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Youth culture, clothing, and communicative messages

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YOUTH CULTURE, CLOTHING, AND
COMMUNICATIVE MESSAGES

by

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Bachelor of Science
Southern Utah University
2001

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

**Master of Arts Degree in Communication Studies
Hank Greenspun School of Communication
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs**

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ABSTRACT

Youth Culture, Clothing, and Communicative Messages

by

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As a nonverbal form of communication, clothing reveals much about its wearers. In addition to exposing attitudes, values, beliefs, and other personal traits, individuals can utilize clothing to disseminate deliberate, symbolic messages. This project focuses on youth subcultures and the messages associated with their strategically constructed clothing images. It addresses how they display in-group affiliation and out-group separation through the management of clothing. It discusses how individuals can increase their personal value with in-group members as they manage their apparel in appropriate and deliberate ways. This thesis also notes the multiple influences that affect the clothing choices of youth subcultures and others. Finally, through an analysis of young people's perceptions of their own subcultures, clothing uses, and influences on their clothing styles, this project demonstrates how clothing serves multiple and various functions for youth subcultures and other young people.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

From the early to mid 1990's, I was involved in a subculture known simply as "skaters." This was a group of teenagers who rode skateboards, listened to punk rock and "alternative" music, and generally got into trouble with local law enforcement. It was not uncommon for us to have extreme hairstyles (long, colored, spiked, etc.), body piercings, and tattoos. This was before these practices became as commonplace among America's youth as they are today. We also wore excessively large pants and shirts, skateboarding shoes, and other skateboarding brand apparel. There are several significant things about the lifestyle we led. First, we managed our clothing in specific ways to project a rebel image and to connect with our skater peers. Due to our behavior and images we were feared, hated, or loved. These reactions were dependent upon others' associations with us, whether inside or outside of our culture. Since that time, I have always noted what people wear, and pondered what they are trying to communicate to the public, if anything at all. This project is the culmination and product of my personal identification with those who manage their identities through their clothing.

Clothing serves as a personal indicator of status, occupation, group affiliation, and other individually revealing features (Joseph, 1986). It can be functional in its uses and diverse in its styles; thus, different individuals and groups utilize it for varied reasons. Through its management, individuals overtly or unconsciously send visually oriented messages to the public. These messages are symbolic in nature and represent individuals' "values, beliefs, and emotions" (Joseph, 1986, p. 9). However, the above points merely hint at how complex clothing as communication can be.

In addition to these concepts of clothing and communication, there is the complication of understanding the messages unique to different groups of people. Groups convey and exhibit distinctly disseminated "intercultural" messages that out-group individuals may not comprehend. This process may involve verbal or nonverbal components. As intercultural messages emerge into somewhat established patterns and practices, groups can literally become subcultures, where norms, values, and communicative practices are exclusively expressed and defined.

Youth cultures, the groups of focus in this project, present unique messages that appear to permeate their lifestyles. Their cultures contain "distinctive vision[s] of social reality" that shape their actions and the communicative messages of those actions (Schwartz & Merton, 1967, p. 457). In addition, youth cultures are diverse, and as this thesis will show, they include subcultures with varied systems of communication. Ultimately, this complicates the study of these

groups, but it also allows for an increased knowledge base regarding the societies within this country.

This thesis will focus on the nonverbal communicative aspects of clothing, and how youth cultures use them to display public messages. In this effort, a groundwork of related and successive topics will be established for the reader. The basis for this work lies in pre-established scholarly knowledge of such topics as nonverbal communication, symbolic communication, clothing and fashion, intercultural communication, youth subcultures, and related areas. In addition, this study assesses what things influence youth and youth subcultures to manage their clothing in particular ways, and the communicative messages of their clothing.

Several assumptions arise from the literature and previous research related to these topics. First, individuals within subcultures manage their clothing to increase identification with one another. Second, subcultures utilize clothing to differentiate themselves from others in society. Finally, individuals gain personal value with in-group members through the use and management of particular clothing styles. The participant responses from the questionnaires disseminated for this work also produce valuable insights in addition and related to the concepts described above.

Ultimately, the purpose of this project is to identify culture-specific communicative patterns as they relate to clothing management and the participants in this project. This work should provide an increased understanding regarding what these youth subcultures do to manage their identities via clothing

and why they engage in such practices. Grounded theory provides the method for this study. In addition, the use and analysis of a qualitative questionnaire will reveal much about the above concepts. In the questionnaire analysis, participants' demographic information, clothing uses, group affiliations, and personal influences will be revealed. Lastly, this project's findings and limitations and additional, related research are explored herein. It is presumed that this research will support previous literature and ideas and that new ideas regarding the sampled group will emerge.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review of literature, key topics and related theoretical concepts shed further light on the ideas supporting this research. These aspects provide a deductive rationale as a baseline for this study.

Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interaction is the theory that reoccurs throughout and unites much of the ideas given herein. This theory explains how individuals give meaning to their social interactions and their environments via social, symbolic interactions. Symbols include words, gestures and other culturally defined forms of communication with ascribed meanings (Reynolds, 2003). Social interaction is the root of how humans understand their social experience.

According to Mead, human life is “a continual process of ongoing *activity*” (Scott, 1995, p. 101). Throughout this constant process, human interaction provides a construction of reality where daily “objects” are identified in culturally and subjectively distinct ways. Thus, the objects in individuals’ lives are defined and given particular meaning. For example, a “spouse” is given certain significance and respect as directed by cultural understanding. Mead also posits

that “the most important elements of the external world that actors [people] must interpret are other people and their actions. As the significance of others is constructed through the use of symbols, social interaction is symbolically mediated: it is ‘symbolic interaction’” (p.102). Furthermore, Blumer states that social experience and the construction of reality is guided by cultural beliefs and practices which provide individuals with a “cognitive ‘map’, a conceptual orientation that soothes the course of their actions” (p. 103). Ultimately, individualized contexts are understood through cultural lenses, which give meaning to daily interactions and events.

This theory explains much of what is exhibited in this project. Youth subcultures have unique communicative practices and ascribe subjective meaning to interactive processes based upon their cultural experiences and perspectives. They interact and ascribe meaning to their communication much like the rest of society; they construct meaning based on their worldviews. Clothing is but one conduit by which this phenomenon occurs.

Nonverbal Communication and Clothing

Bull (2002) states that nonverbal communication includes vocal features of spoken language such as “intonation, stress, speech rate, accent and loudness” (p. 26). In his explanation of nonverbal communication, he also includes “facial movements, gaze, pupil size, body movement, and interpersonal distance” as well as “communication through touch, smell, through various kinds of artifacts such as masks and clothes, or through formalized communication systems” (p.

26-27). According to these ideas, spoken language/words are not the only avenues through which messages are expressed. The communication process is more complex and involved than the mere content of spoken messages. Language, with its strategies of persuasion, slang, or finesse, accompanies nonverbal components in a *complete* process of communication. In addition, nonverbal and verbal messages work individually and simultaneously. While they amplify, minimize, contradict, and regulate one another, they also provide their own individual messages (Burgoon & Bacue, 2003). For example, the content of the statement, "Give me the pen," simply stands as a direction to a receiver of the message. The nonverbal elements associated with the statement could indicate power, intimacy, or a myriad of other pragmatic aspects of the message.

