time since graduation was 2.6 years; actual time since graduation ranged from 1 to 4 years. The income range was diverse; 46% earned between \$21,000–\$50,000. One participant did not disclose income information. Participants' clothing sizes ranged from 0 to 12, 46% of which were a size 6. Height ranged from 5'1"–5'5" to 5'5"–6"; 60% were in the 5'1"–5.5" category. As for living arrangements, 33.3% were living with a spouse or partner, 33.3% lived with friends, 20% lived alone, and 13.3% lived with relatives. The majority of women lived within an urban area, and two lived in a suburban area. None of the women had children.

**STICSA.** According to Van Dam et al. (2013), a subject must receive a score above 40 on the STICSA-T in order to be believed anxious. As for cognitive and somatic significance, participants must score above 23 for the cognitive portion and above 18 for the somatic portion. One participant received above the cut-off of 40 on the STICSA-T. Overall STICSA-T scores ranged from 21 to 44, with an average score of 29.53 (see Table 1). Findings suggested that there was no significant experience of anxiety when preparing dress for the professional office. No STICSA-C (cognitive subscale) scores were above the cut-off of 23, as scores ranged from 10 to

22 ( $M = 16.3$ ). One participant received a significant STICSA-S (somatic subscale) score, while overall scores ranged from 11 to 22 ( $M = 13.4$ ). As predicted, cognitive symptoms received higher values than somatic symptoms. The most frequently high-valued response was statement 4 (“I think that others won’t approve of the clothes I wear to work”). (See Table 2.) Following close behind this response was statement 3 (“I feel agonized over what clothes I will wear to work”), statement 11 (“I have trouble remembering things when focusing on what clothes I will wear to work”), and statement 13 (“I think that the worst will happen if I wear the “wrong” clothes to work”). As predicted, all frequently high-valued statements were located in the cognitive subscale portion.

**Interviews.** After interview responses were coded, three major sections were designated: (a) literal, (b) interpretive, and (c) reflective. Within each section a series of subsections identifying the themes were established.

**Literal reading.** Literal themes included the most commonly found words within participants’ responses, the nuance of the responses, “name-calling” that participants used to identify clothing habits, and personal associations (see Figure 1). The most frequently used word throughout the responses was the word “wear” (see Table 3). Some of the remaining most frequently used words within responses were “feel,” “look,” “dress,” “suit,” and “professional.” The frequent use of the word “feel” helps to confirm the qualitative inquiry of exploring how people *experience* the process of dressing for the professional realm. The word “suit” was often mentioned, but one should not assume that this was in a positive manner. On the contrary, participants frequently mentioned “suit” with a negative and outdated connotation. Expectedly, the word “professional” was common throughout the participants’ responses, and recent graduates reported looking professional as one of the most critical factors when preparing dress.

Though this word may be significant in a quantitative sense, it is less so qualitatively. Thus, while participants may have used this word repeatedly, it is unclear if participants' fully understood the definition and/or shared one commonly. Comments with the word "professional" included such statements as, "I think I look really professional in it" (Participant 6), or "the way that I dress at work, I always keep in mind the big key word like professional" (Participant 13).

The nuance of the responses tended to be mildly nervous. While women understood that an interview regarding dress was going to take place, they still seemed caught off guard by questions, seeming as though they had never been personally asked about such a topic. As the interview progressed, participants appeared to become more relaxed and speak increasingly more freely about their experiences. Some participants answered questions with enthusiasm, as though it was a cathartic process. Despite many participants' willingness to speak openly about their dress decisions, many had trouble articulating how they felt, how to explain their decision-making process, and how to describe their wardrobe. When having difficulties describing their experience, participants would say, "I don't know how else to describe it, sorry" (Participant 13), or "I don't know how to describe them exactly" (Participant 15).

Name-calling occurred when participants referred to garments or dressing techniques with specific terms they had devised themselves. This occurred several times when participants did not know the name of a garment or dressing technique but used it frequently in their daily lives. For instance, one participant would explain, "I don't want to hate the clothes I'm wearing but those are just the 'work clothes'" (Participant 4). Another participant used the phrase "office dresses": "if I know I'm just going to be in the office all day or a meeting with clients I'll wear ... umm like...[what] I call...'office dresses,' like professional wear from like Club Monaco, something that comes to the knee" (Participant 5). Others utilized phrases such as "go-to outfits"

or a “pseudo-suit” (Participant 9).

Another important finding revealed that many women identified dressing for the workplace as a skill. Many participants categorized themselves as being a “good” or “bad” dresser. For example, comments included statements like, “I’m not very good at putting together” (Participant 10), or “I’m not a great dresser. So...I mean there are other girls in my office that look like they’ve just stepped out of a fashion magazine... I’m not one of them” (Participant 11). This personal association demonstrated self-awareness for dressing as well as a level of required proficiency. It was particularly interesting that participants verbalized this autonomous categorization, as people are often unwilling to admit their strengths or weaknesses. It is uncertain if participants shared this information just for interview purposes or if they would be willing to share this with others.

***Interpretive meaning.*** Interpretive themes included seven main domains: (a) perception, (b) guidance, (c) context dependent, (d) compromise, (e) challenges, (f) solutions, and (g) gender inequality. (See Figure 2.)

While the discussion of anxiety was found throughout these major themes, it did not comprise enough data to develop its own distinct theme. Interestingly, when participants would mention anxiety, they did not generally speak about the excess of anxiety experienced when preparing dress for work, but rather, spoke of the lack of anxiety when not having to dress for the professional office. One woman noted, “well for casual everyday...I dress more casual, I guess...more comfortably because I have more freedom and I don’t have to worry about being perceived in a professional way if I’m just going to the store for coffee or something” (Participant 7); similarly, another woman said, “but yeah casual everyday...I just don’t care

about having that anxiety about what to wear, I just try to find whatever's clean" (Participant 10).

*Perception.* The perception theme included all data that discussed how the wearer perceived herself when dressing for the office and how she believed others perceived her. Perception of the self data focused on how the perception of one's own behaviour and attitude changed based on what she wore. For instance, one participant shared, "it's important to me because I like to... convey...my personality... at work, which is fairly organized. I like to look fairly organized and clean cut...heh heh" (Participant 2). Another agreed mentioning, "when you put forward a stylish outfit at the office you're saying to the world that...I care about what I look like, meaning I care about what I do, meaning that... I care about myself" (Participant 14).

On the other hand, the perception of others' perception focused on how dress changes another individual's perspective of the wearer. These comments discussed the role of the others' observation such as, "I feel like people take you more seriously if you project a certain look" (Participant 1). Another participant noted:

I find that if I come to work looking more put together and more professional then people are going to perceive me that way. And I want to be perceived that way, so I always try to dress in a way that I would like to be perceived... or a way that I would perceive someone else seeing them in that outfit or that type of style. (Participant 7)

Similarly, another participant stated:

Work attire is important to me because I believe that you know as much as we would all like to think that it's not true, that people really do judge you based on your appearance at first... and so I think it's really important to have a good image at the office and show that you care because that translates...into people's opinion about your work. So I do think

it's really important to dress for the office, which is why I have so much anxiety because I really don't know. (Participant 14)

Both topics within the perception theme placed a great deal of significance on the role of credibility. The perception of their own credibility and the perceptions of others' credibility towards them could be manipulated based on the dress attire worn at the office.

*Guidance.* The guidance theme included all data that pertained to reinforcement participants sought after when making dress decisions for work. This included family, friends, fashion magazines, and blogs. Examples of this can be demonstrated by the participants' responses, such as, "we're on...fashion blogs all the time, so...I always try to get inspiration for that, and try to incorporate things I see into my outfits for work" (Participant 8). Another participant noted:

Well I kind of ...went out and sort of sourced things, ideas from my mom and sister... and then I guess I just like sensed what looked good together, and I also lived with a bunch of fashion people in university, so I kinda picked up ideas about professional attire there too. (Participant 1).

