AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL DRESS

by

EMILY CAROL BLALOCK

(Under the Direction of Jan Hathcote)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to survey African American college students to identify their perceptions of female professional dress. The variables of self-esteem, the importance of clothing, fashion innovativeness, and the type of Land Grant institution or the geographic location of the university the student attended were tested as possible influencers of perception. A total of 251 surveys were completed by African Americans enrolled in two Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and two predominantly white institutions (PWI) located in Mississippi and Louisiana. Results indicated that there was a significant difference between Mississippi and Louisiana samples, HBCU and PWI subsamples, fashion innovator and fashion follower subsamples, and male and female subsamples in their perception of professional dress. Mean scores indicated that the overall African American sample had a fair understanding of female professional dress, though the entire sample perceived inappropriate fashion-oriented suits as appropriate professional interview attire.

INDEX WORDS: African American, Perception, Professional Dress, Self-Esteem, Fashion Innovativeness

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

African American Consumers

Caucasian consumers from the nineteen-eighties fashionably coined the phrase *shop till you drop*, but currently, African Americans have taken prideful ownership in the slogan (Good Looks, Good Food, 2002). *American Demographics'* analyzed the 2001 Census and reported the top priority in the African American household budget is buying clothes to establish and enhance one's identity (Good Looks, Good Food, 2002). Earlier, Kochman (1981) found clothing and adornment practices were used by African Americans to be the most "powerful statement" about their identity. African American households devote more than the average amount of their income on children's clothing; African American men spend more than any other cultural group on clothing; and African American families spend 47% more than average on personal care products (Good Looks, Good Food, 2002). The University of Georgia's Selig Center for Economic Growth (2002) projected the African American buying power of 2009 to be the highest of all minorities, topping at $965 billion dollars.

Yankelovich Partners and the Consumer Expenditure Survey show that retailers who do not target the African American consumer market may be missing a significant opportunity (Fisher, 1996). Many companies revealed that they don't invest heavily in African Americans due to their low median household incomes of $29,645 in 2003 which is well below U.S. median $43,318 (Cleveland, 2003), but African American consumers are willing to spend large amounts of their income on clothing to enhance their image or identity (Fisher, 1996).

African American households spend more than average on hosiery, women's accessories, and jewelry (Fisher, 1996). Sara Lee Hosiery found that African American women buy more hosiery and the better quality lines of hosiery than other consumers. Sara Lee Hosiery's research found "Black women are less likely to wear casual clothes for work, and overall they have fewer casual days, or bare-leg occasions" (Fisher, 1996, p.55). Consumer Expenditure Survey verified Sara Lee Hosiery's assertion by reporting those African American households who did spend money on hosiery, spent 13% more than the average household in 1994 (Fisher, 1996).

African American professionals are not the only market that needs to be tapped. College students represent a consumer market primed to shop. With 16.5 million enrolled college students, 78% are employed. The third annual Alloy College Explorer Study showed female college students are spending 75% more on apparel items than males. African American men and women spend more than Caucasians, averaging $46 per month where others consumed $31 per month (Seckler, 2005). Retailers should cater to African American female consumer tastes because they spend much more than Caucasian men and women on clothing and personal care items. African American purchasing power, personal income, and social mobility are consistently on the rise (Macguire, 1998), and retailers are losing money not advertising to this high-spending market.

African American Professionals

Retailers are persistently ignoring the millions of middle-class and upper-class African American households that have discretionary money to spend (Fisher, 1996). *Women's Wear Daily* reports the verbal frustrations of African American professionals who are familiar with "difficult, inconvenient shopping experiences" (Lee, 2005, p.10). An analysis of the U.S. Census 2000 data found thirty percent of African American households have achieved middle to upper

income status (Frey, 2003). It was also noted that African American households that fall in the $25,000 to $74,000 bracket represent 44.6 % of the population which is more than those that fall below $25,000 (42.9%) (Good Looks, Good Food, 2002).

Most retailers and marketing campaigns have neglected the preferences of African American professionals. *Women's Wear Daily* reported in August 2005 that African American middle aged, middle class women have sophisticated clothing tastes and the money to back it up, but not enough retailers fulfill their fashion needs. The sudden increase of urban fashion brands like Baby Phat, Rocawear, Enyce, Fubu and Sean John get the attention of the younger fashion-forward females, but these fashions do not lure in the African American professional niche market. African American women are attracted to brands and will invest in work apparel ranging from traditional to updated suits, shoes, and accessories. African American females desire "diverse skirt lengths, double breasted jackets, bolder print patterns, and a greater color variety outside the basic black, navy, brown or gray" (Lee, 2005, p.10). "The women said they and many of their contemporaries have been largely ignored by the fashion industry and retailers, which have never fully addressed their needs for fit, wider size ranges or preference for dressier, more put together looks" (Lee, 2005, p.10). Mass marketers including Sears Roebuck & Co. and Macy's have attempted to reach African American consumers through celebrating Black History Month and adding more African American designers, but consumers are still left wanting apparel designed with their preferences in mind. It is clear that retailers in the African American and in the Caucasian communities do not have products or services to address this demographic's needs and wants (Lee, 2005).

African Americans and Racism

African Americans did not begin their history in America with equal rights as did Caucasian Americans. For several centuries the African American people were oppressed by the slave trade, colonization, segregation, and racism. These advanced strategies to weaken the race mentally and emotionally have had huge political and economic implications for the African American race and culture (Allen, 2001; White and White, 1998).

When the first ship packed with dying and beaten slaves arrived in America, so too did the supremacist notion that God the creator damned all people of black color. The Western world accepted the inaccurate interpretation of the Christian Bible that "Noah's curse of Ham" was a curse that transformed Ham and his descendants into the African race, and which claimed all persons with black skin should remain in slavery indefinitely (Felder, 2005). This ignorant bigotry left no room for equality, justice, or humane treatment for persons of color for years to come.

Despite Caucasians' attempts to manipulate African Americans' perceptions of the world and their self image, African Americans survived with a thriving culture rich with colorful aesthetics, divergent from the popular Caucasian culture today. W.E.B. DuBois, a noted African American scholar, sociologist, author, and civil rights leader, became prominent with his writings on the African American tension filled "double consciousness." DuBois (1898, 2005) explained

> *this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness and American, a Negro two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged*

> *strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife this longing to attain self conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and true self" (p.16-17).*

W.E.B. DuBois (1898, 2005) explained the internal conflict between desiring African American self and the self of Caucasian American society. DuBois focused on the psychological realities of oppression and how the African American culture triumphed. His assumption was groundbreaking to the Caucasian assumption that African Americans have and had no culture of their own. His writings also suggested that despite the constant attack of the African American identity, the culture remains a shelter for developing a sense of identity and for enhancing positive self-esteem (DuBois, 1898, 2005).

What DuBois (1898, 2005) described as two selves under tension fighting for dominance could be similar to what African American students experience in predominantly white institutions (PWI) if they choose to cross racial boundaries to compare themselves to the majority Caucasian group. African American college students functioning on a predominantly white campus often feel they must battle negative stereotypes of African Americans by hiding their true personalities under an identity they want to present to Caucasians (Guiffrida, 2003). Guiffrida (2003) termed "code switching" as when African American students develop two opposing persons: one reserved for Caucasians, and their true self only for meetings with fellow African Americans. Present day code switching mirrors DuBois (1898, 2005) stressors of the African American double consciousness. It is debated whether code switching or double consciousness maintains assimilation or conflict (Holt, 1995; Lewis, 1993; Sundquist, 1993; Allen, 2001).

African Americans in the Workplace

History maintains that African Americans have been beaten and stressed by racial discrimination, and as a result they have experienced large gaps in economic and educational successes (Allen, 2001; Marbley, 2003). Even today, racial discrimination and unfair practices have a common place in most professional work settings. African American professionals do not only have to combat open racism in the workplace, but also hidden aversive racism (Thomas, 2005). Aversive racism is subtle prejudice in organizational settings where Caucasian employees view themselves as non-prejudice, but who have actually digested racist stereotypes of African Americans and overtly hold negative feelings towards their African American peers (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999). Relational demography is a type of hidden racism that negatively affects hiring and promotion decisions affecting African American professionals (Thomas, 2005). Past research reports that African American professionals are aware of the hidden racism and combat its negative influence on their job success by dressing conservatively and professionally (McLeod, 1999; Russell & Reynolds 1992; Schneider, 1998).