Nonverbal messages are also "pseudo-spontaneous," meaning that they involve the "intentional and propositional manipulation on the part of the sender of expressions virtually identical to spontaneous displays, which to the receiver can be functionally equivalent to valid spontaneous displays" (Buck & VanLear, 2002, p. 526). This differentiation between pseudo-spontaneous and spontaneous communication is important here because it illustrates how deliberate nonverbals can be. Buck and VanLear (2002) describe spontaneous communication as involuntary, direct, and utilized when communicators recognize and share symbolic understanding/meaning. It includes spoken language, facial expressions, gestures, micromovements, postures, and other physical and/or linguistic elements.

Buck and VanLear (2002) did not explicitly note clothing as a feature of pseudo-spontaneous communication, but it exemplifies the concept well. For example, in agreement with the concept of pseudo-spontaneous communication, clothing can intentionally manipulate a message that is “not necessarily known consciously by the receiver” (Buck and VanLear, 2002, p. 526). Its uses can be premeditated by the sender of the message, and disguised as natural, or spontaneous, interaction.

By itself, nonverbal communication involves many components, including kinesics, haptics, face and eye expressions, voice fluctuations, physical appearance, proxemics, and environmental factors (Burgoon & Bacue, 2003). The focus herein is on the nonverbal aspect of clothing. Clothing expresses many multifaceted messages and stands as an outward expression of its wearer’s needs, values, and other traits. Leathers (1976) states that apparel “probably represents the most important artifactual means of modifying appearance” (p. 110). “Artifactual” refers to the various ornaments, coverings and accessories individuals put on their bodies in deliberate ways. According to Leathers (1992), artifacts are:

those things that humans can wear on their bodies, do to their bodies, or use as extensions of their bodies for purposes of exercising conscious control over their personal appearance. Chief among such artifactual means are clothing, accent items, hairstyle, as well as care and treatment, eyeglasses, contact lenses, raincoats, and purses and briefcases. (p. 157)

Although Leathers noted these specific items as artifacts 13 years ago, they are pertinent and applicable to today's grooming and appearance standards and practices.

Together, the nonverbal and verbal elements of messages combine to complete their many connotative meanings. Connotative meanings are understood in specific contexts, and influenced by individuals' "feelings about... situations, categories, and labels" (Campbell & Burkholder, 1997, p. 11). The way people connotatively define others' talents, associations, and other attributes has much to do with their dress and appearance. According to the theory of symbolic interaction, individuals interpret and formulate subjective meaning from the communication they have with others (Jeon, 2004). Although the connotative meanings associated with others' appearances are subjectively defined by a viewer/receiver, the wearer/sender of the messages can send purposeful messages that reveal many personal traits. Thus, the nonverbal messages people send via their clothing can be managed for specific purposes. This phenomenon and the deliberate use of clothing as an identifying tool will be addressed later in this thesis.

Symbols and Clothing

To understand dyadic communication one must consider the multitude of symbols that exist everywhere, always. In spoken language, symbols are words, or arbitrary representations, of things or ideas such as "house" or "honor." There is no inherent connection between the words/symbols and the things that they

represent (Scott, 1995). However, as the theory of symbolic interaction holds, symbols have contextually and socially defined meanings despite their random connections with concepts and objects (Morrione, 2004). Furthermore, the idea of “‘meaning’ is one of the major elements in understanding human behaviour [sic], interactions, and social processes” (Jeon, 2004, p. 250).

As group members mutually agree upon symbolic meaning through interactions and pre-established social norms, a system or culture can form with unique modes of communication and understanding. Therefore, according to symbolic interactionism, people understand symbols based on culturally influenced definitions (Morrione, 2004). For example, the word/symbol “dog” could be synonymous with *food* in one culture, or a *pet* in another. As explained above, the different meanings are culturally defined. Additionally, the word/symbol “rain” may refer to a desired and much needed element for desert dwellers. In more lush regions of the world, “rain” may be a daily occurrence that is regularly anticipated and taken for granted. Consequently, the groups/cultures of these contrasting regions attach differing significance and meaning to the symbol, “rain.”

Clothing is also symbolic and represents ideologies or meanings that are socially established. Much like spoken language, the meaning of clothing “will vary tremendously depending upon the identity of the wearer, the occasion, the place, the company, and even something as vague and transient as the wearer’s and the viewer’s moods” (Davis, 1992, p. 8). For example, symbolic clothing can include uniforms and identification badges, which indicate authority, social

position, and/or occupation. They could also symbolize oppression, justice, or other socially defined meanings. According to McLuhan and McLuhan (1988), “all human artefacts [sic] are human utterances, or outerings, and as such they are linguistic and rhetorical entities” (p. 128). Artifacts of the human body may include jewelry, clothing and other ornaments. In any case, they are representations or communicative aspects of the wearer.

For the purposes of this study and analysis, an emphasis on personal image is essential. However, this study is limited to the artifact of “clothing,” which includes pants, shirts, skirts, dresses, shoes, hats and other related items. It does not include jewelry, make-up, tattoos, or other “outerings,” as McLuhan and McLuhan describe above. This is to narrow the focus and provide a manageable topic of study herein. In addition, clothing is worn by everyone, whereas jewelry, tattoos, and handbags are not as universal among research participants.

An Extension of the Self

In addition to its symbolic nature, clothing is a form of media. According to a traditional mass communication definition, media are the channels through which messages are sent (Chesebro & Bertelsen, 1996). When adapting this ideology to interpersonal interactions one must consider the media individuals use to send and receive messages. As it was previously established, clothes are symbols through which people can display personal values, beliefs, and emotions. These messages are sent through apparel as the medium. Furthermore, according to Roach-Higgins, Eicher, and Johnson (1995), “we learn to depend upon dress to

declare our identity to ourselves and others, to pave a way for interaction with others, and to maintain positive feelings of personal identity” (p. 99). Thus, individuals rely upon clothing to display and define their identity to the world and themselves.

McLuhan (1964) describes the *power* of the media to be *within* the media themselves. McLuhan applies this concept rather broadly, but if one is to adapt this ideology to clothing, this medium has the potential to influence others far beyond initial recognition. For example, people may overwhelmingly ignore others in public and disregard the fashions passing them by on the street. However, one red, rhinestone covered leather jacket can penetrate through the media barraged senses. Thus, the *power* of this medium can be expressed in similar ways everyday as individuals adjust their apparel to gain or minimize attention, credibility, and other social responses.

Lipsitz (2001) gives an overt example of the power of the medium of apparel: During the fall semester of the 2000-2001 academic year, Native American students at San Diego State University mobilized against their school’s use of the nickname Aztecs for university athletic teams and against the symbolism encoded in the school mascot—Monty Montezuma, a half-naked warrior in battle regalia....One protestor found a particularly effective way of dramatizing the stakes of the debate. He wore a T-shirt emblazoned with a slogan that parodied the title of a country-and-western song popularized by Willie Nelson in 1980, from the sound track of the film *The Electric Horseman*, “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys”....The

message on the student's shirt changed just one word in the song's title, but to devastating effect. It read "My Heroes Have Always *Killed* Cowboys." (p. 235)

Though this example illustrates an obvious communicative message due to its form in writing, there are other factors to consider. First, the person wearing the shirt is affiliated with a particular group: the protestors. Second, the explicit message on the protestor's shirt not only linked him with that group, but its value system as well. Group affiliation and its relation to clothing and communication will be covered in more depth later in this thesis. The third point of this example is the power of the message due to the nature of the medium. As noted above, the actual medium, the T-shirt, is itself a direct, distinct, and expressive conduit of information. Similarly, other less direct forms of apparel can still exude powerful *connotative* messages as well.