*Context dependent.* The context dependent theme included all responses that discussed dressing on a basis of being dependent on other varying factors. These factors included interacting with other people (co-workers and clients), type of position, duration of position, and body type. Interactions with people comprised of responses where participants had to adapt their dressing for the office depending on whom they were meeting that day (quality) and how many people they would be interactive with that day (quantity). One participant shared that she chooses her dress "based on what my day is going to be, like...if I'm going to meet with clients I'll throw a blazer on, to be more dressed up; if it's just a regular day in the office, I just choose

whatever's clean and whatever matches" (Participant 2). Others agreed with this tactic stating, "depending on the guests I'm going to be seeing... like if I know we have big clients coming in I'll dress up a little but more that day, I might wear a dress" (Participant 4).

The specific position that a participant had in the professional office also modified the practice of getting dressed for work. One participant mentioned that she noticed this by looking at different departments within her organization saying, "compared to people in other departments in my company I'm a little bit more comfortable dressing casually and maybe a little more eclectically" (Participant 6). Another participant simply mentioned how the different roles that she takes on within her position establish this variability: "I have like a dual job, so some days I'm at office sitting at desk, and other days I'm out and about driving around the city visiting an account. I have take into account what I'm doing that day" (Participant 15).

The duration of time that a participant had at a professional position also was a factor in the practice of getting dressed for work. As one would maintain a position longer, there was a negative correlation with care for dressing at work. One woman mentioned, "well I feel like when I first started working compared to how am I know it's kind of different. ...When I first started I think I was more professionally dressed than I am now" (Participant 8). Similarly, another woman agreed with this negative relationship sharing:

It's sort of like changed over time...when I first started at the firm, I was much more formal like I would wear pretty much a full suit every day...then ...you start to just like want to be comfortable...so yeah...it's like very much devolved over time. (Participant 9)

In addition to these factors, the body type of any individual also influenced decision-making. When women would feel "not so hot physically or maybe... not feeling too great about [themselves]" (Participant 4), it would take considerably longer to get dressed. One participant

explained that was not strictly how she felt prior to getting dressed, but if she had not “worn something in a while and have gained weight, [she felt] discouraged and it totally [threw her] off” (Participant 10). Others briefly discussed dependent factors included age and attitude.

*Compromise.* Compromise was the most ubiquitous theme found within recent graduate responses. Compromise themed data consisted of information that discussed the fine line that women had to navigate when dressing for the professional office. This balance applied to a series of different opposing forces including (a) individuality and conformity, (b) the workplace and leisure, and (c) fashionable and professional.

The balance between individuality and conformity was illustrated when women would discuss the struggle between dressing for one’s needs and dressing for the professional realm requirements. Comments such as, “walk the line” (Participant 1), and “I don’t know if I’m crossing the line” (Participant 12) elucidated this balancing act. While others were not as lucid about this dichotomy, they nevertheless demonstrated an understanding of this relationship:

I wanted to be conservative and modest ’cause it’s for an office, in terms of coverage, but I wanted to show that I had a creative side and that I’m fun...generally speaking, the clothes I wear to work are not my favourite. They’re not what I would wear in my everyday lifestyle. I’ve tried to find a compromise of how I would dress if I could just wear what I wanted to everyday and what would be appropriate for work...it kind of sucks, but I have to be realistic. (Participant 4).

It’s often stressful because despite feeling that I can be a little bit more relaxed in how I dress I don’t want to look too casual...or... too ratty... for lack of a better word. I wear a lot of vintage clothing and that kinda of thing, but I recognize that not everyone finds stuff with holes in it charming...I kind of have to balance my own personal taste

with what other people can easily digest I guess and understand as professional attire...so there's balance between wearing something that is acceptable in the workplace and also without betraying my own sensibilities. (Participant 6)

And if I can find something that I'm going to be comfortable, it's professional looking without being a suit, and I think it's still kind of expressing my personality and my personal style then that's my perfect piece. (Participant 7)

The workplace and leisure balance dealt with the tension between investing in clothes for work or outside of the office. One woman explained, for work, "I'm thinking a lot more of what other people will think of me, [however] when I dress for other occasions I dress for me" (Participant 12). This difficulty was often manifested in price, as one woman mentioned:

Often times for nicer stuff it costs more money, obviously, and I'm only wearing it for 8 hours a day...I don't really wear my work clothes on the weekends or anything. It's hard to find something that's affordable for the use I'm going to get out of it. (Participant 2).

The balance between fashionable and professional had to do with trying to incorporate fashionable pieces into one's work wardrobe while still maintaining a professional look. One participant explained, "it was basically trying to look professional and somewhat conservative but without being...well still trying to look fashionable I guess" (Participant 6), while another commented on her own looks for work stating, "I thought the whole look looked put together, yet still fashionable" (Participant 7).

*Challenges.* The challenge theme composed of all data that tapped into a particular challenge that was experienced during the process of preparing dress for the professional office. Overall, women focused on four major sub-themes: (a) price, (b) comfort, (c) weather, and (d) selection of co-ordinates.

Price was the most prominent factor, as at this period of their lives, majority of participants did not have thriving incomes. One participant said, “So price is a big issue. I always try to find things that are pretty cheap but are going to be appropriate for work” (Participant 4). Wardrobe funds needed to be balanced between work attire and clothes for leisure. According to one participant:

It would probably be mostly price, just because clothes can add up pretty quickly...like I like to buy at least a couple of really good items that I can wear all the time that won't wear out, but those often cost a little more, so you kind of have to make sure you aren't going to feel guilty about buying it after. (Participant 1)

Comfort was another common challenge identified. Comments that surfaced included, “I guess I feel that I'm uncomfortable. Comfort is a big important thing” (Participant 12). Women felt that workplace appropriate clothing offered in the fashion industry was uncomfortable and not well designed. One woman explained that this discomfort was so predominant that it prohibited her from buying items, saying, “you know like a lot of the times there's things, but I know that they won't be comfortable, such as certain blazers; they look good but they aren't the most comfortable for me” (Participant 14). Another woman stated:

*You said that comfort as well?* It still is. I think they're making way too much stuff in like itchy fabrics...or like it's too confining...where you can't move your arms as easily...I don't really find that the industry has done the best job of like figuring out something, you know? (Participant 9)

Some women would not specifically discuss how uncomfortable their professional clothing was, but rather how comfortable their leisure clothing was:

Well for casual everyday...I dress more casual I guess...more...I guess more comfortably because I have more freedom, and I don't have to worry about being perceived in a professional way if I'm just going to the store for coffee or something. (Participant 7)

The weather was another challenge that was frequently commented on. It was a factor that women had to "always take into account" (Participant 7). This included both outside the office and inside the office. The outside weather included adjusting to two factors: the season, as one woman noted—"I tend to try and you know co-ordinate how vibrant it is with the season" (Participant 10)—and the temperature. One participant stated:

I will definitely do planning around the shoes, depending on the weather as well. I don't have a car, so if I'm taking the bus to work I'll have to plan...boots, ...shoes, ... what kind of shoes, ....am I going to wear heels, ...I can't wear suede in the snow so (Participant 5).

Inside the office included concerns regarding the room temperature. Often comments surrounded around how the office was surprisingly cold. This would preclude women from wearing garments they would ideally like to. As one woman mentioned, "oh, a lot of the times where I'd like to wear a t-shirt I just know that I can't because it's cold and I'll be freezing" (Participant 14).

Variation in selection of garments was also a struggle. Women had difficulties "trying to come up with new combinations.... trying to provide some sort of variety" (Participant 10). This was difficult because women felt that they had, "a lot of miss match" (Participant 15).