Past and present research show there is much racism against African American men and women in the workplace. In the 1990s Caucasian women held 40 % of middle management positions in the United States, compared to black women representing 5 % of middle management positions, and African American males hold even less (Hemmons, 1996). Hemmons (1996) also provided reasons for the inadequate representation of African American females in executive administrative and managerial positions representing 7.2% in 1996. He maintained that African American females earn less due to inadequate job mentors that do not promote “white male job-ladder progress” for African American co-workers (p.80). Historically,

when African American females acquire a suitable mentor, the relationship is often brief and insincere (Hemmons, 1996; Thomas, 2005).

Hemmons (1996) determined that Caucasian males' median income was three times greater than African American females' income. The earning-gaps for African American men are tremendous. Dortch (1994) affirmed, Black men working full time, twenty-five years and older who held jobs in executive, administrative, and managerial positions, had mean earnings of 81% of that of Caucasian men in similar positions ($34,200 compared to $42,400) (Dortch, 1994). Under the same circumstances, African American female professionals earn about the same as Caucasian female professionals figuring a median of $27,500. African American women face the most injustice; they must combat earning-gaps based on race and gender. Hacker (1995) reported that as education raises so do earnings of African Americans; in particular, the women. African American women with Masters Degrees make relatively $70 more than African American men with the same education (Hacker, 1995).

Dortch (1994) reported in *American Demographics*, that the reason African Americans of the same education level earned less than their Caucasian peers in white-collar jobs is for two reasons: African Americans work in industries that pay lower wages like government and education (Hacker, 1995; Hemmons, 1996), and "Companies do not want them" (Dortch, 1994, p.19). Currently, African American working females have more median years of education than African American men (Lynn & Mau, 2002). National reports show African American career women represent a larger proportion of the female professional community, and African American women represent a larger proportion of the African American labor force (Marbley, 2003). Although African American women have surpassed African American men in education

and professional employment, more men are in prestige careers (Doctors, Lawyers, and College Professors).

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that having black skin means less income for employees (Dortch, 1994; Ryan, 2005). Ryan (2005) reported African Americans earned less than Caucasians at every education level including college graduates, and even if education level was equal there would still be a 71% earning gap. Dortch (1994) found African American women earned more than African American men in comparison to Caucasians of the same gender, and that African American women typically earn more than Caucasian women. The projection for the 21st century did not look much better. Thomas (2005) reported in the *Occupational Outlook Quarterly* that African Americans will represent a mere 12% of the labor force by 2012; compared to Caucasian employment of 80 percent.

African Americans and Professional Dress

It is common knowledge that society depends on appearances to communicate how others should perceive the wearer's personality, style, and status (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). This has been proven in the workplace (Damhorst, 1984,1985; Forsythe, Drake & Cox, 1984; Lennon & Miller, 1984). Clothing choices and other adornment practices reflect ways individuals take part in inventing and mirroring the dominant culture (Franklin, 2001). Society and corporate America do not encourage women to create a unique look for themselves. Women are expected to consume what is considered appropriate by dominant culture whether or not they are members in that group (Franklin, 2001; Watkins, 1996). Watkins (1996) emphasized as women learn to compete successfully in the male dominated work force, they soon realize that men and fellow female co-workers consider appearance as the most important display of authority. Watkins (1996) also alleged that mass media is the most suitable medium for spreading respectable,

authoritative professional dress for females. In addition, *Ebony* magazine identified the top female managers in the workplace as fashion templates for appropriate workplace attire (Power-dressing For Professionals, 2005). Watkins (1996) ignored any reference to African American females or other minority groups in her study. She critically analyzed major periodicals for appropriate hair, clothes, figure, facial expression, and age for the most appropriate appearance of powerful women in the workplace. The study's findings represent traditionally Caucasian traits and culture as the most suitable and professional look for females in the workforce. Where does this leave African American female professionals?

Franklin (2001) declared "it can be a challenge for Black women in the west to assemble a look that makes them feel as beautiful, intelligent and capable as they are without some reference to their identity as Black women" (p.139). She claimed that African American women frequently scrutinize what they wear to predominantly White settings in order not to draw attention to their cultural heritage. Franklin defended her remark by affirming that African American women in the workplace dress conservatively to keep their jobs, not to "look white." Franklin's assertion mirrors Guiffrida (2003) idea of code switching, and DuBois (1898, 2005) double consciousness by nurturing two opposing personas, one reserved for Caucasians and the other for fellow African Americans. Deciding which aesthetics of clothing to wear for work is a double edge sword for African Americans. African Americans take the risk of being acquainted with the "desire to be White" stereotype, or getting accused of an even more disliked or professionally inappropriate image (Franklin, 2001). It is argued that the idea of two opposing identities causes internal tension (Allen, 2001; Lewis, 1993; Sundquist, 1993).

Proshansky and Newton (1968) argued that African Americans who dislike their own racial culture are communicating aversion for themselves. The study alleged when African

Americans live in a Caucasian supremacist country, they are oppressed with disapproving feelings about themselves. However, evidence has been collected which empirically suggests that personal identity and group identification may be separated (Cross, 1991; Jackson, McCullough, Gurin, and Broman, 1981).

Traditionally ethnic hairstyles can be a sensitive spot in the work environment. Afros, braids in African inspired styles, and dreadlocks are considered taboo by the non-Black work force. These styles are translated by individuals outside the culture as "too ethnic, too angry-looking, too butch to avoid censure…." (Franklin, 2001, p.146). Franklin (2001) argued that African American employees may avoid wearing opposing aesthetic hairstyles out of fear of exposing racism in predominantly white work environments. Franklin also noted that Caucasian co-workers may be ignorant to their racist remarks about African American hair. There are many differences in African American and Caucasian American culture, but one element remains the same regardless of race; all persons use appearance to communicate who they are as individuals, their personality, and their status.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to obtain information regarding African American male and female college students' perception of female professional dress. Specifically, the research identified if African American females incorporated fashion-oriented garments into the standard definition of traditional professional dress. In addition, this research sought to determine self-esteem differences or similarities in African American students enrolled in two Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) and two Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), and to determine if self-esteem influences fashion innovativeness.

Objectives

The main objectives of this study were:

1. To understand African American college students' perceptions of female professional dress.
2. To compare a sample of African American college students' opinions of professional dress.
3. To examine the relationship between self-esteem and fashion innovativeness on a sample of African American college students.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested:

Ho1: There will not be a significant difference in their perceptions of female professional dress between African American college students enrolled in Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU).

Ho2: There will not be a significant difference in perceptions of female professional dress between Louisiana and Mississippi African American college students.

H3: There will be a significant difference between African American male and female perceptions of female professional dress.

Ho4: There will not be a significant difference in their level of self-esteem between African American college students enrolled in PWI and HBCU.

H5: There will be a significant difference in their level of self-esteem and fashion behavioral variables between fashion innovators and fashion followers.

H6: There will be a significant difference in their perception of female professional dress between fashion innovators and fashion followers.

Significance of Study

This study will provide retailers, manufacturers, and academia with African American college students' perceptions of female professional dress identified through the review of literature and verified through an analytical survey. This will reduce the possibility of stereotypes and racial biases between African Americans' beliefs and outsiders' judgments of African American beliefs. Also, this study will add to the body of knowledge in African American self-esteem differences in PWI and HBCU, and African Americans' degree of innovativeness in clothing for the professional workplace. Understanding the clothing habits reported by African American consumers will allow retailers and manufacturers to better market merchandise to the Black professional niche market.

Conceptual Definitions

1862 Land Grant Institutions are defined as institutions that have been designated by their state legislature or Congress to receive the benefits of the Morrill Act of 1862 which supplied federal land to each state to teach agriculture, military tactics, and the mechanic arts in addition to the classical studies, so that members of the working class could obtain a practical education (National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, 1999).

1890 Land Grant Institutions are defined as institutions predominantly in the South that had been designated by their state legislature or Congress to receive the benefits of the Morrill Act of 1890 which supplied federal land to each state for segregated black institutions to teach agriculture, military tactics, and the mechanic arts so that African American members of the working class could obtain a practical education (National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, 1999).