As described above, clothing can powerfully communicate much about a person. This is done as a literal extension of the human self, where the physiological senses are extended in (this case) a communicative act (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988). According to this thinking, clothing is an extension of the skin and, as such, a part of the self (McLuhan, 1967). Therefore, it is noteworthy to address the self, or an individual's self-concept, which includes the subjective traits that are extended, or communicated, to others. Firstly, Blumer (2005) defines the self simply as "the object that the individual is to himself or herself" (Morrione, 2004, p. 57). Additionally, a person may fulfill multiple roles (i.e. parent, employee, and/or student) and recognize him/herself as one or more of

them. This self-concept is developed over time through social interactions, education, and other life experiences. The theory of symbolic interaction holds that the “self” is a product of social interaction, developed and refined through an on-going process of participation in society” (Jeon, 2004, p. 250). Clothing interrelates here because, “appearance is of major importance at every stage of the early development of the self” (Stone, 1995, p. 19). In addition, “clothing is a major medium of communication and, as such, is the major means by which we establish our self-identity in interpersonal communication” (Leathers, 1976, p. 110).

What parts of the self are exhibited, or extended, via clothing and its uses? One personal aspect clothing displays is the group to which one belongs. As noted above, cultures or groups and their shared symbol systems are important in symbolic interaction processes. In varied contexts, such as among subcultures, clothing serves valuable and multiple functions that are addressed throughout this thesis.

Intercultural Communication

Dop (2001) defines a culture as “the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes beliefs, customs, and traditions of a particular group of people” (p.75). Ultimately, these practices, religions, beliefs, ideologies, and traditions of cultures are preceded and perpetuated by communication (Craig, 1999). It is the interaction, verbal and/or nonverbal, that allows for social organization, evolution, and communion. As cultures establish and develop themselves in various ways,

they form in-group communicative functions and practices. In-groups are those people with whom individuals identify. The unique communicative interactions among group members involve symbol systems that may or may not be understood by out-group members, or those people who are viewed as different (Wann & Grieve, 2005). Just as verbal languages vary across cultures or groups, nonverbal messages vary. Adler, et al. (2005) illustrate this concept in the following example:

Fiorello La Guardia, legendary mayor of New York from 1933 to 1945, was fluent in English, Italian, and Yiddish. Researchers who watched films of his campaign speeches found that they could tell with the sound turned off which language he was speaking by noticing the changes in his nonverbal behavior. (p. 223)

Similar to the nonverbal behaviors noted in this example, other nonverbal messages can also reveal the culture or group to which an individual belongs. In this study, clothing serves that function.

Youth Subcultures and Their Influences

Subcultures exemplify intercultural communication. However, within youth subculture systems individuals exhibit the patterns and practices unique to their age. Thus, *youth* subcultures exhibit communicative behaviors that are unique to their groups. When these groups form, distinctive patterns of interaction emerge and advance. In this movement, "youth culture consists of those adolescent norms, standards, and values which are discussed in a language particularly

intelligible to members of this age-grade" (Schwartz & Merton, 1967, p. 457).

The "language" of youth subcultures is expressed interculturally in both verbal and nonverbal means.

Schwartz and Merton (1967) provide a valuable criterion for categorizing a youth subculture. They state that a group's norms should "provide its members with a distinctive world view, a style of life, and the standards against which they can measure their own worth" (p. 468). In addition, Wood (2000) provides a more contemporary, but similar explanation of a subculture that can be utilized for this project. He states, "subcultures comprise sets of norms values, and beliefs, along with networks of individuals, objects, and relationships designed for the purpose of subcultural boundary communication and maintenance... subcultures are 'cultures within cultures'" (Wood, 2000, p. 26). According to these criteria and this author's deduction, youth subcultures have distinct lifestyles that separate them at some level from mainstream society. Otherwise, they would not be in a "sub" category.

The media and others can influence these subcultures because they have the power to affect groups' thinking and perceptions about themselves (Littlejohn, 2002). This power to influence the public is significant because media icons and other influential people stand as subcultural examples or "guidance" regarding the appropriate uses and expressions of clothing. Professional athletes, peers, musicians, politicians, and others may stand as these social examples; and, as Simmel (1971) states, "fashion is the imitation of a given example and satisfies the demand for social adaptation" (p. 296).

Besides mediated models of fashion, significant others may also influence apparel choices and management. A significant other is “an individual who is or has been deeply influential in one’s life, and in whom one is or once was emotionally invested, including members of one’s family-of-origin and people encountered outside of family relations” (Andersen, Chen, & Miranda, 2002, p. 160). Thus, counselors, ecclesiastical leaders, coaches, relatives, friends, teachers, and the like can all qualify as significant others. Their examples of clothing management may also be observed and imitated by youth subcultures.

Much of what has separated youth subcultures from other (especially older) groups has been their management of clothing. There are exemplars or idols of subcultural style for the many groups that exist. Among the various youth subculture factions, there are gang, punk, hip-hop, rave, club, jock, preppy, and other divisions. A few of these subcultures will be illustrated below.

The first example of youth subculture and distinct fashion given herein is associated with punk rock music. This music scene embraced clothing and an image where “it was fashionable to look like the morning after, on the night before” (Kennedy, 2000, p. 54). This group twisted other, more mainstream styles for their own expression and purposes. For example, a simple yet distinct aspect of punk rock style among youth was the Dr. Marten work boot. Initially made for postal workers and police officers in England in 1960, the shoe was adopted and distinctly adapted by the punk subculture (Cardona, 2000). The bootlaces were changed to different colors and permanent markers branded the sides of the boots with punk logos, slogans, and band names. These are a few

examples of how this youth culture used visual extensions of the self to separate themselves from other groups.

The second group of focus involves fans of the hip-hop music scene. The following passage from Taylor and Taylor (2004) describes the hip-hop culture and its far reaching influence:

Throughout the last 25 years, a new form of expression has continually evolved... This form of expression that was once limited to urban music and dance has become a wide-spread form of communication and expression by young people throughout the world... It represents a multi-billion dollar industry that influences everything from automotive design and fashion to primetime television programming... and Madison Avenue advertising... Today Hip-Hop is for many a way of life, a culture that is intricately woven into every aspect of their daily lives. (p. 251)

A key concept in this excerpt is the idea of hip-hop as a widespread form of communication with a major influence on fashion and lifestyle, among other things. According to the authors, these things permeate hip-hop fans' lives. Thus, as an extension of the self, hip-hop fashion displays a consistent subcultural identity.

The third example, gang subculture, has also been known for utilizing specific, stylistic attributes in clothing. For examples, in the 1990's, gang members in California wore Raiders football team jerseys, shirts, and other apparel, at times with their names embroidered on them. This was done to profess publicly one's membership in a particular gang (Burke, 1991). This

visual identification of membership with a particular gang may have endangered the wearer in some contexts, but protected him/her in others. For example, if he/she encountered a rival gang, this identification could be hazardous. On the other hand, other members of the same gang would recognize the specific fashion and protect anyone with a similar “uniform” (Burke, 1991, p. 12). Gangs today still use apparel in similar ways to express group membership. It is significant that gang members chance wearing symbols, or extensions of their self, that could provoke personal harm. However, it appears that affiliation with the subculture is worth the potential price.