Attempting to attain a variation in selection was because women did not want to "wear anything twice in a week" (Participant 15). It is important to note that this variation in selection was not about having a lot of clothes, as one participant noted, "last year I spent pfff...thousands on

clothing and I still feel like I don't have much selection" (Participant 10). Rather, it was about having the right clothes to create co-ordinates.

*Solutions.* Solutions included all ideas and suggestions that the women offered to make the process of dressing for the office as manageable as possible. Solutions consisted of four domains: (a) pieces, (b) styles, (c), stores, and (d) habits.

Dresses were the most frequently advocated pieces. The women noted that when they need "to look more professional, [they had] some nice dresses" (Participant 8). One woman also preferred wearing dresses compared to suits, she said, "I hate suits, like I just absolutely hate them, and dresses I like" (Participant 11). One woman mentioned that dresses provided an enhanced sense of power and that is why she enjoyed wearing them, "I feel like it's nice to wear a dress... There's something empowering about like a dress and heels I guess.... I don't really know why" (Participant 9). In addition to dresses, blazers, pants, high heels, and boots were also recommended.

In regard to styles, participants recommended a variety of different suggestions.

Layers were mentioned as way to feel a sense of an increased wardrobe:

I guess wearing a lot of layers maybe...because I don't really like to just...umm...I like a lot of variety I guess. Having a lot of different types of pieces that you can kind of mix and match. I find that you can put something together that is not so formulaically office wear. (Participant 6)

Many women also suggested keeping their professional clothing in neutral hues. One woman noted, "I like to stick with basic black, white, and grey I guess... kind of mix and match anything with it to create a lot of outfits with it" (Participant 7). Accessorizing was also

mentioned through the participants' solutions. Participants would comment on how it added variability, an air of fashion, and fun to workplace attire:

I try to accessorize a little bit more umm than some people would because what I wear day to day is not necessary very full of variety. The variety for me comes from the accessories. That's something, you know for someone who really doesn't have that creative thinking with fashion, that's something I'd recommend, cause it's something easy to do is pop on a different necklace...that might you know...look very different than the one yesterday. (Participant 10)

Other women swore by including a pop of colour in their wardrobe. This was not only to spruce it up, but also to offer a sense of individuality. One participant mentioned, "I like to wear colour. I feel like a lot of people wear a lot of black, white and brown, and grey when they have to dress professional, so I try to wear as much colour when I can" (Participant 15).

Additionally, this woman not only utilized colour as means of expression and novelty, but also made sure she took the silhouette and cut into consideration when incorporating colour:

Umm I try to pick things that are classic in cut, but maybe a little more interesting in colour. And then if I pick something that has really interesting cut, then I'll pick a neutral. Just to try and keep things more versatile in your wardrobe, because if you pick something that's very trendy in cut and colour, you're not going to be able to wear it as long. (Participant 15)

Go-to stores included a variety of low- to mid-end retail companies. Some of the common stores recommended included Aritzia, Le Chateau, Club Monaco, Mexx, Jacob, Zara, Forever 21, and H&M.

Habits that women used to solve dress stressors included activities like taking care of the

quality and cleanliness of one's clothing and trusting educated sales associates. One participant stated that care for clothing was more vital than even picking the right clothing:

So you know it's more important than the clothing you choose, it's how you take care of it...it's how you umm...I think it is important to get things tailored and make sure the fit is proper. That's a big thing; people notice. (Participant 10)

In addition to maintaining the cleanliness, she recommended having confidence in the sales associates, as they had helped her negotiate through the stress-provoking process of preparing dress for the office:

I've learnt really to trust really the retail clothing people. Umm...they're...some of them are very good and have a very good eye for... putting together combinations that I may not have ever thought of. So some of my favourite outfits actually came from this sales person. (Participant 10)

*Gender inequality.* The role of gender also played a significant factor for dressing for the professional office. Women felt that they had a more difficult time compared to men. Some women mentioned that this was due to not having an established template of what to wear to the office compared to men. One participant said, "I feel like people take you more seriously if you project a certain look. Especially being a woman, because if you're a guy, I guess suits are kind of the norm" (Participant 1). Another woman agreed with this wardrobe unjustness stating that, "and ahh...cause you know day to day women have to change it up a lot more than men do, so to not look like you're wearing the same thing" (Participant 10). Other women expressed that they simply felt more judged for their dress than men, "as they say 'clothes make the man'...it probably goes double for women" (Participant 6). In particular, one woman discussed her unfair experience trying to achieve equivalent respect:

As a female it's harder for them to lay down the law of what women have to wear in the business. Men wear suits and ties and dress shirts like that's it, but for women it can easily go from a really professional looking outfit to looking really cheap or just unprofessional simply by the shirt you put under that suit jacket like... for me I feel like I'm trying to compete with the men in my company, just for respect, nothing else.

(Participant 15)

**Reflective.** Reflectively, the primary researcher may have played a role in the outcome of the results. Participants may have experienced a heightened sense of nervousness at first due to sharing their personal experiences with dress to a researcher. In addition to feeling apprehensive, participants may have manipulated results slightly due to being in a position of evaluation. While anxiety was not significantly experienced, perhaps the experience of telling another person about their dressing habits provoked anxiety.

### **Fashion Advisor Participants**

Fashion advisor participants ( $n = 5$ ) included two Torontonians fashion stylists, one fashion editor of an online Canadian beauty and fashion magazine, one luxury Canadian retailer womenswear buyer, and one fashion director of a luxury Canadian retailer. Each fashion advisor was invited to complete an interview in person, via telephone or by email. Two out of the five advisors (one of the local fashion stylists and the fashion editor) completed their interviews via email, while the remaining participants performed their interviews face-to-face (two audio-recorded, one manually typed).

**Literal meaning.** Literal themes included the most commonly found words within participants' responses and the nuance of the face-to-face responses (see Figure 3). The most frequently used word throughout the responses was the word "go" (see Table 4). Perhaps such an

active verb was frequent because the advisors were being asked to suggest guidance and solutions. Similarly to recent graduate participants, frequently used words included “feel,” “look,” “work,” “dress,” and “professional.” Additional words that were not witnessed in the recent participants’ responses were “interview” and “wardrobe.” “Interview” was more commonly used, as advisors would dedicate portions of their responses to focusing on the impact of dress during the interview. “Wardrobe” was more frequently discussed, as advisors agreed about the value of a wardrobe and not simply individual pieces.

The nuance of the face-to-face responses was comfortable, confident, and smooth. Feelings of enthusiasm and willingness to participate were conveyed when advisors were approached. They wanted to help facilitate the research process and share their opinions regarding the subject. Advisors felt that there was a substantial amount of room for education, and this education needed to be transmitted to recent graduates.

**Interpretive meaning.** Interpretive themes included six main domains: (a) compromise, (b) direction, (c) environment (context dependent), (d) strategy, (e) solutions, and (f) anxiety. (See Figure 4.)

**Compromise.** The compromise theme consisted of responses that discussed the balance that women needed to navigate when making dress decisions. Similar to recent graduates, advisors mentioned comments like, “knowing where to draw the line” (Participant 1, Stylist), and “so you wanna stand out, but you don’t want to stand out foolishly” (Participant 5, Fashion Director).

**Direction.** The direction theme included responses that illustrated advisors’ predictions regarding the future of professional womenswear. Direction varied among the fashion advisors. Some believed the future of professional dress was going to be “more casual for sure”

(Participant 4, Womenswear Buyer). One advisor noted, “we see brands like J Crew doing a fantastic job of putting together exciting looks with very classic pieces like pencil skirts, button-ups, and sweaters” (Participant 3, Fashion Editor). Others suggested that too casual was not expected. In fact, they had even witnessed an, “overly casual common complaint” (Participant 1, Stylist). Additionally, some advisors projected that there would be a more masculine-inspired future, as noted “professional dress for women seems to be going in a much more masculine direction. More and more we are seeing menswear-inspired pieces for women” (Participant 3, Stylist).