Aesthetics is defined as the study of human responses through creating, perceiving, comprehending, and being influenced by art (O'Neal, 1994).

Fashion Adoption Cycle is defined as classifications of the members in a social group on the basis of their innovativeness (Rogers, 1983). These include: Fashion Innovators, Fashion Opinion Leaders (early adopters), Mass Market Consumers (early majority), Late Fashion Followers (late majority), and Fashion Laggards (Cholachatpinyo, Padgett, Crocker, & Fletcher, 2002; Rogers, 1983).

Dress is defined as body modifications and supplements to the body (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).

Business Casual is defined as workplace dress that maintains individual professionalism, but with causal fabric choices such as cotton, linen, corduroy, rayon, and denim; in addition to more variety in color and cut. Athletic wear and high fashion garments are not elements of business casual (Ball State University Career Center, 2003). Business Casual dress is often appropriate for an on-site interview or the second interview and consists of matching separates (Louisiana State University Career Services, 2006).

Fashion-oriented professional dress is defined as: workplace clothing with very low cut necklines, skirts several inches above the knee, Capri pants, busy texture or bold stripes or prints, matching leather jacket and pants, embroidery that highly contrasts with the base fabric, high contrast trim on pant legs or pant legs with slits, and skirts with slip up to mid-thigh (Damhorst, Jondle, & Youngberg, 2002).

HBCU (**Historically Black Colleges and Universities**) are defined as institutions established prior to 1964 whose principal mission is the education of black Americans. HBCU must be

accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary of Education (Eagan McAllister Associates, 2005).

Fashion Innovativeness is defined as the degree to which an individual is relatively earlier in adopting new adornment practices than other members of the same social group (Rogers, 1983).

Perception is defined as the process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment (Robbins, 2005).

PWI (**Predominantly White Institutions**) are defined as institutions where Caucasian students and faculty are the majority, and African American students (and other cultural backgrounds) are the minority (Guiffrida, 2003).

Self –esteem is defined as the individual's sense of his or her worth, or the extent to which a person values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991).

Traditional professional dress is defined as the traditional conservative interview attire for business and other highly professional fields. Traditional professional dress is a suit classic and conservative in style, consisting of matching jacket and pants and/or skirt with neutral button up shirt. Suits should be fabricated in a solid neutral color. Black or brown closed toe shoes with a slight heel are appropriate (Louisiana State University Career Services, 2006; Southern University and A&M College Career Services, 2005; Mississippi State University Career Center, 2005).

Operational Definitions

1862 Land Grant Institutions used in this study are Mississippi State University and Louisiana State University, and will be called PWI (predominantly white institutions). The two 1862 Land Grant Institutions will be used in this study to identify if African Americans attending these

schools refer outside their cultural group for standards of professional dress, and identify what these African American students perceive as professional dress.

PWI (**predominantly white institutions**) in this study will be Mississippi State University in Starkville, Mississippi, and Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

1890 Land Grant Institutions used in this study are Alcorn State University and Southern University Systems and A&M College, and will be defined as HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). The two 1890 Land Grant Institutions will be used in this study to determine what the African American students perceive as professional dress.

HBCU (**Historically Black Colleges and Universities**) in this study are defined as Alcorn State University in Alcorn State, Mississippi, and Southern University Systems and A&M College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Aesthetics of dress in this study is defined as an individual's response to dress or dressing, influenced by their culture's perception of beauty and art.

Dress in this study is defined as a word that is used in place of clothing, appearance, adornment, cosmetics, hair style, and costume in terms of professionalism.

Traditional professional dress in this study is defined as any body supplements (clothing) and body modifications (hair style) that are appropriate and respectable for a professional workplace setting as described by professional literature and research. Perceptions of Traditional professional dress will be determined using an adaptation of Franz and Norton's (2004) study that classified individual female garments found in the workplace as Business Professional, Fashion-Oriented Dress, Business Casual Dress, or Casual Dress.

Fashion-oriented professional dress in this study is defined as informal business professional dress that ignores conservative rules of professionalism and replaces the traditional suit with

more color and fashionable fabrics. Perceptions of Fashion-oriented professional dress will be determined using an adaptation of Franz and Norton's (2004) study that classified individual female garments found in the workplace as Business Professional, Fashion-Oriented Dress, Business Casual Dress, or Casual Dress.

Business Casual in this study is defined as workplace clothing that maintains a professional appearance while wearing comfortable fabrics, brighter colors, and more stylish fabrics. Perceptions of Business Casual Dress will be determined using an adaptation of Franz and Norton's (2004) study that classified individual female garments found in the workplace as Business Professional, Fashion-Oriented Dress, Business Casual Dress, or Casual Dress.

Causal Dress in this study is defined as inappropriate workplace clothing that maintains a informal and relaxed appearance. Perceptions of Casual Dress will be determined using an adaptation of Franz and Norton's (2004) study that classified individual female garments found in the workplace as Business Professional, Fashion-Oriented Dress, Business Casual Dress, or Casual Dress.

Perception in this study is defined as the belief that individuals from different cultures look at garments found in the workplace and perceive their appropriateness differently.

Fashion Adoption Cycle in this study is defined as the rate African American consumers adopt new fashions. This study is solely interested in testing for Fashion Innovators and Fashion Followers.

Fashion Followers in this study are defined by the degree to which individuals in a group are the last to adopt new adornment practices. Fashion followers will be separated from fashion innovators using an adaptation of Kwon and Workman's (1996) study using eight questions addressing fashion leadership and five questions addressing the importance of clothing. Fashion

followers have a low degree of innovativeness and represent the majority of consumers. This study will use a four point Likert-type scale, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

Fashion Innovators in this study are defined by the degree to which individuals in a group are the first to adopt new adornment practices. Fashion leaders will be separated from later adopters using an adaptation of Kwon and Workman’s (1996) study using eight questions addressing fashion leadership and five questions addressing the importance of clothing. Fashion Innovators have a high degree of innovativeness, and represent the minority of consumers. This study will use a four point Likert-type scale, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

Self-esteem in this study will assess African American self-esteem using Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale (1989) in a 4-point Likert-type scale, ranging from one of *strongly agree* to four indicating *strongly disagree*.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Clothing is worn daily, used to get ahead, used as a way of expressing individuality or conformity, and used for enhancing self-esteem. Because clothing is worn for symbolic reasons; dress is used to define identity (Kwon & Workman, 1996; Feinberg, Mataro & Burroughs, 1992). Yet, before assuming the perceptions or identity of African American college students based on the results of the survey, it is necessary to review other findings and explanations for an African American aesthetic of dress.

African American Aesthetics of Dress

Aesthetics are commonly defined as the study of human responses through creating, perceiving, comprehending, and being influenced by art (Child, 1968; O'Neal, 1994;). Aesthetics are often thought to be the sum of one particular group's desires or values (Kaiser, 1990). Cultural norms do transform, but the ingrained values and structure remain constant and are passed down through generations (McCracken, 1988). It is consistent in the African American culture to embellish the aesthetics of dress, because it is not what is worn, but how it is worn and with what attitude (Kaiser, Rabine, Hall & Ketchum, 2004). Style, like aesthetics, influences every facet of life. Style is a norm accepted by a culture to express an attitude or appearance (Kochman, 1981). Semmes (1992) declared that African Americans establish "style" at the foundation of their culture "…artfully embellishing movement, speech, and appearance….One must inject beauty, heightened emotion or feeling, and idiosyncratic expression into a product or action" (p.131). Kochman (1981) noted that style (cultural

aesthetics) does not remain invisible; rather it is a constant form that nourishes admiration, imitation and resentment. As mentioned, clothing and adornment practices are employed by African Americans to be the most "powerful statement" about their identity (Kochman, 1981; Semmes, 1992; Kaiser, et al., 2004). Research does not mention the same for other cultural groups. If this assertion is correct, then one might expect to find differences in Caucasian and African American aesthetic judgments of professional dress.

Too often, society insists on ignoring cultural differences, Caucasians create a cultural system, and they automatically assume African Americans are operating with identical speech and cultural conventions (Kochman, 1981). During the 20th century is was accepted by a few in the Caucasian society that African Americans have no culture, and "The Negro is only an American and nothing else…he has no values and culture to guard and protect" (Glazer & Moynihan, 1963, p.53). Yet, for decades, scholars have proved the existence of and the flourishing of African traditions in the aesthetics of dress in African American culture (Nobles, 1980; Semmes, 1992).