The final example of youth subculture is an informal culture, not as unified by activity, theme, or intent similar to the three groups previously described. Still, dress identifies its numbers, as they utilize apparel to separate (or hide) themselves from others. These individuals were observed by McCormick (2003) in an ethnographic study in an inner-city high school. McCormick found that some students wore oversized clothes, hats, and/or hoods that covered their faces. These styles (paired with physically minimizing postures) served to “hide” them from authority figures in their high school. Across the United States, many young people utilize clothing in similar fashions. They are labeled and grouped by others, if not by themselves, as outsiders on the fringes of normality, mainstream society, or “regular” lifestyles. Here, they serve to illustrate another type of youth subculture, one where the culture may or may not be unified or formalized by practice or the congregation of its members. However, the use of clothing has a distinct purpose: to aid in social disappearance.

As illustrated by these four examples, subcultures appear to have varied influences and motivations associated with their clothing choices. In the following section, several key functions and assumptions associated with these clothing choices will be addressed.

Functions and Assumptions of Clothing Management

Group members *display* clothing, and thus establish their *alignment*, or mode of social contact, in a situation (Goffman, 1979). However, as Goffman (1979) further explains:

Displays don't communicate in the narrow sense of the term; they don't enunciate something through a language of symbols openly established and used solely for that purpose. They provide evidence of the actor's alignment in the situation. And displays are important insofar as alignments are. (p. 1)

In this explanation, Goffman compared displays to direct, more obvious, discourse. Displays, which include clothing management, are somewhat ambiguous; yet they still serve social and communicative functions. Goffman also explained the pragmatic and contextual nature of displaying certain behaviors. He proposed that individuals utilize specific types of displays (including clothing management) influenced by a given place and time among particular people. Thus, the functions of clothing noted below can be

accomplished as people manage their images within particular contexts, such as with members of an in-group or out-group.

One function of clothing illustrated by the three examples given above is that it serves to differentiate (Leathers, 1976; Simmel, 1971; Swain, 2003). For example, people have “church clothes,” “school clothes,” and “play clothes.” Church, school, or play are all activities differentiated in part by the clothing people wear while engaging in them. Similarly, a business suit and casual clothing can also differentiate between the occupational roles of a businessperson and a cab driver. Finally, each group in the youth subculture examples given previously was differentiated by their clothing from the mainstream society. Apparel literally functioned to separate them from society into various youth subcultures.

The youth subculture examples not only demonstrate how clothing functions as a differentiator between mainstream and subculture groups, but they show how clothing serves to connect in-group members. This second function is especially important because “style and appearance are among the most important elements of subcultural identity” (Crane, 2000, p. 187). The following explanation illustrates this point further:

For adolescents and young adults who do not want to belong to the workforce, dress is an aspect of their lives they can control relatively easily and that they can use to make statements about themselves and their attitudes towards their social environment. Borrowing from existing styles and combining them in new ways, they put possessions, clothing, and hairstyles

together in such a way as to define an identity that expresses the personal experiences and situations of a particular group. (Crane, 2000, p. 187)

This view of subcultures exemplifies how they unite via their image, including the specific use of clothing, further connecting in-group members. This author assumes that the first function reinforces this second one. Consequently, as subcultures are continuously differentiated from mainstream and other groups, individuals seek to solidify their union and position within a group of some kind.

Lastly, for some people, clothing functions to enhance personal prestige or value. As Roach-Higgins, Eicher, and Johnson (1995) posit, “we learn to depend upon dress to declare our identity to ourselves and others... and to maintain positive feelings of personal identity” (p. 99). Thus, clothing can be beneficial for individuals’ identity. In American society and among its subcultures, some clothing styles are more recognizable, popular, and/or sturdy. This study proposes that individuals seek to exhibit certain clothing styles as an extension of the self. Consequently, they link themselves with certain apparel and increase their personal “value” within their group or society. Here, enhanced value can be evidenced by increased popularity, status, or affiliation with in-group members.

According to Leathers (1976), in an interaction, nonverbal communication is the dominant force and is more efficient than verbal communication. Thus, clothing, a nonverbal form of communication, can express and exhibit a person’s value in significant ways. When the mainstream or in-group members recognize a person’s clothing choices and styles as acceptable, they reinforce them, and the person, as valued. Reinforcement is expressed through various forms of

social approval, which is gained by following “societal [or cultural] rules, regulations, norms, and laws” (Leathers, 1992, p. 209). Therefore, if the norms of a culture indicate how certain apparel is to be managed, then matching those practices can enhance a person's value in that group.

This project stands as a support of the previous literature and research, which indicates that clothing serves to differentiate groups from others in society. It also supports the idea that clothing connects in-group members and helps them to identify with one another, their values, and practices. In addition, this thesis presupposes that individuals increase their personal value within their groups using various, yet specific and deliberate, clothes. Increased personal value involves a status enhancement of some sort. This is defined by individual groups and could include such personal traits as integrity, intelligence, rebellion, or other attributes that are significant to a particular culture. As youth subcultures fulfill the three functions noted above in their clothing management, they are influenced by media icons, significant others and other individuals. Ultimately, the participant responses gathered as a part of this study will shed further light on the ideas and presuppositions established from the literature review provided above. They will reveal what groups respondents belong to, how they utilize clothing to associate with these groups, and tell what types of apparel they wear. They will also expose influences on participants' clothing choices and provide personal insights on respondents' clothing management.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND DATA DESCRIPTION

On September 9, 2005, prior to any human subject research activities, this methodology was approved by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (see Appendix II). This board is an auxiliary of the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory guided the research methods for his study. These methods provide "systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data" in order to "explain the collected data" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 509). In addition, grounded theory is "an approach for generating theory that is grounded in systematically derived data, with an emphasis on the comparative method of constant, concurrent data collection and analysis" (Jeon, 2004, p. 252). The grounded theory techniques used for this study include: "(a) simultaneous collection and analysis of data, (b) a two-step data coding process, (c) comparative methods, (d) memo writing aimed at the construction of conceptual analyses, (e) sampling to refine the researcher's emerging theoretical ideas, and (f) integration of the theoretical framework" (Charmaz, 2000, pp. 510-511). The

way these processes were employed in this study is explained in more detail below.

The Questionnaire

First, a qualitative questionnaire (see Appendix I) was utilized for the efforts of this study in order to gain "rich data with thick description[s]" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 514). Mostly open-ended responses were required for the questions and statements given in the instrument. The purpose of this format was to allow respondents to express their ideas freely, within practically established boundaries. The following questions and statements were given on the questionnaire:

1. Members of subcultures and other groups can have a distinct *view of the world* and unique *lifestyle*. These things can influence their clothing choices.

Are you a part of a particular group or subculture? If so, which one?
2. Do you use clothing to display your connection or membership with a group or subculture? If so, how?
3. How does your clothing help to define who you are?
4. What are you trying to express through your clothing?
5. Describe the styles or types of clothing you commonly wear.
6. Where do you purchase your clothing?
7. How do forms of media such as books, television, movies, and music influence your use of clothing?

8. Why do you wear the clothing that you wear?

In addition to the qualitative information obtained from the questionnaire, basic demographic information about the participants was also acquired. This included the respondents' sex, race/ethnicity, and age.

Research Participants

This study took place at a large southwestern university. Participants included undergraduate students from basic communication courses. The sample size was 79 respondents. The university has a diverse ethnic, racial, and economic population, thus providing a more representative, though convenient, sample. A relatively equal ratio of young men and women was sampled. Minors and members of other vulnerable populations were not used for this study.