***Environment.*** The environment theme involved all responses that discussed the role of the company or position that should be taken into account when women are making decisions about what to wear for the workplace. Majority of the advisors agreed that it was critical to understand one’s employment environment. Only once this was understood could one dress best for the office:

I think the first thing I would keep in mind is your (future) place of employment—which doesn’t necessarily mean we all need to be wearing grey suits with beige hosiery. I think you always want to look professional and polished but also appropriate to the work environment. Example—if you’re applying at a creative place, typically the dress is more casual. But I would always lean towards the conservative side if you’re unsure.

(Participant 3, Fashion Editor)

This was because advisors said that professional dress “depends on the office...you have to define the environment” (Participant 1, Stylist). It was recommended to “follow the trend of the industry they are in” (Participant 2, Stylist).

**Strategy.** Strategy consisted of all data that regarded the process of preparing one's structure of building a professional wardrobe. One advisor suggested the "do's" and "don'ts":

- Five Do's: understand and adhere to organization policy, err on the side of professional dress, blazer, keep dresses knee-length, and great accessories.
- Five Don'ts: too short, too sheer, too many accessories, leggings, and Sunday morning dress on casual Fridays. (Participant 1, Stylist)

Other advisors had more lengthy plans, as one suggested, "they should always have a plan before they go shopping; think about what they actually need and keep in mind which pieces they are going to be wearing the new clothing with" (Participant 2, Stylist). All fashion advisors suggested devising an organized plan with structure. Without the implementation of strategy, recent graduates risked wasting valuable time and resources.

**Solutions.** Solutions comprised all responses that provided recent graduates with sound suggestions to combat challenges experienced when preparing dress for the professional office. Solutions varied among participants, but common themes of key pieces, styles, and habits were presented. One advisor suggested, "key pieces would be a suit that both pieces can be worn together or separate, a pencil skirt, wool pants, a few button-up tops, wool sweaters or cardigans, if appropriate, a basic black pump or another neutral color" (Participant 2, Stylist). Similarly, one concluded, "you're gonna spend a little bit more on certain things than other things" (Participant 5, Fashion Director).

**Styles.** Styles of dressing varied among the participants. One advisor had afforded weight to "pay[ing] attention to details" (Participant 1, Stylist). Others had simply placed emphasis on staying very professional: "In her casual wardrobe, she can take more risks and

really express her personality. In my opinion, there is no room for taking risks in professional dress” (Participant 2, Stylist).

**Habits.** Habits comprised of activities that women should be doing with their professional wardrobe in order to look their best in the office. Focusing on having complete outfits versus stand-alone garments, and mixing and matching were suggested:

I find the biggest mistake women make is they do not buy outfits; instead they buy pieces and hope to work them in their wardrobes but then have great difficulty actually doing this. As a result they feel like they have nothing to wear! (Participant 2, Stylist)

Go with a mix of solid and printed versions—all with a professional look (i.e., pay attention to hemline and necklines) I would skip anything with complicated straps that might show bra straps—and in conservative work environments a blazer or cardigan is a good idea to layer over top. (Participant 3, Fashion Editor)

**Anxiety.** This category included all responses that highlighted the role of anxiety that fashion advisors had witnessed among young recent graduate females. Contrasting to recent graduates, fashion advisors agreed that they had witnessed recent graduates experiencing anxiety. However, participants’ responses varied in how this anxiety was manifested. Frequently discussed anxieties were finding the appropriate “balance,” dressing one’s body type appropriately, and price. Questions received by recent graduates that concerned balance included, “How to transform day to evening? What’s appropriate? What’s acceptable?” (Participant 1, Stylist). Body type and “fit” (Participant 4, Womenswear Buyer) was noted as “their biggest insecurities” (Participant 2, Stylist). One advisor mentioned, “for me, it is typically our readers that write in with specific wardrobe questions—advice and tips on body type is always a topic that resonates with readers” (Participant 3, Fashion Editor).

Regarding price, advisors shared that “there is a lot of anxiety and pressure around budget. How much money to spend...ok...and where do I... and how do I prioritize” (Participant 5, Fashion Director).

**Reflective.** It is important to note that the advisors did have a previous existing relationship with the primary researcher. This relationship may have facilitated participants to speak more freely about their opinions. Overall, advisor participants seemed to enjoy the process of investigation and were enthusiastic about being of assistance in this process. This excitement demonstrated their shared interest with this dilemma and willingness to help women feel better about their clothing.

## Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

### Discussion

This study explored the issues of professional dress from the qualitative perspectives of recent graduates and fashion advisors, as well as quantitatively using a modified standardized anxiety scale questionnaire. While STICSA-T scores did not reveal significant anxiety levels overall, several individual questions on the STICSA-T showed heightened anxiety levels and were trending towards significance. Interview results illustrated high levels of uncertainty, ambiguity, and concern. Interestingly, when participants did mention anxiety, they would generally not directly discuss the experience when preparing professional dress, but would rather declare the lack of anxiety when not having to. Additionally, fashion advisors agreed that they had witnessed recent female graduates illustrating this dress stress. So, while there may not be statistically significant levels of anxiety, qualitative results support the notion that there is a difficulty experienced when a recent graduate transitions into the professional sphere and practises dressing for the professional office.

Confirming SIT, there was a distinction acknowledged between participants' student identity and their workplace identity. As one fashion advisor and fashion director mentioned, "when you're in college, university, grad school, whatever, that's all play," but when you enter the working world, there is a shift. This change of social identity was exemplified by their clothing. Specifically, this segregation was illustrated by a designation of specific clothing for their professional identity ("work clothes") and other pieces for their student or leisure identity; sometimes, participants even established separate wardrobes. Due to this discontinuity, participants had a difficult time balancing their wardrobe needs. One of the most difficult challenges was balancing resources required to purchase both work and leisure clothes. As recent

graduates' leisure lives retained great vibrancy, they did not want to invest too much in work clothes. However, they did not feel comfortable when they had not afforded sufficient energy towards their professional wardrobe. As Ashforth and Mael (1989) suggested, maintaining both of these separate identities became a difficult task.

In order to maintain both identities successfully, participants would attempt to negotiate compromises. The theme of compromise is consistent with previous research illuminating the struggle between the demands of the individual and group (Barnard, 2007; Entwistle, 2000; Simmel, 1957). Particularly, Simmel's theory of fashion can be applied to the struggles of individuality and conformity witnessed in responses. As graduates dressed for the office, they tried to conform to the norms of professional womenswear while at the same time negotiating how much of their own identity to reveal. Women seemed to be searching to find the fine line, a line that allowed them to be noticed, but maintain uniformity, in order to belong to their co-worker group.

Another important compromise witnessed was between professional and fashionable requests. According to the most frequently used words in the interview responses, achieving a professional image through dress was one of the most prioritized goals among recent graduates. However, accompanied by this desire for professional affiliation was the fear of looking too professional. Thus, participants wanted to remain professional looking while maintaining fashionable accents. Corresponding with Arnold's (2001) research, women feared presenting an image that excluded fashionable aspects.

Interestingly, one participant who admitted to not experiencing any signs of anxiety stated that this was due to blurring the lines between work and leisure clothing. This participant noted that she always felt good when preparing dress for work because she does not segregate

“work clothes” from her remaining clothes. Moreover, she would never invest in clothes that could not be adapted to her casual life. The Fashion Director advisor confirmed this, as she advocated that there would be more of a “dotted line between work and play” dress as society evolves. This suggests that women may be able to reduce apprehension when preparing a professional wardrobe if they maintain a sense of leisure identity in their workplace wardrobe. However, this difficulty will vary depending on the state of the wearer’s current leisure wardrobe. If the wardrobe is dramatically different from a professional genre, one may have a more arduous task in trying to blend the lines.