African Americans and Caucasians alike both recognize that the preference for loud colors and large expressive patterns is an African American stereotype (O'Neal, 1994; Thomas, 2005). Conflicting studies have both refuted and maintained the stereotype of African Americans preferring loud "high affect" colors. Kaiser (1990) stressed that African American females do not favor flashier outfits, but opposing studies argued that African Americans females fancy brighter hues and bold colors (Lee, 2005; Hood, 1993; White and White, 1998; Williams, Arbaugh, & Rucker, 1980) and that blue and red were favorable colors (Liebman, 1987). O'Neal (1994) argued that even when African American educated professionals prefer "high affect" colors, they must hide or quiet their preferences to appropriately assimilate into a dominate

corporate culture. It has been argued that loud flamboyant hues imply lower social and economic classes (O'Neal, 1994; White & White, 1998).

In the early 1990s, retailers began to understand that African American females' preferences of dress differed greatly from Caucasian females. J.C. Penny created an exclusive African American catalog about the same time *Spiegel* and *Ebony* magazine developed *E-Style*, a catalog for African American women (O'Neal, 1994). *E-Style's* spokeswoman maintained that African American females desired a wide assortment of colors like bold yellows, oranges, gold, fuchsia, and purple to complement their skin, and that they desired garments with large scale patterns to reflect their African heritage (Hood, 1993).

Identity through Dress

Literature has proved clothing to be the determining factor for initial judgments in others. Dress has been used as a means to indicate social status and personality (Behling, 1995; Feinberg, Mataro, & Burroughs, 1992; Kwon, 1994; Molloy, 1975, 1996). Others perceived appropriateness and attractiveness of clothing to affect perceptions of competence (Kwon, 1994), managerial abilities (Forsythe, 1988), intelligence and expected scholastic achievement (Behling, 1995).

Beginning in the 1960s, research has suggested that African Americans spend more on clothing than Caucasians at comparable income levels (Alexis, 1962), African American women place a greater emphasis on fashion than Caucasian women (Portis, 1966), and that African American females perceive themselves as more fashion conscious and innovative than Caucasian women (Bauer, Cunningham, & Wortzel, 1965). The answer given for African Americans' focus on fashion is that they have been politically and economically prevented in spending freely, and dress is the major mechanism for achieving status (Goldsmith, Stith, & White, 1987;

Portis, 1966). Goldsmith, Stith & White (1987) surveyed a small sample of African American and Caucasian college students and middle class professionals on their fashion innovativeness. Goldsmith, et al. (1987) reported, "Although…barriers still exist, more recent developments such as anti-discrimination laws, affirmative action programs, educational opportunity, and occupational mobility have broadened the options of many Blacks so that fashion clothing may have become less important" (p.412). However, McLeod (1999), Russell and Reynolds (1992), and Schneider (1998) interviewed African Americans who reported an extra burden of dressing professionally in order to combat racism in the workplace. Goldsmith et al. (1987) compared African Americans and Caucasians on age, income, and education to discover that middle class African Americans were no more innovative or fashion conscious than middle class Caucasians.

Kwon (1994) studied male and female perceptions of the role of clothing in enhancing ten occupational attributes: responsibility, competence, knowledgeability, professionalism, honesty, reliability, intelligence, trustworthiness, willingness to work hard, and efficiency. Perceptions were based on two dress modes (properly dressed and improperly dressed), subjects' self perceptions of their own attributes, and subjects' clothing interests. One hundred and thirty-two males found proper clothing generally enhanced self perception of occupational attributes, and 190 females did not believe many attributes could be enhanced by clothing. The study found a significant difference in all 10 occupational attributes between both modes of dress for the sample. What does this mean for African Americans attempting to fit into a corporate environment through dress? Are African American women hampering their chances of success and upward mobility because they devalue the importance of professional clothing on one's perceived work ethic?

African American Self-Esteem

There has been much debate among sociologists and psychologists about the proportion of positive self-esteem attributed to African Americans. Initially, researchers assumed African Americans maintained lower self-esteem than Caucasian Americans (Frazier, 1957; Bachman, 1970); however, additional literature has refuted the idea that African Americans view themselves more negatively when compared to the self-esteem of Caucasians (Allen, 2001; Cross, 1991; Crocker & Major, 1989; Drury, 1980; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972).

Self-esteem refers to an individual's sense of worth, or the degree to which a person values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991). Basically, self –esteem is the extent that an individual has a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards themselves (Rosenberg, 1989). Self-esteem relates to cognitive and behavioral aspects (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991) and is directly related to expectations for success (Allen, 2001; Robbins, 2005). Individuals with high self-esteem believe they are capable of accomplishing tasks at work. Individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to be affected by outside influences, such as evaluations from others. Low esteemed individuals are more susceptible than high-esteem individuals to seek group approval and to conform to the beliefs and behaviors of those they admire (Robbins, 2005).

Levin (1948) asserted in the Social Identity Theory that individuals constantly seek to maintain and improve their self-concept, and membership into a reference group evokes a sense of belonging that leads to a positive self-concept. The individual is aware of the positive or negative benefits of belonging to a group, and when faced with challenges to their social identity, people will create positive comparisons between their group and out-groups (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990). However, being a member of a minority group does not always associate

positive identity with group membership (Phinney, 1990). If the dominant group holding societal power looks down on the minority group with prejudice, there is a chance for members of a minority group to posses a negative identity (Allen, 2001). Allen (2001) believed this was the situation for African Americans until recently. A major problem of social identity theory is an individual existing in two membership groups where one overpowers the other causing confusion of identity (Allen, 2001; DuBois, 1868, 2005; Phinney, 1990). In recent years studies show personal identity and group identification can be separated (Cross, 1991; Jackson et al., 1981).

Traditionally, it was believed that segregation caused severe harm to the self-esteem of African Americans (Ausubel, 1958). However, increasing evidence suggests segregated African Americans demonstrate significantly higher self-esteem than their desegregated African American cohorts (Allen, 2001; Bachman, 1970; Drury 1980; Porter & Washington, 1993). Bachman (1970) surveyed tenth grade males in segregated and desegregated schools and found those educated in desegregated institutions scored higher in self-esteem evaluations. Two years later, Rosenberg & Simmons (1972) surveyed urban high schools to discover that African American students do not have lower self-esteem levels than their Caucasian counterparts. Nearly a decade later Drury (1980) conducted a quantitative analysis of 194 southern high schools to study the self-esteem of young African Americans. He discovered African American's mean self-esteem was significantly higher for African Americans than for Caucasian when school mean achievement was controlled. In addition, self-esteem of African American students in racially balanced schools was lower than their Caucasian counterparts, but surprisingly higher in predominantly White schools. Drury suggested this was because minorities are inclined to stick together when outnumbered by the dominant culture.

Caucasians have a privileged status in U.S. society and they perceive their identity as the "norm" to which outside groups in society are measured (Martin, Krizek, Nakayama, & Bradford, 1999). Theoretically, Caucasians are unaware of their color or believe it to be invisible, and Caucasians do not comprehend the profound effect their race has on their daily lives and livelihoods (Lipsitz, 1998; Martin, Krizek, Nakayama, & Bradford, 1999; Thomas, 2005).

Powell & Fuller (1970) propositioned the idea of Caucasian (conscious or subconscious) resistance to integration and racial discrimination to be a possible answer to the lower esteem levels in African American students in interracial environments. They attributed the movement in African American Nationalism as a factor for lifting African American self-esteem. Since the 1960s *Black Pride* and *Black is Beautiful* has been successfully marketed throughout the African American population (Kaiser, et al., 2004; Walker, 2001).

While the resurgence of Black Nationalism may be true, there are many arguments that contradict Powell and Fuller's assumption. Rosenberg & Simmons (1972) investigated how discrimination in desegregated schools associated with African American self-esteem. They found the relationship between racial context and African American self evaluations to be poorly represented. Also, Porter & Washington (1993), and Allen (2001) declared that African Americans as a whole compare themselves with their African American peers instead of cross-racial comparisons.