Data Collection Procedures

The procedures established by the Office for The Protection of Human Service were followed to acquire the data for this study. The qualitative data was collected in the following manner: After obtaining permission from basic course instructors, a graduate student researcher attended several classes to access a convenient sample of respondents. The nature of the study was described to the students as it relates to youth subcultures, clothing, and communication. Consent forms were explained and given to the students for their reference. After students had an opportunity to ask questions, they were given the questionnaire to complete outside of class and return at the next scheduled class

time. If they were not comfortable with participating in the study, they did not have to answer the questionnaire. The respondents were given consent forms that they kept. By turning in the questionnaires, the respondents agreed to participate in the study. The consent forms stated that the questionnaire was completed on a voluntary basis and that answers were kept confidential. This information was also explained verbally to the participants.

The questionnaire orientation and directions read as follows:

Your participation in this research project is voluntary. All information you provide will remain anonymous and your name is not required on the questionnaire or used in the results of this study. The purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain students' ideas about clothing, communication and subcultures. *Please use as much space as you need to respond to the following questions/statements.* Please return the questionnaire to the graduate student researcher during the next scheduled class session. Your participation in this study is appreciated.

These instructions were also read to the participants. When all of the surveys were distributed, the study was explained, and questions regarding the study were answered, the researcher left each class. During the next scheduled class sessions the graduate student researcher collected the completed questionnaires.

Data Analysis

As participant responses were analyzed for themes, discrepancies, and other noteworthy pieces of information, codes were created. As Charmaz (2000) explains, coding enables the researcher "to gain a new perspective on...[his/her] material" (p. 515). Thus, the codes in this study emerged, as commonalities among responses were examined and correlated with previous research and assumptions made herein. First, a line-by-line analysis of questionnaire responses occurred "in order to explore all possible aspects of issues and ideas in the data, and to develop descriptive codes as labels for the meanings of the issues and ideas" (Jeon, 2004, p. 253). After this step was accomplished, the questionnaire responses were divided into conceptual categories. As Jeon (2004) explains, this allows the initial, empirical codes to be integrated into theory in an attempt to explain the behaviors observed or presented. Thus, as concepts emerge from the data in categorical form, themes and patterns become theoretical constructs. Finally, constructs stand as the building blocks for the theoretical explanations in research such as this.

Comparing data is the next essential step in the coding aspect of grounded theory. This overall data comparison and analysis process involves, "(a) comparing different people (such as their views, situations, actions, accounts, and experiences), (b) comparing data from the same individuals with themselves... (c) comparing incident with incident, (d) comparing data with category, and (e) comparing a category with other categories" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 515). This approach helps to ensure that all aspects/comparisons of the data

are considered. In addition to qualitative information, various demographics were also compared in a qualitative manner with the questionnaire responses.

The next step in the data analysis was to document memos, or initial impressions of the data. As Charmaz (2000) indicates, this is/was the "intermediate step between coding and the first draft of the completed analysis" (p. 517). Writing memos aided in data exploration and linking "analytic interpretation with empirical reality" (p. 517). Jeon (2004) notes that, "memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding" (p. 253). This process allowed for patient scrutiny and thought as the data presented new ideas and phenomena. Once the data had been analyzed, coded, and described in memo form, theoretical sampling allowed for scrutiny of the themes, contexts, and constructs extracted from the data. Theory emerged during this process as constructs and phenomenon became more evident (Jeon, 2004). Identifying the conditions within which certain phenomenon occurred also allowed for explanation of the data in more narrative and concrete ways (Charmaz, 2000).

Because this study is guided by grounded theory techniques it expounds upon a *portion* of "social life....[its] people, social processes, and situations" (p. 522). It does not seek to explain the events surrounding entire societies. It uses narrative form to tell a story that reflects the ideas of the viewer and the viewed (Charmaz, 2000). In addition, grounded theory is utilized to develop evolving, dynamic theory, versus theories as finished products. This approach "gives a social theory its credibility or trustworthiness that can be understood fully only

within the context of the social world from which it was derived" (Jeon, 2004, p. 252). This approach requires that social theories mirror the social world and its processes that they seek to explain; they should develop in directions that may be unknown to their observers and participants. They should also remain flexible for adjustment based upon future theorists' observations of similar social and communicative phenomena.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

The number of respondents that participated in this study was 79. Of these 79, 39 were male, 38 were female, and two respondents did not indicate on the questionnaire whether they were male or female. Participants include 46 Caucasians, 3 Asians, 12 Hispanics, 7 African-Americans, 3 Pacific Islanders, and 8 individuals of mixed races (Caucasian/Native American/Asian, Lebanese/Trinidadian, Pacific Islander/Asian, Caucasian/Pacific Islander, African-American/Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Pacific Islander, African-American/Caucasian, and Hispanic/Pacific Islander/Asian).

According to the ages reported by research participants, most of the respondents qualify as "youth." To be exact, 71 of the respondents were 18-25 years of age, 6 were 26-30, 1 was 31-36, and 1 was in the 37-years-old and older category. Consequently, most of their comments could be applied to the realm of "youth subculture," assuming that they are involved with subcultures of some kind. However, only 36 of the respondents indicated that they belonged to a subculture. This allows for minimal insights from actual members of youth subcultures. However, various noteworthy pieces of information were gained

from the questionnaire's respondents, even if they claimed no affiliation with a group of some kind.

Subcultures and Their Clothing

Based on the questionnaire responses, 33 of the respondents' subcultures fell into four main categories or orientations: music, worldview, activities, and education related. The music-oriented subcultures included groups whose lifestyles involved punk rock, hip-hop/urban, rock, rhythm and blues, and alternative music styles. These individuals wear clothing that compliments the subcultures associated with their preferred music. At the very least, their styles do not contradict the images of the subcultures associated with their music preferences. For example, these individuals wear clothing such as band t-shirts that reveal their music preferences and associate them with those cultures. In a specific case, one respondent who subscribes to hip-hop culture wears the baggy pants and shirts (stereotypically) associated with that group. Another respondent wears black clothes and "skull shirts," exhibiting her association with the "alternative" music scene.

The subcultures associated with subjective worldviews included political, religious, and other groups with specific, overt value systems. One respondent within this category identified himself as a "hippie." This individual indicates that he "dress[es] more hippie," and "accessorize[s] with bracelets and hats." Another individual, who identified his subculture as Jewish, indicated that he wears formal clothing for worshipping in the Jewish Temple. A Mormon respondent stated that

he wore certain clothing that would give an impression that he is a “good, responsible individual.” Finally, one respondent stated that her (unnamed) subculture is a class of people where “high values” and “intelligence” are important. Interestingly, she does not feel that her clothing expresses anything about herself, even though she describes her clothing as “classy” and “designer,” a probable match for the culture with which she claimed association.

The subcultures that revolved around activities included such things as sports, collectables, dance, acting, art and other hobbies/interests. The respondents in this category included 2 skateboarders, 2 artists, a rock climber, and an “adrenaline junkie” (motorcycle rider), among others. The individuals involved with sports most often reported wearing clothing that would identify them with their subcultures. This clothing often includes shirts that identify athletic products by brand name. Although it may be difficult for the public to identify the artists by the clothing they wear, they do indicate that they wear clothing that reveals their artistic personalities through color and creativity. This category also contained 2 respondents who each associated themselves with computer/technology and anime (cartoon) subcultures, respectively. Both of these respondents stated that they do not wear any clothing that reveals their connection with these groups. They also indicated that they could wear clothing that alludes to these interests, but they choose not to.

The final main subculture category was the higher education/student population. In this category, 5 individuals described their college student status as a subculture. One respondent who is associated with this group identified

herself as a sorority member. Although sorority members can be easily recognized on college campuses with their shirts carrying the Greek lettering of their organizational affiliation, this respondent did not indicate that she wore this type of clothing. Only 2 of those who described the “college student” role as their subculture stated that they wore school related apparel. This included clothing with their school’s name on it.