In addition to the distinction of social identities and the need for balance, research demonstrated SIT’s assumption of heightened self-esteem when social identity aligned with an in-group and the contrary for lack of integration. This relationship was particularly demonstrated in one of the highest valued responses on the quantitative questionnaire, “I think that others won’t approve of the clothes I wear to work.” Agreeing with this statement (a) suggests that there is a fear that participants will not be accepted into the professional in-group, and (b) confirms the notion that identity alliance is mediated through clothing, as previously illustrated by Guy and Banin (2000). Particularly, this drive to dress well and fear of looking inappropriate was demonstrated when participants would meet with high-status colleagues or clients within the professional office, supporting evidence of SIT suggesting that the more one desires to be in the in-group, the harder one tries (Hornsey, 2008), and SI, claiming that people will be required to modify their symbolic ensembles depending on their relationships with others (Kaiser, 1983).

Supporting SI, many women did not know what clothing to wear to elucidate an ideal professional identity. When women were wracked with doubt, they would seek reassurance. This is consistent with earlier findings by Clarke and Miller (2002), suggesting that individuals

experience such a level of uncertainty when dressing that they feel no other choice but to ask for reassurance (p. 209). Similarly to Clarke and Miller's research, participants questioned friends, family members, and/or consulted more commercial forms (e.g., magazines). This search for guidance demonstrated that there was (a) an unawareness of what is "right" to wear and (b) the unawareness was so distressing that participants were forced to seek out help. However, the Fashion Director advisor did suggest that although women are seeking help it does not necessarily mean that those resources are providing correct advice.

One garment that women uniformly agreed was comfortable, attractive, and according to SI projected the right symbolic professional image, was a dress. In contrast to previous literature advising women entering the professional realm to dress masculine (Forsythe, 1990; Forsythe et al., 1985; Molloy, 1996; Ogle & Damhorst, 1999; Rabolt & Drake, 1985; Rucker et al., 1999), outcomes revealed that women found dresses to be very "successful" in the workplace. One woman mentioned that she felt that dresses provided her with feelings of empowerment. Another woman had mentioned that dresses create the appearance that one has invested a lot of energy in her appearance, but they are in fact very easy and comfortable to wear. Perhaps, this was due to the increasing inclusion of women in the professional realm.

When women did find clothing that they found complementary to their professional culture (in-group), they agreed that it provided them with qualities of credibility and respect, thus increasing their self-esteem, as both SIT and SI had suggested (Hornsey, 2008; Kaiser, 1983). Women also took note that it was not just others' reactions that increased their well-being, but they also felt more confident and able to promote their best self in appropriate professional clothing. Playing off Adam and Galinsky (2012), women felt that clothes not only enhanced the way they appeared, but also the way they performed at work.

Duration of time in a position also played a role in the fear experienced by participants. If employed in a position for a long period, and consequently assimilated into the in-group, participants began to reduce their concern about their clothing. According to SIT and SI, this decreased sense of distress demonstrates two phenomena: (a) that once a part of the in-group, concern about dress decreased, as purposed by SIT, and (b) that with experience people can learn how to adequately align their clothing with their professional identity and the situation to create a successful experience, as purposed by SI. Conversely, when new to a position or entering an interview, dress played a much greater role and posed risk within the professional realm, as discussed by Solomon and Douglas (1985).

SIT and SI suggested that a person's actions towards professional assimilation would vary depending on the context (Hornsey 2008; Kaiser 1983). Contextual variables in this research included everything from the environment to physicality.

Results revealed that the type of position one was in manipulated the practice of dressing for the professional office. Similarly to what both SIT and SI have argued, the situation or specific in-group dynamics will play a role as to what one will be guided to wear. Therefore, variations in professional dress complemented changes in professional occupations. More creative positions allowed for more creative looks, sometimes even a responsibility to be fashionable. While more business and legal positions offered less room for individuality.

Other supplementary issues participants mentioned included body type and attitude. As revealed in Stacey's (2001) research on dress size, women felt additional "psychological baggage" if they had gained a few pounds or were generally overweight. Another factor revealed in the study results but not mentioned in Stacey's research was the difficulty that height and

breast size played when dressing. Women agreed that both their height (e.g., too petite) and breast size (e.g., too large) had to be more concealed. These factors played a role in the difficulty of preparing dress for the office.

Another remarkable finding was the gender inequality recognized by recent graduates. As articulated by Molloy (1996); when compared to men's attire, women felt as though their clothing made a more significant impact on others' impressions. Supporting literature by Davis (1992), women agreed that they had a difficult time due to an excess of options, and consequently, increased potential to make wardrobe mistakes. Similarly to what Entwistle (2000) and Solomon and Douglas (1985) had suggested, women felt they were also more judged for their dress than men in the workplace. Comments such as "especially being a woman" and "it probably goes double for women" were noted. These results complement previous literature discoursing about the additional struggle that women face in the workplace.

In addition to these difficulties, results revealed that participants experienced particular challenges when preparing their office wardrobe. These challenges included price, comfort, weather, and variation in selection of outfits.

According to SI, women found it challenging to build a symbolically professional wardrobe that was within their available clothing budgets. Both recent graduates and advisors suggested several clothing stores that were affordable while retaining professional accessibility.

Comfort was another substantial challenge recent graduates complained about. In particular, they struggled because of an incompatibility between professional wear and comfort. They found that fashionable professional wear did not allow for a lot of freedom of movement. Furthermore, it was difficult to convey an image of professionalism while retaining their comfort throughout the day.

In addition to comfort, the weather was consistently found to be a difficult factor. Participants discussed weather climates both inside and outside the office. Nearly all mentioned that it is something to take note of and incorporate into their dress decision-making. Participants shared that if they ever overlooked this factor, they experienced severe discomfort.

Finally, participants also made note of the challenge of co-ordinates selection for their professional wardrobe. Often subjects found that they had pieces or specific outfits, but not enough to transition into a series of different combinations or looks. Wardrobe variety was an important factor for women, as they did not feel that the professional realm would warmly welcome them if they wore the same outfits all the time.

As for fashion advisors, they too shared responses that complemented SIT and SI frameworks. First, fashion advisors had witnessed the struggle recent graduates experienced entering the professional workplace. Complementing SI, advisors claimed that this anxiety was prompted by an uncertainty regarding an understanding of the dynamic symbolic range of appropriate professional dress.

Second, advisors recommended that in order to be successful, recent graduates needed to understand the culture of the work environment they were entering. Under the assumption of SIT and SI, by understanding the specific workplace and the typical wardrobe presented, recent graduates would be more equipped to professionally assimilate into the in-group (Hornsey, 1998; Kaiser, 1983). Suggestions included speaking to current employees or simply visiting the place itself. For instance, the Womenswear Buyer advisor suggested that one should “adjust to how other people dress around you,” and the Fashion Director advisor stated, “that for young people today entering the workforce they need to interview the place that they want to go to as much as that company is going to interview them.” Advisors explained that this preparation was context

specific because they could not offer standardized recommendations for clients working in different professional occupations. Once an understanding of the particular environment was established, advisors recommended specific strategies to achieve dress goals. Strategies varied depending on the advisor. One Fashion Stylist had a list of the five “do’s” and “don’ts” for the professional workplace. The do’s included understanding and adhering to the organization policy, always erring on the side of professional, having a blazer in one’s wardrobe, knee-length dresses or skirts, and complementary accessories; the don’ts included nothing too short, never too sheer, never too many accessories, eliminate leggings, and Casual Friday does not mean “Sunday morning.” Other advisors recommended more overarching techniques like investing in particular pieces or “building blocks” and then fleshing out one’s professional wardrobe over time. As stated by the Fashion Director advisor, “building a wardrobe doesn’t happen overnight.”