Tinto (1993) maintained that many African American students who transfer or dropout of desegregated universities do so because of a lack of fit between the students' perception of norms, values, and ideas, and those perceptions of the dominant group of an institution. If the values are similar, then the students will become academically and socially integrated into the

college (Tinto, 1993; Guiffrida, 2003). African American students are at a disadvantage when attempting to academically and socially integrate in PWI due to diverging norms and values with the Caucasian majority (Guiffrida, 2003; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, and Trivno 1997; Tinto, 1993).

Social integration with minority students primarily functions through formal associations with peers or student organizations on college campuses (Guiffrida, 2003; Tinto, 1993). Guiffrida (2003) found African American student organizations that initiated cultural connections and social integration into the university included: academic honor groups, Greek societies, religious groups, political organizations, and student government. Guiffrida (2003) maintained that the most critical reason for joining African American membership groups was to establish connections and friendships with teachers, allow opportunities to reward fellow African Americans, and to allow comfort in communication with like others; all of which maintain positive self-esteem.

Joining African American student associations allows students to relax in their cultural values and aesthetics. But when functioning in the predominant White society in these institutions, many African American students feel they must battle negative stereotypes of African Americans by hiding their true selves under an identity they want to present to Caucasians. "Code Switching" occurs when African American students develop two opposing personas; one reserved for Caucasians and their true self only for meetings with fellow African Americans (Guiffrida, 2003). Code Switching is similar to DuBois' (1898, 2005) stressors of double consciousness. Both Code Switching and DuBois' double consciousness maintain the battle of two identities fighting for dominance in the African American self.

Dress is the predominant form of Code Switching. One male subject from Guiffrida's study suggests having to compromise his dress while at school "*I sort of took a different route. Instead of getting rid of the boots, I hide them. I'll get baggy jeans but not too baggy. I dress…a little bit preppy with the hip-hop thing. I just make sure I don't go too far*" (Guiffrida, 2003, p.311). Other male students stated when at home they dress in loose pants and shirts, lugs and do-rags, but when in class on predominantly White campuses they adorn their bodies differently to steer clear of the gangster stereotype (Guiffrida, 2003). Code Switching can become stressful and eventually cause confusion of identity and lower self-esteem (Guiffrida, 2003).

Guiffrida (2003) noted it is possible for African American students to socially integrate in PWI without joining African American student organizations. Those African Americans from predominantly White high schools and neighborhoods find social integration easy. These students have previously learned to function in the Caucasian educational system and consider the Caucasian students their peers. However, Guiffrida (2003) noted these as exceptions.

The present research referred to Rudd and Lennon's (1994) assumption that African American women may not rely on the dominant cultural aesthetic standard of the United States, but one of an in-group standard. Rudd and Lennon's (1994) model explains individual response to the ideal appearance based on cultural aesthetics. The model's assumptions are that all cultures have a primary appearance that is internalized as the aesthetic standard people use to adorn their bodies and to compare that created appearance. Self-esteem is enhanced when others evaluate the individual's appearance as socially ideal. Positive evaluations lead to positive social and personal identity. When self or others' evaluations deviate from the accepted aesthetic appearance, the individual is motivated to alter his or her appearance to more closely mirror the aesthetic ideal.

Perception and Culture

Shibutani (1968) mentioned that perception is selective and the experience is reliant on what is expected and what is taken for granted. Individuals with dissimilar outlooks label similar contexts differently. Shibutani's affirmation was supported by Warren, Orbe, & Greer-Williams (2003) study which analyzed the differences in the perception of male and female Latinos, African Americans, and European Americans. The study presented the subjects with a movie clip of a black male and white female in an argument, and then asked them to respond to the reason for the conflict. The study showed that African American females, most African American men and Latinos perceived race as a continual issue of conflict, while European American females primarily perceived the conflict in terms of gender, and European American males could not see race or gender as an issue in the conflict. Understanding both Shibutani's theory and Warren et al. case study, could persons with different cultural backgrounds perceive professional dress differently?

Culture allows individuals in a particular group to perceive from a similar lens. Culture is defined in many ways, but African American Studies sociologist, Abdul Alkalimat, defines culture as the "sum of values and behavioral preferences that make up a person's lifestyle and approach to the activities of everyday life" (Swindel, 1993, p. 176). Swindel (1993) explains that the root of culture lies in the everyday activities "such as talking and communicating, childrearing, cooking, dressing and recreation" (p. 176). This notion reinforces the idea that African Americans and their culture are different from traditional Anglo American culture. African American culture nurtures a separate way of thinking and developing, which inspires a separate set of experiences (Cross, 1991; Kaiser, et al., 2004; Kochman, 1981; Lee, 2005). Thus, if fashion reflects life's journey and experiences, and African American experiences are

different; then the aesthetic principles of dress too would be dissimilar (Myeres, 1993; Schneider A., 1999; Swindel, 1993).

Shibutani (1968) stated culture is not stagnate, but a continual process or creating and recreating norms through social interactions. Those taking part in a culture view, others with a set of expectations, and that prospect strengthens their perspectives. Thus, African Americans that refer to their culture are constantly sustaining their fellow group members' perspectives by responding to the others in a predictable way. When African American college students attend HBCU, are their perceptions of professional dress reinforced? When African American students attend PWI and are submerged in a culture unlike their own, is their perspective of professional dress challenged? Shibutani believed so. He affirmed, after an individual has digested a specific viewpoint from a reference group, that outlook forms his or her perspective of the world and all new situations.

Differences in viewpoints develop due to disparities in contact and affiliation. Shibutani (1968) maintained that the preservation of social distance due to segregation, tensions, and divergent education forms dissimilar cultures. Individuals in dissimilar cultural groups have their own culture due to isolated interactions in order to preserve their way of life and separate themselves from outsiders (Shibutani, 1968). Swindel (2001) stated, "Culture determines whether or not the group survives, and if it survives, to a great extent, it determines the survivor's quality of life" (p. 22).

Shibutani (1968) found in an integrated society, where every individual absorbs several perspectives there must be some internal disagreement of viewpoints. Most people are members of several reference groups and shift from one social world to the next (Hyman & Singer, 1968; Shibutani, 1968. Porter and Washington (1979) maintain African Americans refer to

Caucasians for comparisons of economic and social status, but refer to African Americans for personal issues. "For most African Americans, it is the African American community that provides them with a frame of reference, and thus their sense of self-esteem or worth" (Allen, 2001, p.70).

Understanding how perspectives change as one moves up in social classes could be one explanation for the transition of fashionable professional dress to conservative professional dress as individuals climb the corporate ladder. As employees assimilate into the culture of the workplace, they slowly change their outlook for a more conservative perspective (Johnson, Crutsinger, & Workman, 1994; Kimle & Damhorst, 1997; Molloy, 1996; Russell & Reynolds, 1992; Solomon & Douglas, 1987). Solomon and Douglas (1987) suggested that individuals will adopt new forms of dress to help simulate in to new roles. Other research makes it clear that if an employee does not dress the part, then they will be denied opportunities (McLeod, 1999; Schneider, 1998; Russell & Reynolds, 1992; Johnson & Roach-Higgins, 1987; Lennon et al., 1999; Workman & Johnson, 1989).

In conclusion, perception is selective, and the experience is reliant on what is expected and what is taken for granted. Individuals with dissimilar outlooks or dissimilar culture label similar contexts differently. Hence, perception of appropriate dress for the workplace is relative to an individual's culture.

Adoption Cycle

Fashion retailing is extremely competitive, and the success of each brand depends heavily on effective management strategies. These strategies are based on providing the right products at the right time, to the right target consumer. "Different types of fashion consumers have to be matched with styles of commodities" (Cholachatpinyo, Padgett, Crocker, & Fletcher, 2002, p.

24). As mentioned before, African American consumers desire different products, fit, and fashions than the general Caucasian American (Holloman, 1997; Kaiser, Rabine, Hall, & Ketchum, 2004; Lee, 2005; O'Neal, 1994; 1998). Market research is crucial for manufacturers' and retailers' marketing departments wishing to target the African American professional niche market by aiding them in identifying and understanding the African American fashion cycle as applied to professional attire (Goldsmith, Flynn, and Moore, 1996; Cholachatpinyo, Padgett, Crocker, & Fletcher, 2002).