Other subcultures listed by respondents that did not fall into any main categories were smokers, “teenage culture,” race related, and a subculture that is created by the individual as a mix of other subcultures. Interestingly, some of the groups or affiliations noted above may not normally be viewed as subcultural by the mainstream public. Respondents’ perceptions of subcultures are rooted in their subjective knowledge/education in combination with the brief explanation of a subculture given on the questionnaire. This explanation was meant to prime respondents to this topic in the research. It read, “Members of subcultures and other groups can have a distinct *view of the world* and unique *lifestyle*.” Based on this description and the respondents’ own understanding, respondents often ascribed themselves to groups that are otherwise unrecognized by mainstream America as “subcultures.” It appears that they broadly and subjectively defined this concept and/or felt a need to be a part of *any* subculture when answering the questionnaire.

In addition to the phenomenon noted above, 14 of the respondents indicated they do not use clothing to identify themselves with particular subcultures. These respondents may not consciously express anything via their images.

Alternatively, they may not recognize the actual use and affects of their clothing choices. For example, one of these respondents said she was of a high-class subculture. She also stated that she was not trying to express anything in particular through the management of her clothing. However, this same respondent indicated that she wears classy, designer clothes. This person may not recognize that her clothing management can reveal much about the group to which she professes affiliation. Alternatively, she could be wearing her clothing for other legitimate reasons. For example, her apparel could have been given to her or it may fit more comfortably than cheaper brands.

In another example, a respondent stated he is not a part of any group and does not use clothing to indicate affiliation with any group. However, he later stated he wears "skater shoes...and supercross t-shirts." This individual may also not recognize that his clothing affiliates him with some sort of group; in this case, it could be skateboarders or supercross (motorcycle) riders. Ultimately, some individuals may not deliberately, or consciously, express group association. It may be a secondary result as they seek to express other personal traits via clothing management.

Of the 36 individuals who indicated that they belonged to a subculture, 24 of them match their clothing with their particular groups. Only 12 of these respondents wear clothing that does not reflect their group practices, norms, values, and/or activities in some manner. Interestingly, some of the cultures provided by questionnaire respondents are questionably "youth subcultures." Artists, Mormons, Jews, smokers, computer lovers, and Hispanics are all groups

presented on the questionnaires, but they are not unique to youth alone.

However, it can be argued that within these categories there are youth aged groups with practices, norms, and beliefs unique to their age demographic. For example, computer/technology loving 18-25-years-olds may use technical jargon older generations are unaware of. Similarly, young Hispanics may experience a different worldview from older Hispanic individuals. Thus, considering that the average age of the questionnaire respondents is 18-25, a broader and decisively subjective understanding of “youth subcultures” is utilized and accepted herein.

Defining and Expressing the Self

Through Clothing Management

Many respondents (72) who both did and did not express affiliation with a group indicated that clothing was at least a partial indicator of their personal traits or identity. One individual noted that his clothing management reveals his originality. Another respondent claimed that her clothing revealed her “classic look, not too young, not too old.” Finally, another individual uses apparel to reveal her “laid back” nature. More than half of the respondents (72) agreed with this thinking; they also utilized clothing to reveal aspects of the self.

Nearly one third (28) of the total respondents took this ideology a step further. They explicitly associated their clothing management with subculture membership. For example, 5 respondents wear skateboard and other sport-specific clothing. Another individual admitted to wearing stereotypical “hippie” styles, thus connecting himself with that group. Lastly, one participant wears

“down to earth,” or casual styles, to connect with a relaxed, “college [student] subculture.”

In contrast, 13 of the respondents disagreed that their clothing defined them in any way. In addition, 5 of these same individuals did not feel that they expressed anything through their clothing. One respondent stated that her clothing does not define her, “although many believe this to be true.” However, she does utilize apparel to express what style she likes, a (debatably) more surface level self-expression. Another participant stated he is not defined by his clothing and he is “not trying to express anything” with his attire. Curiously, this same individual “only wear[s] Nike and Reebok shirts.” If this person is “not trying to express anything,” why is he so committed to these brand names? This person appears to be unaware of the messages he communicates via his appearance. On the other hand, it is possible that these brands fit better than others, and are consequently more comfortable. Finally, another individual stated that he expresses “nothing” through his use of clothing. However, he stated that his clothing styles are usually “casual.” Again, some kind of message is sent to the viewing public about this person’s level of formality, but it is apparently unknown to this individual.

Twelve of the respondents indicated that they express their uniqueness and/or originality through their apparel. Interestingly, the majority of these individuals also utilize apparel to associate themselves with particular groups. This appears to be a contradiction; is their clothing management utilized for group identification or individualized originality? In addition, 6 of them also

purchase their clothing at mainstream, popular stores, such as those found in mall shopping centers. If these respondents' desire is to express uniqueness, it seems that this would be difficult through common and popular styles found at mall shopping centers. This is based on the assumption that these individuals are not tweaking or accessorizing the initial clothing styles beyond intended use and recognition.

Specific Clothing Styles and Locations of Purchase

In regard to clothing styles, 46 respondents indicated that they commonly wear "casual" clothes. This category includes jeans, khaki shorts, cargo pants, t-shirts, tank tops, baseball hats, sneakers, flip-flop sandals, Hawaiian shirts and other related items. Perhaps this type of clothing is so predominate due to the majority demographic in this study: 18-25-year-old college students.

Presumably, many of these individuals do not have professional employment that requires formal attire. In addition, they can attend university classes in informal attire. Therefore, it can be assumed that much of their time is spent in casual apparel.

Despite the large number of participants who wear casual apparel, 35 of the research participants commonly wear nicer, expensive and/or formal clothing, such as skirts, suits, and other related items. This category also includes expensive brands found at more elite, high-class clothing stores. Another category includes 12 others who wear sports or activity related clothing such as

skateboarding shoes and sweat pants. Yet another group of 12 respondents acquire clothing where price and affordability are key components. These retailers include second-hand stores, Target, Wal-Mart, and stores with reduced priced name brand clothing such as TJ Maxx, Ross, Marshall's and Burlington Coat Factory. Another 6 research participants purchase clothing online, 7 had no preference, and 3 shop anywhere they can "find something appealing."

Most of the respondents (67) wear clothing purchased from department and other stores found in mall shopping centers. Many of these stores are name brand companies with merchandise labeled for and sold exclusively in their retail locations. These include such companies as GAP, Abercrombie and Fitch, Hollister, Pac Sun, and Billabong. Department stores noted in this category include Dillard's, JC Penney's, Macy's, Nordstrom and others typically found in mall shopping centers. Apparently, since the majority of respondents purchase clothing at these types of retailers, the mainstream, popular, name brand shops and department stores noted above must provide the clothing adaptable for a range of youth subcultures. However, according to the explanation of youth subcultures given in Chapter 2 of this thesis, *unique* practices and modes of expression emerge from and define youth (and other) subcultures. If similar, mainstream retailers provide the clothing for both types of participants in this study (those who do and do not claim association with subcultures), then what are the differences among their clothing choices? Are they truly associating themselves with specific groups via apparel? It is plausible that while specific clothing items may be purchased by differing groups at the same retailers, the

research participants still manage them in varied and unique ways. Thus, much subcultural uniqueness may emerge through deliberate, meaningful manipulation of mainstream articles of clothing and the addition of artifacts, versus purchases exclusively from culturally specific/oriented retail stores.