Third, similarly to recent graduates, compromise was a tactic used to balance the needs of the professional identity and the student identity. Without appropriate balance, advisors believed that recent graduates risked being rejected, inappropriate, or overlooked. However, when the ideal outfit was composed, the Fashion Director stated, “you don’t really notice the clothes as much as you do the person; it enhances the person, it doesn’t distract from the person.” Therefore, clothing may not only offer an individual the ability to demonstrate one’s physicality, but also the ability to demonstrate personality. Ironically, in order to see someone’s internal qualities, allotting energy towards one’s external appearance is necessary. The use of appropriate attire allows professional colleagues to appreciate the authentic personality of the wearer. On the contrary, those who believe that they can demonstrate their authentic personality without devoting time to their appearance may be misjudged.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, while anxiety was not debilitating, recent graduates did experience a process of uneasiness when preparing dress for the professional realm. This stress was illustrated throughout recent graduate and fashion advisor interview responses. Major factors contributing to this distress included a difficulty in balancing wardrobe needs, an uncertainty of what to wear, a discomfort in clothing, a concern about price, and a difficulty in creating a multifaceted wardrobe. Not to mention that women felt as if they started off in an unfair position from men, as dressing professionally for the workplace was recognized as much more demanding for women. According to SIT and SI, these challenges arose due to an apprehension about being perceived their best in the professional workplace and promoting the right messages in the professional workplace.

While difficulties transpired, women did however discover some personal solutions. Solutions included seeking help from loved ones or commercial routes, implementing particular styles, wearing specific pieces, practising explicit habits, understanding the specific professional environment, and composing a strategic plan. Intriguingly, one woman who admitted to not experiencing any anxiety suggested that this relief was due to a seamless integration of her clothes for work and her previous student clothes. Moreover, she simply had one wardrobe that could be adapted to both. While solutions were manageable, they were not necessarily ideal nor were they definitive. In addition to these findings, several unexpected outcomes were found. One unpredicted result illustrated that women categorize themselves based on how “good” or “bad” of a dresser they find themselves to be. Another unforeseen finding exhibited that women agreed that dresses were ideal for the workplace as they were appropriate, well-received, and comfortable. This is contrary to previous research suggesting male-orientated clothing is

successful. It is important to note that there were certain factors that mediated stress depending on the context, including type of environment, duration of position, body type, and mood.

### **Limitations**

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, information regarding participants' ethnic backgrounds was not included in demographic questionnaires. Ethnic and cultural differences may influence styling choices, dress restrictions, body type, and treatment in the workplace (Rucker et al., 1985). These ethnic-based adaptations may have contributed to differences in anxiety when preparing dress for the professional workplace. Phone interviews provide little information regarding race and ethnic background. Though a homogenous sample is suspected, it would be wise to add this to the demographic questionnaire for future research.

Second, the size of the sample created a limitation. While the sample size was adequate for qualitative purposes, a small sample for the applications of a quantitative questionnaire may yield less credible results (Sandelowski, 1995). This is not to say that the research did not receive valuable and accurate scores; however, sometimes it is necessary to gather more data in order to confirm this (Sandelowski, 1995). A greater sample size would have allowed researchers to witness more powerful results and increased validity measures.

Third, allowing for inclusion of participants who work in different professional environments might enhance results. The specific environment and position an individual works in will influence the experience of dressing for the workplace (Davis, 1992), and consequently, the anxiety when dressing. Particularly, the inclusion of fashion graduates may have modified results, as fashion students have a more robust understanding of clothing trends, fashion styling, and image management.

Finally, participants were not asked about the proportion of men and women in their professional office. This ratio influences dressing habits (Solomon & Douglas, 1985) and potential anxiety experienced by young women entering the professional realm. Had this research utilized a sample of recent graduates who were all in a similar occupation, with a similar ratio of male-to-female colleagues, results would potentially carry more weight.

### **Implications for Future Research**

An interesting area for future research would involve implementing a series of comparisons among participants. Comparisons could be administered between different demographic populations, among diverse professional positions, and different relationships with one's student identity. A wider demographic distribution might illustrate the specific role that income (Turner-Bowker, 2001) or body size (Stacey, 2001) play on the preparation for dress for the workplace. Investigating various distinct professional positions could give insight into the particular preparations or challenges recent graduates entering a specific field may have to be aware of. Different relationships with one's student identity may provide light into the difficulty of the transition. Perhaps students who feel a closer connection with their student identity experience a more difficult time transitioning into the professional workplace, whereas students who perceive themselves as professionals may have a more seamless transition.

Future implications of this research involve both theoretical and practical applications. Theoretically, this research adds to literature regarding the power of dress on one's self, others' perceptions, and its role in the professional workplace. It will guide future research for those who are interested in studying the experience of dressing for the professional realm. From a practical perspective, this research may be implemented in a variety of different mediums, including seminars, blogs, editorial, pamphlets, and webinars. A blog, editorial, or pamphlet would

encompass a creative manifestation of the research demonstrated. This would include images of solutions, guidance from fashion advisors, advice from recent graduates, as well as powerful, direct quotes from the research. Seminars may be administered in academic, occupational, or personal settings. An academic seminar would be most suitable for an audience of female students who are soon-to-be graduates. Academic seminars could be organized through career centre facilities. Critical career-oriented practices such as resume building and job search strategies are taught through these agencies; however, wardrobe planning for the professional realm is often not. Given that dressing correctly for the workplace is so important, inclusion of clothing-building strategies is crucial in the education of students prior to graduation.

In addition to using this research to benefit future female graduates, findings can also be used to assist retailers who wish to capture the young professional female demographic market. In particular, this research could be used to improve garment design, marketing techniques, fashion direction, and buying strategies.

Table 1

*Modified Standardized Anxiety Scale (STICSA – T) Scores for Recent Graduates*

Recent Graduates ( <i>n</i> = 15)	STICSA-T ( <i>M</i> = 29.54)	STICSA – C ( <i>M</i> = 16.14)	STICSA-S ( <i>M</i> = 13.40)
1	44	22	22
2	27	16	11
3	32	21	11
4	34	17	17
5	31	18	13
6	35	20	15
7	21	11	10
8	27	15	12
9	24	13	11
10	30	16	14
11	22	11	11
12	28	14	14
13	21	10	11
14	38	22	16
15	29	17	12

*Note.* STICSA-T scores indicate the total level of anxiety an individual *generally* feels towards preparing dress for the professional workplace. Receiving a STICSA-T score above 40 demonstrates significant anxiety experienced. Within STICSA-T, there are two sub-scales: STICSA-C: cognitive (psychological) anxiety-detecting statements and STICSA-S: 11 somatic (physically) anxiety-detecting statements. STICSA-C scores above 23 indicate cognitive anxiety and STICSA-S scores above 18 indicate somatic anxiety.

Table 2

*Frequency of High-Valued Responses on Modified Standardized Anxiety Scale (STICSA-T) for Recent Graduate Participants*

Question (n = 21)	Cognitive or Somatic (C or S)	Received High-Valued Responses (%)
1	S	0.7%
2	S	0.7%
<b>3</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>26.7%</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>26.7%</b>
5	C	13.4%
6	S	0.0%
7	S	0.0%
8	S	0.0%
9	C	0.0%
10	C	13.4%
<b>11</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>20.0%</b>
12	S	0.7%
<b>13</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>20.0%</b>
14	S	0.0%
15	S	0.0%
16	C	0.7%
17	C	0.7%
18	S	0.0%
19	C	0.0%
20	S	0.7%
21	S	0.7%

*Note.* 10 questions on the STICSA-T were cognitive sub-scale and 11 questions were somatic sub-scale. High-valued items were defined as questions that received responses of 3 (moderately) experienced anxiety or 4 (very much) experienced anxiety.