E. M. Rogers is considered the founding father of the adoption process and consumer innovativeness. Rogers (1983) established that consumers have different rates or cycles of adoption of a particular product or idea. Classification into the fashion adoption cycle is based on consumers' approval of a specific style during a length of time. The classification is graphically represented by the bell curve (Rogers, 1983). The curve indicates length of diffusion time, speed rate, and acceptance level of that fashion cycle. Adopter categories include: *Innovators* representing 2.5% of the population which, Rogers (1983) describes their purchasing decisions as venturesome; *Early Adopters* represent 13.5% of the population with their purchasing decisions characterized by respect; *Early Majority* maintains 34% of consumers characterized by making deliberate purchasing decisions; *Late Majority* also represents 34% of the population, but purchasing decisions are usually skeptical; and *Laggards* maintaining 16% of consumers which make purchase selections based on efficient cost or pressure to fit in.

Marketing functions are based on stages or correlations of behaviors of consumers for adopting new fashions. As mentioned, the fashion adoption cycle includes: Fashion Innovators, Fashion Opinion Leaders (early adopters), Mass Market Consumers (early majority), Late Fashion Followers (late majority), and Fashion Laggards (Cholachatpinyo, Padgett, Crocker, &

Fletcher, 2002; Rogers, 1983). The fashion adoption cycle correlates with retailers' marketing strategies. Commercial introduction and high fashion promotion targets the *Fashion Innovators*; rising retail inventories and local promotion focuses on the *Fashion Opinion Leaders*; mass merchandising attracts *Mass Market Consumers*; and lastly, clearance and obsolescence marketing strategies target *Late Fashion Followers* and *Fashion Laggards* (Cholachatpinyo, Padgett, Crocker, & Fletcher, 2002). It is in retailers' best interests to identify the fashion innovators in each reference group in order to capture the group's purchasing power.

Studies show that fashion innovators and fashion followers' patterns for deciding to change to a new fashion are extremely different. Cholachatpinyo et al. surveyed 40 subjects, 20 being from innovators and 20 from followers. Fashion followers' decision making process began with "the need to be up to date;" however, fashion innovators began their process with "the need to feel different." Fashion innovators are described as overly confident in their standpoints, styles, and preferences. Cholachatpinyo et al. (2002) and Baugarten (1975) found fashion leaders felt uncomfortable when adorned in similar fashions as their surrounding peers, and that unpleasant feeling inspired them to replace the established fashion with a more whimsical fashion. Contrarily, fashion followers are influenced by their reference groups and media, and represent the largest group of consumers (Studak & Workman, 2004).

Self concept, are the perceptions and attitudes individuals have of themselves that are learned through interactions with the external environment (Goldsmith et al., 1996; Solomon, 1994). Goldsmith et al. was the first to distinguish between fashion laggards and fashion adopters, while other research focused on demographics, psychographics, and personality variables. Also, Goldsmith el al. found that fashion leaders expressed an exclusive self-concept that was described as "more excitable, indulgent, contemporary, formal, colorful, and vain than

followers" (p.242). Studies show that different types of clothing mirror an individual's self concept (Goldsmith el al., 1996; Kaiser, 1990).

Gender, when put into the fashion adoption mix, causes many complications. Kaiser (1997) found that women during childhood were socialized to enjoy and discern fashionable styles, where men were taught to be uninterested in shopping and up-to-date fashions. In addition, research found females to be more innovative, to be more fashion conscious, and to spend more on new fashions than their male counterparts (Goldsmith, Stith, and White, 1987). Female fashion leaders embodied positive attitudes toward risk and change and use more sources of fashion information than non-leaders (Chowdhary and Dickey, 1988). Goldsmith, Stith & White (1987) attributed African American and Caucasian women of the same age with spending more income on new fashions, were more innovative, and more conscious of fashions than men. However, Kwon and Workman (1996) found there was no significant difference between males and females on the importance of clothing. This finding represents both males and females "using clothing to get ahead, key to the good life, as a way of expressing individuality and self concept" (Kwon and Workman, 1996, p. 254).

Fashion innovators do exactly what their name suggests; they are the first members in a reference group to learn about and to dress in a new fashion when it emerges in the market (Goldsmith, Flynn, and Moore, 1996; Cholachatpinyo et al., 2002; Rogers, 1983). "Identifying and understanding fashion leaders helps manufactures market new clothing styles more effectively" (Goldsmith et al., 1996, p. 242). These leaders of fashion are imperative for retailers. They promote new fashion items to fashion followers who look to them for guidance about new adornment practices, and leaders provide profit to retailers for costly new items that are deemed fashion forward (Kaiser, 1990; Goldsmith, et al., 1996). Understanding what

motivates fashion leaders to the purchase will advance both marketers and consumer researchers in targeting the professional African American niche market.

Professional Dress

Throughout history, dress has defined an individual's role. Police officers wear law enforcement uniforms, farmers traditionally wear over-alls, surgeons wear hospital scrubs, and priests wear robes. Research confirms, if one looks the part through corresponding dress, observers will assume that he or she is deserving of that role or identity the individual claims (Damhorst, 1990; Franz and Norton, 2001; Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquail, and Mackie-Lewis, 1997). Likewise, research shows dress can be a factor for perceiving the attributes of an individual's occupation (Kwon, 1994; Johnson, Schofield, Yurchisin, 2002). Research also has revealed the connection between clothing and the individual's self perception (Franz and Norton, 2001), in that, clothing affects the way people view themselves. Other research shows dress expresses an individual's characteristics and emotions (Kwon, 1994; Miller, 1997; Pratt and Rafaeli, 1997).

Dress is the vehicle to identity (Damhorst, 1984-1985; Eicher, 1995). Dress communicates without speaking words. Dress defines what roles we will play that day. Currently, work dress is the most worn garments in the wardrobe and most of a career person's income goes toward business clothing (Miller, 1999). Miller (1999) declared most adults spend forty to sixty hours at work and additional hours are spent commuting and preparing for work. Professional dress manages an employee's work identity (Kimle & Damhorst, 1997), but lately dressing for work is not as clear of a routine. During the late 1980s, corporate dress was bombarded with a more relaxed look and feel; consequently blurring the lines of appropriate or standard professional dress.

Casual Fridays quietly slipped into the traditional workweek causing conflict in the traditional company dress code. Miller (1999) explained that casual dress' emergence into the corporate world was due to the overwhelming occurrence of downsizing in companies. Upper management wanted to give employees an incentive for hard-work, hoping to boost morale among anxious employees (Miller, 1999).

Some companies ignored the style as just a fad while others embraced a full week of causal dress (Miller, 1999). Due to incongruent feelings across the corporate dimension, old company rules were challenged, and individuals openly violated strict-traditional policies (Kaiser, Nagasawa, and Hutton, 1991). Snyder (2004) declared that the professional look was merging its way back into the corporate dress code of companies in order to gain advantage over their competitors. To ensure the best impression possible, industries have begun "out-dressing" the competition due to lack of jobs and intense competition (Snyder, 2004).

Dress codes can sometimes be formally written in employee manuals, but most often there are informal codes of dress that are assumed and rarely discussed (Miller, 1999; *Power-dressing for Professionals*, 2005). Employers assume that employees will observe what upper management is wearing and reflect those adornment practices in their own dress (Samson, 2005; *Power-dressing for Professionals*, 2005; Miller, 1999). Without a written dress code, individuals determine for themselves what they perceive as appropriate types of clothing for various work places. It is common for perceptions of proper or improper dress for each job to differ from person to person (Kwon, 1994). Schneider (1973) determined the implicit personality theory, which suggests that persons possess individual mental constructs of proper dress for each job setting, and when employees perceive themselves as dressed properly, they believe that they embody responsibility, competency and other attributes.

Russell & Reynold (1992) spoke specifically to African American professionals, and explained if an employee's image does not mirror the protocol dress of the employer, it negatively affects the employee, the superiors and the company. They wanted African Americans to understand that incongruent appearance between employees and their employer could limit their career opportunities. Male and female African American managers face many racial barriers toward upward mobility, and appearance should not be one of those barriers (Russell & Reynolds, 1992; Johnson-Elie, 2004). In addition, Molloy (1996) believed women must dress professionally in every situation regardless of casual dress codes. He recommended conservative colors and avoidance of sexy clothing.