Media Influences on Clothing Choices

The majority of the questionnaire respondents (48) stated that the media (books, television, movies, music, and others) have an influence on what they wear. Respondents expressed desires to emulate musicians, television stars, and people in magazines. This may occur because of the clothing's appealing nature. For example, one respondent states, "many times when I see someone wear an outfit that is attractive I may be more influenced to try that particular style, even if it is not something I would commonly wear." In other cases, the attire may be pleasing because of the wearer's status in society. For example, another research participant states, "I once saw Acheston [sic] Kutcher wear a John Deere hat on this show "Punk'd" [and] I later went out and bought one." Thus, the actual clothing and its wearers can both influence the media consumers sampled herein to purchase certain apparel.

Seven other participants indicated that the medias' influence on their clothing choices was minimal. They indicated that the media *occasionally* influences them. In addition, 2 others stated that they look to other people who are "attractive" for ideas. Finally, 21 of the respondents indicated the media had no influence on their clothing choices. One of these individuals stated, "those

people [in the media] wear some pretty outrageous stuff and I don't care for much of it." Another declared, "I wear what I think is comfortable, not what other entities tell me is 'cool.'" Similarly, another respondent stated, "pop [culture] influence on clothing/image is sickening." These respondents appear to judge their management of clothing by standards other than those presented in the media.

Why They Wear What They Wear

When research participants were asked why they wore the clothing that they wore, 27 stated it was because, "they are comfortable." Although comfort was a common answer to this question, it is a multifaceted response. People are "comfortable" for different reasons. For example, one respondent stated that she wears certain clothing for "comfort and to look good for society." Another said his clothing is "comfortable and loose." Finally, a third respondent said her clothes give her comfort and they are not expensive. Thus, comfort is seemingly associated with social, physiological, and psychological factors/affects. A positive social image, wearing subjectively fitted apparel, and paying less money for clothes may all be antecedents to experiencing comfort.

Similarly, 15 individuals stated that they "feel good" wearing certain clothing. Within this group, certain fashions and/or materials have a positive effect on their wearers. One aspect that helps 3 participants to feel good is the increased self-confidence gained through their clothing. Not any clothing will accomplish this goal. As one respondent states, "dressing well adds confidence." Another

individual revealed, "It's cliché but they [clothing] help give me confidence." Here, increased self-confidence affiliated with certain apparel seems to be a factor in the clothing choices of these research participants.

Another group of 25 respondents indicated that they wear certain clothes because they "look good." This is a personalized response because these respondents display differing and even contrasting images. One individual reported wearing, "different styles depending on which mood [he is in]." He may wear a "'GQ' structure dress shirt" or a "polo [shirt] and shorts." Another individual commonly exhibits, "jeans and t-shirts." Finally, another respondent frequently wears leisure suits. What "looks good" to each respondent varies upon his or her tastes and culture.

Respondents' clothing choices also appear to have functional importance. One individual wears certain styles to "get compliments from people" and others want to reveal personal attributes. Another research participant utilizes clothing to gain others' attention and to "be taken seriously." Finally, one respondent candidly explained his clothing choices are aimed to "get nice girls." Similarly, another group of 11 individuals wear specific apparel as a form of self-expression. Respondents in this category state that their clothing reveals personal attributes, background, and/or group affiliation. Ultimately, all of these respondents fulfill various purposes with their clothing choices and managed images.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Clothing communicates symbolically as an extension of the self. Individuals' attitudes, occupations, group associations and other attributes are communicated through this medium. Consequently, youth subcultures can utilize their apparel to exhibit membership in and gain connection with particular groups. Apparel can also differentiate them from the mainstream culture. Thus, clothing serves as a powerful medium that fulfills varied functions, including in-group identification and out-group differentiation.

Based on the literature, theoretical perspectives, and examples given in this thesis, there are several baseline features of this research. First, youth subcultures are unique from other groups because they are often (partially) defined and recognized by their clothing. They wear the symbols of their cultures in public almost daily. For example, regular use of gang colors, all black clothing, over-sized pants and professional athletic team jerseys all reveal group affiliation with gangs, "gothics," or hip-hop enthusiasts, respectively. These styles are worn everyday by youth as they attend school, social events, or otherwise spend time with their peers. By contrast, older groups cannot often wear their subcultures' styles due to the nature of their lives. Instead, older members of the

public are often confined within social norms and work place policies. For example, a thirty-something rap music fan may (stereotypically) wear heavy jewelry and baggy clothes when he/she attends a rap concert, but forego this image in his/her professional life as an accountant. This example illustrates how “different self-schemas [or self-representations] may be activated in different contexts, with particular schemas being quite stable with respect to a given class of situations or relationships” (Tunis, Fridhandler, & Horowitz, 1990, p. 1279). Conversely, youth cultures are freer to utilize clothing for daily presentation and association with their chosen groups. As a result, the public can then consistently recognize them as a part of specific groups.

The research participants for this study differed in their claims to subcultural membership. While 43 respondents believed they did not belong to subcultures, the remaining individuals could name groups with which they identify. Of the 36 individuals who professed association with subcultures, 24 also utilize their clothing to display a connection with their groups. Thus, the public can potentially identify these individuals with their social factions. This is a small portion of the respondents who actually use clothing to associate themselves with a group. However, for the most part, it appears that in-group association via clothing management is important for the respondents who belong to particular groups.

Beyond simple daily presentation, previous research reveals that group members deliberately choose and invest in their styles in an effort to differentiate themselves from out-group members and connect with in-group members. In-

group identification and out-group separation is a conscious effort on the part of these individuals, rather than a passive, random occurrence. This is expressed as youths patronize vendors who sell clothing that matches their chosen styles. Consequently, they invest both time and money into their styling efforts.

In this study, 24 of the research 36 respondents who claimed association with certain groups did indeed seek to show in-group identification via their clothing management. They did this through specific logos, brands, colors, styles, fitting patterns, and other methods. This in-group identification inherently fulfills another assumption of this thesis, that respondents also utilize clothing to differentiate themselves from out-group persons. The very act of identifying oneself with one group separates an individual from others in some way. Thus, these functions work in conjunction with one another.

This study also provided an interesting view regarding subculture apparel purchasing patterns. Most of the respondents to this study (67), whether they professed association with a subculture or not, indicated that they purchase clothing in department and other brand name clothing stores commonly found in mall shopping centers. If all of these individuals are shopping at similar, if not the same, retail locations, how do they differentiate their groups' images? It is possible that the same retail stores sell different clothing styles that match the intended images of various cultures. It is also possible that the research participants alter and mix the apparel from these stores to fulfill their personal image management goals. Another explanation is that respondents manage their style via hairstyles, jewelry, body piercing, tattoos, handbags, backpacks

and other accessories. Thus, various respondents may wear similar clothing, but artifacts and body manipulations can differentiate them. This is an area that could be addressed in future, related research.

Another related idea is that it is impossible for these participants to truly differentiate themselves from other groups because fringe styles ultimately become mainstream. This is currently evidenced by the punk rock/skateboarding, hip-hop, and gangster/rapper styles that are so prevalent among today's youth. All of these styles were once on the edge of mainstream society, often unaccepted by much of the public. At one time the clothing associate with these cultures was not found in mainstream stores. Now they are common in popular retail locations such as those found in mall shopping centers. Not only are these styles readily accessible, but they are also widely desired by youth who see their friends and media icons displaying such fashions. The questionnaire utilized for this study did not address such issues. Ultimately, these are topics to be explored further in other research.