Table 3

*Word Frequency of Recent Graduates' Interviews*

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Root Word	Frequency
Wear	192
It	157
Umm	134
I'm	126
Just	125
Don't	113
Know	98
Work	96
Feel	90
Dress	88
Real	88
Look	88
Something	77
Think	71
Go	69
Professional	67
Little	64
Lot	63
Thing	63
Because	61
Pant	59
Suit	54
Black	54
I'll	51
Bit	51

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Table 4

*Word Frequency of Fashion Advisors' Interviews*

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Root Word	Frequency
Go	33
Dress	30
Think	30
Work	29
Wear	26
Look	25
Say	23
Know	23
Thing	23
That	21
Professional	21
Want	21
You're	20
Ya	18
Real	18
Piece	18
Women	18
Because	18
It	16
Interview	15
People	15
Don't	15
Feel	15
Wardrobe	14
How	14

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Figure 1. Literal Theme Map Results for Recent Graduate Participants

*Figure 1.* Literal theme map for recent graduate interview results.



Figure 2. Interpretive Theme Map Results for Recent Graduate Participants

*Figure 2.* Interpretive theme map for recent graduate interview results.



Figure 3. Literal Theme Map Results for Fashion Advisor Participants

*Figure 3.* Literal theme map for fashion advisor interview results.



Figure 4. Interpretive Theme Map Results for Fashion Advisor Participants

*Figure 4.* Interpretive theme map for fashion advisor interview results.

**Appendix A**  
**Research Ethics Board Approval**

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To: Julie Rubinger  
Communication and Design – School of Fashion  
Re: REB 2012-309: Uncloaking Anxiety Behind Professional Dress  
Date: December 12, 2012

Dear Julie Rubinger,

The review of your protocol REB File REB 2012-309 is now complete. The project has been approved for a one year period. Please note that before proceeding with your project, compliance with other required University approvals/certifications, institutional requirements, or governmental authorizations may be required.

This approval may be extended after one year upon request. Please be advised that if the project is not renewed, approval will expire and no more research involving humans may take place. If this is a funded project, access to research funds may also be affected.

Please note that REB approval policies require that you adhere strictly to the protocol as last reviewed by the REB and that any modifications must be approved by the Board before they can be implemented. Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication from the Principal Investigator as to how, in the view of the Principal Investigator, these events affect the continuation of the protocol.

Finally, if research subjects are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research.

Please quote your REB file number (REB 2012-309) on future correspondence.

Congratulations and best of luck in conducting your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy Walton". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Nancy Walton, Ph.D.  
Chair, Research Ethics Board

## Appendix B

### Media Company Recruitment Letter

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**RYERSON UNIVERSITY**

**Share your Wardrobe Experiences for  
Ryerson Master of Arts Fashion Research**

*Are you a professional woman with a university or college education who has graduated within the last seven years?*

*If yes, would you share your wardrobe experiences?*

Completing a university or college education is one of life's greatest milestones. In the process, you improve your academic skills and develop a new set of professional abilities, going through years of hard work and stressful circumstances—papers, presentations, and exams. After graduation, you assume that with a degree or diploma in place your anxiety should disappear. Yet, transitioning from student life to career track involves building a whole new set of skills and dealing with different stressful conditions. One of the most potentially anxiety-provoking situations is deciding what to wear for work.

The purpose of this research is to examine how women experience the process of deciding what to wear to work. Particularly, it aims to understand if this potential anxiety occurs when women think about what clothes they will wear to work and how this practice is experienced.

Involvement in this study will add to the literature investigating the relationship between dress and identity. In addition, this research will be utilized to create a guide on how to dress better for work. Future directions may also include wardrobe consultation and workshops.

It will take roughly 20-30 minutes to complete this study, and you will receive a \$10 gift card to Tim Hortons as a token of appreciation for your time. Participation involves an interview that includes two parts: first, a series of open-ended questions that will focus on wardrobe choices and attitudes towards clothing, and second, a questionnaire investigating the experience of anxiety. This study may be completed via phone or Skype during a time most convenient for you. This phone or Skype process allows for more accessibility, convenience, and comfort—as participants can pick an environment where they feel they're most calm to complete the interview.

All information will be kept confidential. The only individuals who will have access to this study's information are the researchers. Your participation will not impact your relationship with Ryerson University or [Media Company] nor will anyone at [Media Company] know who has or who has not participated in this study.

This research is being conducted by Julie Rubinger and supervised by Sandra Tullio-Pow. Julie Rubinger is a graduate student in the School of Fashion, and Sandra Tullio-Pow is an associate professor at Ryerson University. This research study is being done in partial fulfillment of Julie Rubinger's Master of Arts, Major Research Project.

If you would consider participating and/or have any questions, kindly contact the principal investigator, Julie Rubinger, by e-mail, [Julie.Rubinger@ryerson.ca](mailto:Julie.Rubinger@ryerson.ca).

## Appendix C

### Media Company Informed Consent Form

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RYERSON UNIVERSITY

#### Informed Consent Form

This research is being conducted by Julie Rubinger and supervised by Sandra Tullio-Pow. Julie Rubinger is a graduate student in the School of Fashion, and Sandra Tullio-Pow is an associate professor at Ryerson University. This research study is being done in partial fulfillment of Julie Rubinger's Master of Arts, Major Research Project. The Ryerson University Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this research. It will take roughly 20-30 minutes to complete this study, and you will receive a \$10 gift card to Tim Hortons as a token of appreciation for your time.

You are being asked to be part of a research study. Please read the information in this form carefully (study purpose, procedures, benefits, risks, and confidentiality) before you agree to participate. Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study at any time. Your choice of participation will not impact future relations with Ryerson University or [Media Company], nor will anyone at [Media Company] know who has or who has not participated in this study. To make an informed decision, please review the information carefully. This is known as the informed consent process. Feel free to ask for an explanation of anything that you do not understand before you sign this form. If you wish to participate, kindly sign your name at the end of this consent form and e-mail back to the interviewer, or in an e-mail please state that you have read the consent form and agree to participate.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to examine how women experience the process of deciding what to wear to work. Particularly, it aims to understand if potential anxiety occurs when women think about what clothes they will wear to work and how this practice is experienced. This study intends to demonstrate the relationship that women have with their professional wardrobe and how this relationship illustrates dimensions of one's identity. By researching this process among women, we will acknowledge the complexity of this experience and better understand how it functions. Furthermore, if we are able to understand how this pressure functions we will be more equipped to deal with it.

#### **Procedure**

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete and return two forms prior to the interview. The first form you will be asked to complete is the informed consent form that you are currently reading. The second form you will be asked to fill out is a brief demographic questionnaire asking information regarding age, education, income, age, clothing size, relationship status, and area you live in. This information provides the researchers with data that may impact your identity, and consequently, the clothing you choose to wear. At that time you

will be asked to coordinate a mutually agreeable time to speak via phone or Skype to conduct the interview. During this preliminary call, consent will be reconfirmed, and you may ask the researcher any questions you have about the two forms or the research in general.

The interview portion may be completed via phone or Skype during a time most convenient for the participant. This phone or Skype process allows for more accessibility, convenience, and comfort—as participants can pick an environment where they feel they're most calm to complete the interview. There will be two parts to the interview phone or Skype call: first, a series of open-ended questions will be asked that focus on wardrobe choices and attitudes towards clothing, and second, a questionnaire investigating the stress involved in getting dressed for work. This call will be audiotaped for analysis purposes. Before finishing the call, you will be asked to share your home address in order to receive your coffee gift card. Coffee card gifts will be directly mailed to the provided address.