Determining the degree of professionalism in an employer's everyday attire can often present great challenges for employees. Causal dress falls between the traditional business suit and active sportswear, causing employees to become confused on what is appropriate clothing. Research reported men to be more perplexed over appropriate attire for causal work days than female employees (Miller, 1999). In addition, Rafaeli et al. (1997) found women have abundant skills in negotiating dress in the workplace.

Ebony magazine stressed to their readers that everyday the employee should be polished and office-friendly. *Power-dressing For Professionals* (2005) contended there were two types of business attire: *business professiona*l and *informal business professional*. Informal business professional, which is similar to fashion-oriented professional dress, allows for more color and fashionable fabrics in the traditional suit. The article identifies *casual* and *chic* as the other options for dress in the workplace and advises females to steer clear of "sandals, disco boots, jungle prints, leather miniskirts, tattered blue jeans" (*Power-dressing For Professionals*, 2005, p.90), and other party clothes. The article strictly advises black females to wear business

professional for job interviews and their description of interview clothing resembles that of clothing presented on college career websites.

Three of the career center websites from the four Land Grant Institutions chosen for this study dedicate several pages of instructions for professional dress for job interviews (LSU Career Services, 2006; MSU Career Center, 2005; Southern University Systems and A&M College Career Services, 2005). University Career Centers are quick to remind students that it only takes twelve to fifteen seconds for a first impression to form, and that one's dress should not be a detracting factor (Ball State University Career Center, 2003). All of the college websites give specific guidelines for choosing a professional interview suit for women.

Women are directed to purchase a conservative, classic style skirt suit fabricated of lightweight fabric (Southern University Systems and A&M College Career Services, 2005). Career counselors advocate neutral colors such as navy, dark gray, black, or camel. The skirt should be no shorter than two inches above the knee (LSU Career Services, 2006), though human resource hiring managers maintain the most inappropriate suits are those that have skirt lengths several inches above the knee (Damhorst, Jondle, & Youngberg, 2002). Ironically, Mississippi State University's Career Center suggests pantsuits are acceptable for interview attire, but Southern University's Career Services, Louisiana State University's Career Services, and Damhorst et al. (2002) adamantly oppose wearing pants to a professional interview. A solid light colored blouse is preferred, and a low neck line is prohibited (Damhorst el al., 2002; Mississippi State University Career Center, 2005; Southern University Systems and A&M College Career Services, 2005; Louisiana State University Career Services, 2006). Shoes should be pumps with medium heel in black or other dark colors, and hosiery is a must (Southern University Systems and A&M College Career Services, 2005). LSU Career Services (2005) is

the only college to detail no backless or toeless shoe. All Career Centers strictly forbid flashy or fashionable jewelry and accessories. The sites stressed to students that employers should remember their message, not their appearance.

John Molloy (1975), the author of Dress For Success, stressed that upward mobility at work depends on intelligence and ability, but even more important, on how one dresses. Molloy (1975) devoted 245 pages to professional dress advice on how clothes can make a man succeed and become more likeable at work. Molloy stressed that men should always dress in conservative colors, patterns, and combinations of cloth. He believed that familiar conservative dress initiates acceptance, not contempt. In addition, Molloy and Bixler (1997) believed more than any other garment in the professional dress genre, the business jacket produces the most professional look (Bixler, 1997).

More recently, Molloy (1996) has written a book suggesting what is appropriate for women to wear in the workplace. He stressed the importance of wearing a jacket over any outfit to increase authority. The business jacket has been declared the hallmark of American businesswomen, serving the same functions for women as they do for men (Molloy, 1996). According to Molloy's survey, 93 percent of business men and 94 percent of business women assumed that females adorn in jackets outranked those without jackets. Molloy (1996) believed that women's dress choices have greater consequences in terms of upward mobility and respect than they do for men. Molloy believed corporate casual dress has negatively impacted the female workforce.

Adornment practices have a larger influence than physical attractiveness on hiring decisions (Johnson and Roach-Higgins, 1987). Yet, it was Kwon (1994) who was the first to examine the types of occupational attributes enhanced by proper or appropriate dress in a work

setting. “Appropriate dress has become extremely important in many professions. The clothing industry has been quick to meet the symbolic need for attire that translates into power, success, and desired outcomes” (Kwon, 1994, p. 34). In addition, studies show that the man’s “classic suit” provides a “halo-effect” ascribing intelligence, academic ability, and good behavior to the wearer, both for men and women (Behling, 1995; Molloy, 1975).

Kimle & Damhorst (1997) found that women and men noted that focusing on fashion garments in business dress is typically viewed as exhibitionism. The occurrence of fads and other trendy garments in the professional dress code are perceived as showy and draw unnecessary attention to an individual in order to create an elite identity (Damhorst et al., 2002; Kimle & Damhorst, 1997). Some even negatively juxtapose fashion garments with poor work ethic. Outsiders perceive those who wear fashion items to make poor decisions and are quick to jump on the band wagon (Kimle & Damhorst, 1997).

Kimle & Damhorst (1997) found conservative dress and fashionable dress to be polar opposites on a continuum. Subjects found one meaning higher than the other on a continuum, but didn’t totally disregard the other. It is believed that observing a balance of conservatism and fashion keeps a female employee from appearing too extreme. Women in the survey professed that the general professional dress was conservative.

It is believed, “Conservatism balanced with fashion in business dress communicated professionalism and social savvy simultaneously” (Kimle & Damhorst, 1997, p.55). An interest in fashion recognizes awareness to cultural aesthetics and appropriately choosing elements of the larger culture into the workplace. Authors note that appreciation for up-to-date trends could function as a valuable skill in selected organizations (Kimle & Damhorst, 1997). However, research has clearly noted that career driven women (Yoo, 2003; Kimle & Damhorst, 1997;

Johnson & Roach-Higgins, 1987; Workman & Johnson, 1989) and African American professionals (Schneider, 1998; McLeod, 1999) place a greater importance on appropriateness of professional garments than do "just-a-job" employees.

Though academia has conducted numerous studies on appropriate dress for the workplace, industry has conducted their own research. Gardyn and Fetto (2002) reported the "American Industry Dress Code Survey," which was a national poll of 201 senior executives at corporations that take in over $500 million in annual sales. They discovered that 56% of those businesses surved followed a strict dress code policy including a suit and tie, and or dress. The New York based, *Men's Apparel Alliance* revealed in 2001 senior executives' perceptions of employees who dress professional versus those that dress corporate causal. These included: 70% believed professional business attire projects a better image, 60% believed suits to command more respect, 46% expressed that individuals appear more organized when wearing corporate dress, and 22% of senior executives stated individuals are more likely to get promoted when adorned in professional business attire (Gardyn & Fetto, 2002). Damhorst, Jondle, & Youngberg (2002) affirmed the American Industry Dress Code Survey, by noting from 1991 to 2001 there was a return to conservative interview dress that did not leave room for the fashionable or feminine aesthetic code.

Dressing Women in the Workplace

In 1970 the U.S. Department of Commerce verified that women held 16.7% of management and administrative roles, but by 2001 women maintained 46% of the executive, administrative, and managerial roles. Although women are gaining representation and power in lower level management positions, females are still disproportional in representation in higher management positions (Kimle & Damhorst, 1997; Thomas, 2005). Many professional women

are aware of this fact and do not allow lack of professionalism in dress to be a factor (Kimble & Damhorst, 1997; Schneider, 1998; Thomas, 2005). Due to the disproportionate level of respect and authority provided to women at work, Molloy (1996) stressed that a suit jacket should be worn everyday with professional work attire.

Since the 1970s, there has been a rise in females in higher education causing an increase of women in traditional male dominated professions (Clarke & Weismantle, 2003; Cleveland, 2003). Image consultants and clothing researchers past and present have recommended working females to dress for success by fashioning their bodies in a professional skirt suit (Franz and Norton, 2001; *Power-dressing For Professionals*, 2005; Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquail, and Mackie-Lewis, 1997; Yoo, 2003). However, in the 1990s the push for business causal became the dominant policy while the professional suit took a short rest (Kate, 1998; Kimble & Dahmorst, 1997; Miller, 1999). U.S. companies found it too hard to manage the relaxed corporate dress, inspiring the current rebirth of a conservative dress code.