In addition to the above points, prior research and literature illustrate that members of subcultures use clothing to enhance their personal value or prestige. In-group members can serve as significant others, or people whose judgments are particularly valuable (Andersen, Chen, & Miranda, 2002). These individuals can reinforce other group members' self-concepts. Therefore, if group members stylistically conform to a group's image, and gain positive reinforcement from significant others within their culture, their apparel can literally enhance their perceived personal value. Their importance within the group, improved self-

worth, and other benefits can all be obtained through the management of their attire.

Questionnaire responses related to this presupposition provided interesting insights. Among the 36 who claimed in-group association of some kind, 12 indicated that they wore certain apparel for comfort, 7 as a form of self-expression, 9 because they feel good and 4 because they like wearing it. No *direct* relationship between respondents' responses and the idea of increased personal value via clothing choices can be made here. However, it can be assumed that when an individual "feels good" wearing certain attire, they can perceive themselves in a more valuable light. It can also be presumed that in-group members who approve of an individual's style may ascribe increased value to that person. This may come in the form of praise, acceptance, and even increased power within a group. In the end, individuals would not conform to in-group styles if there were not positive benefits such as in-group acceptance and reinforcement.

Finally, it was presupposed that clothing choices are influenced by multiple social factors. Ultimately, these influences are inherently linked to cultural/mediated antecedents and reinforcers such as music and musicians, and television and movie stars. These are often the initiators and perpetuators of such youth subcultures as gangsta-rap, glamour rock, and even metro-sexuality. Even if respondents cited family and/or other members of their subcultures as influences, it was suspected that their clothing styles all came from similar mediated roots.

Most of the respondents in this study (48) indicated that the media did indeed influence their clothing choices. They looked to media icons on various levels of popularity and public exposure for ideas regarding fashion. Those who looked to the media for this content included those who did and did not affirm involvement with various subcultures. However, 31 of the participants claimed little or no influence by the media on their clothing choices. One in this category actually avoided the medias' influences and 2 others looked to other people for ideas regarding style. Overall, the media is but one significant factor that influences this group's clothing management.

There were various limitations to this research project. First, the convenient sample limits its scope and application to the group studied. The ideas presented herein should and could have no concrete, widespread application to other groups. A second limitation to this study is that 43 of the 79 respondents did not associate themselves with a particular group. This presented much less information to work with. The very goal of this project was to study youth subcultures and their communication via clothing. With more than half of the respondents claiming no group affiliation, much less key information was available for scrutiny. Despite priming respondents with a somewhat universal explanation of a subculture on the questionnaire, many still found no personal affiliation with particular groups. This could mean that they want to avoid any negative stigmas associated with subcultures. One remedy for this would be to include an explanation of subcultures as neutral, but naturally occurring social phenomenon. This may help to alleviate negative feelings about subcultures

respondents may harbor. Consequently, they may be more apt to associate themselves with a group of some kind. In the end, this problem may not have a cure because some people may legitimately avoid, disassociate, or feel unattached to any particular group.

Another limitation to this research is the use of the questionnaire. Another alternative such as filming participant interviews could provide three benefits: First, the respondents' clothes could be observed on camera and compared with their responses. Second, additional questions could be pursued by the interviewer to extract underlying ideas and feelings regarding the topics. Lastly, nonverbal body language could be analyzed as it relates to specific questions and answers. For example, if a respondent was offended by a question, the researcher could examine his/her behaviors more closely. All of these things could add more detail and insights into this study.

In addition to these limitations, it is probable that clothing is not always meant to send a message. As 27 of the individuals in this study stated, they simply wear certain clothing because they are comfortable. As 4 other respondents indicated, they wear certain clothes because they are cheap. Finally, another respondent wears specific apparel because it is easy to care for. Thus, other motives can supersede the need to communicate unique messages via clothing.

This research and analysis provided valuable insights related to the assumptions provided in this thesis. This study adds to the collective knowledge in the fields of communication and sociology by addressing the symbolic processes that occur with respondents via their clothing. The information

presented herein can only be applied to the individuals studied, but it supported previously established ideas, and expanded contemporary knowledge regarding these topics. It revealed that 36 of the respondents felt they individualized themselves and/or conformed to unique groups despite the fact that 67 of them purchase clothing from the same types of retail stores. Additionally, this study exposed that 55 respondents simply do not manage clothing to affiliate with a group of some kind. They are not as deliberate in this communicative act, perhaps because it is a matter of functionality and/or practicality for them.

This project also revealed that respondents identify unlikely groups as their subcultures, such as Scottish heritage, political affiliation, smokers, teenagers, and others. Initially, these may not be widely accepted subcultures, but the participants' subjective viewpoints are valid and useful for deciphering what subgroups exist in society, or at least in this study. Finally, this study revealed that 55 respondents had at least some influence from the media in regard to their clothing management. This can lead to further research on the power of the media, how seriously they monitor its trends, and what specific styles youth model. Future research could also address why so many differing youth subcultures can acquire clothing from the same retail outlets. It could also explore how youth subcultures tweak mainstream styles to meet subjective fashion needs and purposes. Finally, it could focus on the impossibility of disassociating from mainstream culture as subcultural styles assimilate into mainstream society. Addressing these topics will shed further light on this and

other topics involving subcultural conformity, consumer practices, and identity management.

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APPENDIX I

Questionnaire

Your participation in this research project is voluntary. All information you provide will remain anonymous and your name is not required on the questionnaire or used in the results of this study. The purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain students' ideas about clothing, communication and subcultures. *Please use as much space as you need to respond to the following questions/statements.* Please return the questionnaire to the graduate student researcher during the next scheduled class session. Your participation in this study is appreciated.

Part A

1. Members of subcultures and other groups can have a distinct *view of the world* and unique *lifestyle*. These things can influence their clothing choices.

Are you a part of a particular group or subculture? If so, which one?

2. Do you use clothing to display your connection or membership with a group or subculture? If so, how?

3. How does your clothing help to define who you are?

4. What are you trying to express through your clothing?

5. Describe the styles or types of clothing you commonly wear.

6. Where do you purchase your clothing?

7. How do forms of media such as books, television, movies, and music influence your use of clothing?

8. Why do you wear the clothing that you wear?

Part B

Demographic Information

Please circle the appropriate response.

Sex: Male Female

Age: 18-25 26-30 31-36 37 and up

Ethnicity: African-American/Black Caucasian/White Hispanic

Pacific Islander Native American Asian

Other: _____

APPENDIX II



Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review Approval Notice

NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:

Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.

DATE: September 24, 2005
TO: Dr. Larry Mullen, School of Communication
FROM: Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
RE: Notification of IRB Action by Dr. Michael Stitt, Chair
Protocol Title: **Youth Culture, Clothing and Communicative Messages**
Protocol #: 0507-1659

This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45 CFR 46. The protocol has been reviewed and approved.

The protocol is approved for a period of one year from the date of IRB approval. The expiration date of this protocol is September 9, 2006. Work on the project may begin as soon as you receive written notification from the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS).

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
4505 Maryland Parkway • Box 451037 • Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-1037
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PLEASE NOTE:

Attached to this approval notice is the **official Informed Consent/Assent (IC/IA) Form** for this study. The IC/IA contains an official approval stamp. Only copies of this official IC/IA form may be used when obtaining consent. Please keep the original for your records.

Should there be *any* change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a **Modification Form** through OPRS. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB.

Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond September 9, 2006, it would be necessary to submit a **Continuing Review Request Form** *60 days* before the expiration date.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at OPRSHumanSubjects@ccmail.nevada.edu or call 895-2794.

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