### **Risks**

There are potential minimal risks involved in this research. Minimal risks include experiencing unexpected feelings towards your professional wardrobe and dressing habits. These risks are minimal because they do not cause any long-term physical, mental, or emotional suffering. Getting dressed for work is a daily activity, and this will be the focus of the interview.

### **Benefits**

Contribution to this study will add to the literature investigating the relationship between dress and identity. In addition, this research may be utilized to create a guide on how to dress better for work, such as ELLE's, "Style A to Zee: Nine to Five; Joe's advice on what works—and what doesn't at the office" (Zee, 2012, p.1-10). Moreover, this research may also be used for wardrobe consultation and workshop purposes, such as those completed by *Style for Success* (<http://styleforsuccess.com>). You may also enjoy sharing feelings about your personal dressing habits for work. You may not gain any direct personal benefit from participating in the study.

### **References**

Zee, J. (2012, May 21). "Style A to Zee: Nine to five; Joe's advice on what works—and what doesn't at the office". *ELLE US*. Retrieved from <http://www.elle.com/life-love/society-career/style-a-to-zee-nine-to-five-20532#slide-1>

### **Confidentiality**

All information will be kept confidential. The only individuals who will have access to this study's information are the researcher and supervisor. All data, both written and recorded, will be stored under lock and key at Ryerson University, and the only the researchers who created this study will have access to it. After one year, data will be destroyed. All identifiers will be removed from data summaries. In this study, you will not be identified by name, and no names or identifying information will be used in any publication or presentation.

### **Participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are permitted to ask questions throughout participation. You are free to refrain from answering questions you choose to omit and/or are

free to withdraw from the study at any time or/and for any reason. You do not need to give a reason for this. If you choose to omit questions or withdraw from the study, you will still receive compensation.

If you sign this form or state in an e-mail that you agree with this form, it will indicate that you have understood the information regarding your participation in the study and agree to participate. This does not waive your legal rights nor release the researchers or involved institutions from legal and profession responsibilities.

**Questions**

Should you have any questions or comments about this study, please contact the principal investigator, Julie Rubinger, [Julie.Rubinger@ryerson.ca](mailto:Julie.Rubinger@ryerson.ca), or the supervisor, Sandra Tullio-Pow, [stullio@ryerson.ca](mailto:stullio@ryerson.ca), 416-979-5000, Ext. 6528, or The Ryerson University Ethics Board, Nancy Walton, PhD, Chair, Ryerson University REB, [rebchair@ryerson.ca](mailto:rebchair@ryerson.ca), 416-979-5042.

**Consent**

I have had the opportunity to consider this study, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to take part in the research study with the understanding I may withdraw at any time. I will receive a signed copy of this consent form or copy of this form with accompanying agreement email. I voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

I \_\_\_\_\_, have read the above information and hereby consent to participate in this research study.

I \_\_\_\_\_, have read the above information and hereby consent to my interview being audiotaped.

Participant's Name & Date [Please Type]

\_\_\_\_\_

by checking this box and returning this form from my personal e-mail account I indicate my consent to participate in this study.

by checking this box and returning this form from my personal e-mail account I indicate my consent to my interview being audiotaped.

## Appendix D

### Demographic Questionnaire

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RYERSON UNIVERSITY

#### *Demographic Questionnaire*

Please mark an X by the most appropriate answer. Please remember that your responses to the questions are confidential, and you are free to stop or omit questions. Please e-mail back to the primary researcher, [Julie.Rubinger@ryerson.ca](mailto:Julie.Rubinger@ryerson.ca), when you have completed the form.

**Are you female?**

- Yes
- No (If no, please do not complete this form)

**How old are you?**

- 18 years of age and below
- 19 to 25 years of age
- 26 to 30 years of age
- 31 to 35 years of age
- 36 years of age and above

**What is your household status?**

**(Please check the one that applies)**

- Married/living with partner
- Living alone
- Living with relatives
- Living with friends

**Do you have any children?**

- Yes
- No

**What is the highest level of education that you have ever attained?**

- Some high school education
- High school diploma
- Some post-secondary education
- Post-secondary degree or certificate or diploma
- Graduate degree

**How many years ago did you graduate?  
(from your last level of education)**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year ago or less | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 years ago         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 years ago        | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 years ago         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 years ago        | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 years ago         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 years ago        | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 years ago or more |

**What sector do you work in?  
(Categories taken from Statistics Canada)**

- Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Leasing
- Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
- Business, Building and Other Support
- Educational Services
- Health Care and Social Assistance
- Information, Culture and Recreation
- Accommodation and Food Services
- Public Administration
- Other

**What is your total household income for all sources, before taxes or other deductions?**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than \$20,000  | <input type="checkbox"/> \$71,000 - \$100,000   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$21,000 - \$50,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> Greater than \$100,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$51,000 - \$70,000 |   |

What is your usual clothing size?

- |                            |                             |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 12 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 14 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 16 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8 | <input type="checkbox"/> 18 |
|                            | <input type="checkbox"/> 20 |

**What is your height?**

- 5" and below
- 5.1" – 5.5"
- 5.6" – 6"
- 6.1" and above

What part of the city do you live in?

- Rural
- Suburban
- Urban

*Thank you for your participation*

**Appendix E**  
**Modified Standardized Anxiety Scale (STICSA-T)**

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**MODIFIED VERSION OF STICSA-T QUESTIONNAIRE**

**STICSA-T QUESTIONNAIRE SCRIPT**

I am going to recite a number of statements that can be used to describe how people feel towards thinking about getting dressed for their professional job. I will read each statement and you will have to provide the appropriate answer to indicate how often each statement is true. There are four options you may answer: (1) Not at All, (2) A Little, (3) Moderately, and (4) Very Much. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time answering any one statement but give the answer that seems to describe how often each statement is true to you. Remember, that your responses to the questions are confidential and you are free to stop or omit questions at any time. May we begin?

**STICSA-T: Your General Mood State**

*Adapted from the original STICSA composed by Ree, MacLeod, French, and Locke, 2000*

**Instructions**

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Below is a list of statements that can be used to describe how people feel about getting dressed for their professional job.

Beside each statement are four numbers which indicate how often each statement is true of you (e.g., 1 = *not at all*, 4 = *very much so*). **Please read each statement carefully and circle the number which best indicates how often, in general, the statement is true of you.**

Not at all	A little	Moderately	Very much so
------------	----------	------------	--------------

---

- |  |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1. My heart beats fast when thinking about what clothes I will wear to work  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. My muscles are tense when thinking about what clothes I will wear to work |   |   |   |   |
| 3. I feel agonized over what clothes I will wear to work                     |   |   |   |   |
| 4. I think that others won't approve of the clothes I wear to work           |   |   |   |   |

5. I feel like I'm missing out on things because I can't make up my mind soon enough about what clothes to wear to work
6. I feel dizzy when thinking about what clothes I will wear to work
7. My muscles feel weak when thinking about what clothes I will wear to work
8. I feel trembly and shaky when thinking about what clothes I will wear to work
9. I picture some misfortune when I think about the clothes I wear to work
10. I can't get thoughts of what clothes I will wear to work out of my mind
11. I have trouble remembering things when focusing on what clothes I will wear to work
12. My face feels hot when thinking about what clothes I will wear to work
13. I think that the worst will happen if I wear the "wrong" clothes to work
14. My arms and legs feel stiff when thinking about what clothes I will wear to work
15. My throat feels dry when thinking about what clothes I will wear to work
16. I keep busy to avoid uncomfortable thoughts about my professional wardrobe
17. I cannot concentrate without irrelevant thoughts about what clothes I will wear to work intruding
18. My breathing is fast and shallow when thinking about what clothes I will wear to work
19. I worry that I cannot control my thoughts when thinking about what clothes I will wear to work
20. I have butterflies in my stomach when thinking about what clothes I will wear to work
21. My palms feel clammy when thinking about what clothes I will wear to work

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