Beginning in the 1980s, researchers began to suggest female professionals adopt a more unified business appearance like that of the men's business suit. To symbolize success, researchers suggested a uniform comprised of a matching skirt and jacket with a quiet blouse (Cash, 1985; Forsythe, Drake, & Cox, 1984; Johnson & Roach-Higgins, 1987).

Extensive research has been conducted on perceptions of female dress in upper management positions. Molloy (1996) found when females dress casually, their authority, professionalism, and competence can be challenged. Favorable opinions about a person are influenced by positive appearance (Molloy, 1975; Molloy, 1996; Johnson & Roach-Higgins, 1987). In addition, Bixler (1997) found professional interview appearance influences a higher starting salary and career advancement. Damhorst, Jondle, & Youngberg (2002) emphasized

that some young female professionals flaunted their sexual attractiveness through their business dress, and they attribute some of their success to their provocative dress, despite hiring managers insisting that sexy and fashionable dress are not acceptable for interviews or the workplace (Molloy, 1996; Damhorst et al., 2002).

Research has examined how the dress of an applicant affects the interviewer's perception of his or her characteristics (Damhorst & Reed, 1986; Johnson and Roach-Higgins, 1987; Lennon & Miller, 1984-85) and the perception of the applicant's competencies (Forsythe, 1988; Thurston, Lennon, and Clayton, 1990). Collectively, studies showed that whether a woman will advance through the corporate ladder and succeed is determined by observer's perceptions of the female's adherence to the traditional professional dress code.

Some studies found traditionally feminine garments, when integrated into professional dress, negatively influence others' perceptions of women's credibility and equality to men (Faludi, 1991). Molloy (1996) suggested that working women should purchase their clothing in a traditional men's store that has a women's professional dress section. Following the push for masculine appearance in professional dress, the question was proposed if women could appear too masculine, thus hurting their professional appearance and chances for promotion.

Johnson, Crutsinger, & Workman (1994) found that accessories such as women wearing a scarf around the neck was perceived more likely to possess managerial skills than when wearing an open collared shirt, but these adornment practices must follow traditional gender roles. Neckties fashioned like those of men were reported as masculine symbols, violating expectations of feminine appearance, thus hurting chances for promotion (Johnson el al., 1994). Similarly, Kimle & Damhorst (1997) discovered female subjects believed women should not appear too masculine in business dress for fear of gender norm violation. Women in the study

viewed extremely masculine dress as a devaluation to femininity and gender, thus causing resentment from female co-workers. There is a fine line for women to discern between masculinity and femininity, but Damhorst et al. (2002) established findings on the appropriate business dress for women. The ideal interview suit was classic tailoring like that of a man's suit, but allowed pants and skirts.

Some researchers suggest that women have a greater variety of professional clothing to choose from than do men. One study found female business wear selections include a wide range of silhouettes, patterns, textures, and colors (Kimle & Damhorst, 1997). Kaiser (1990), and Solomon & Douglas (1985) both believed that for the past two hundred years societies have toyed in and around women's fashions, creating whimsical colors, fabrics, and styles. Kimle & Damhorst (1997) entertained the idea that if women are welcoming a variety of business dress, then their assigned meanings would become unclear. However, the higher the position, the more conservative and traditional a woman's suit should look (Kimle & Damhorst, 1997; Yoo, 2003; Johnson & Roach-Higgins, 1987; Workman & Johnson, 1989).

Damhorst et al. study conducted from 1991 to 2002, found that personnel interviewers upheld the same standards for appropriate female professional interview dress. The ideal interview suit was classic tailoring like that of a man's suit and was equally represented by pants and skirts. In their study, 69 male and female human resource managers, recruiters, and employment interviewers deemed the following qualities problematic dress for interviews: "1) deeper neckline exposure or shirt left open at the neck with collar casually rumpled to expose a narrow view of the neck and upper chest; 2) three quarter length sleeves; 3) high contrast trim, large buttons, or unusual collars that brought too much visual interest to the outfit; (4) open toe

shoes or sandals; (5) a one piece “coat” dress; (6) a knee length jacket; and (7) large jewelry, such as a large pearl necklace” (p.7).

Respondents in the professional field claimed collarless jackets worn buttoned to the neck, boot-cut pants and A-line skirts to be too trendy in style. Damhorst et al. found that some colored suits with the appropriate cut are acceptable. Bright red, magenta, and light beige suits were accepted, but pink or purple suits were not. Conservative plaids or checks were voted professional, but prints were believed inappropriate. The study found that skirts shorter than the knee were not approved.

Studies show that males’ view of womens’ professional dress were more critical than females’ (Damhorst et al., 2002; Kwon, 1994). Females are more eager to approve fashionable items such as tweed fabrics, A-line skirts, and a variety of collar styling (Damhorst et al., 2002). However, Molloy (1996) found female superiors to be more critical than men in their judgments of improperly dressed female employees.

Understanding professional African American consumers’ aesthetic preferences of professional dress is essential to retailers wishing to target this growing niche market. Not only is it important to African American consumers, but it is financially rewarding for those retailers that target this market.

African American Professional Dress

Individuals and groups use clothing to carve out a place in society and to create an identity. This identity is used to express one’s culture and ideals of the group that authorized it. An individual’s cultural background or race has been found to affect the individual’s clothing preferences (Hood, 1993; Yoo, 2003; Lee, 2005). Walker (2006) reported that more products and services are being promoted for the growing cultural markets because the markets are mostly

untapped. Many researchers have explored cultural differences in consumer behavior (Doran, 1994; Fisher, 1993; Miller, 1993), but very few researchers have focused on the African American population.

Appearance is used as a tool to determine how well an employee can adapt to the corporate culture and understand the values of the company. Russell and Reynolds (1992) interviewed an African American vice president of purchasing in a Massachusetts firm who believed African American managers must invest extra time in their professional appearance and training because, "Blacks have to prove themselves for admission to the inner circles of corporate America. Whites have to disprove themselves to be kicked out" (p. 72). Watkins (1996) confirmed this assertion by proving that an individual's membership in different groups can be achieved by manipulating appearance.

Other studies have confirmed appropriate dress for minorities is one key element for success into the inner circles of the corporate workplace. Schneider (1998) interviewed academia in the United States and found a vast difference in perceptions of appropriate dress for the classroom setting. The majority did not agree, but frumpy, causal, or fashionable was the standard informal dress code for a Caucasian professor. This code was greatly different from African American professors who maintained the traditional professional dress. Informal dress codes for companies depict the power of normative influence on an employee's purchase selection (Mowen & Minor, 1998). Schneider's (1998) study of African American professors used Caucasian professors' informal dress codes as a comparative reference or as a checkpoint to ensure their own dress maintained a greater professionalism. The African Americans interviewed noted that dressing professionally in the workplace is an extra burden for minorities working in academia. One African American professor noted that dressing in Afrocentric

garments or causal dress “makes the other parts of you invisible- your scholarship, your intellect, your seriousness” (Schneider, 1998, p.14). In addition to the previous studies, McLeod (1999) also reported African American men working in corporate America declined to dress down even on company recommended Causal Fridays due to fear of a negative perception from Caucasian coworkers. McLeod (1999), Schneider (1998), and Russell and Reynolds (1992) maintain cultural identity holds a more powerful influence over perception in professional dress than does assimilation into the majority’s casual aesthetic code.

It is a common assumption in diversity management literature that the same rules for Caucasians do not apply to African Americans in today’s society (McLeod, 1999; Thomas, 2005; Cleveland, 2003). In addition, McLeod (1999) found “Casual dress may be seen by some African Americans as a rule or dress code practiced in Caucasian corporate America, but it does not apply to them” (p.272).

Even though African American professionals spend more of their income on work clothing (Miller, 1999), it is not clear what African American employees consider appropriate professional dress. It may seem easy for retailers and manufacturers to cash in on the African American professional niche market, but have these industries studied the perceptions of these consumers? Do they understand the wants, needs, and desires of the African American consumer? Have retailers identified the source of influence for African American perceptions of dress for the workplace?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The population for this study will consist of African American students attending Land Grant universities in Mississippi and Louisiana; two 1862 Land Grant colleges (PWI) and two 1890 Land Grant colleges (HBCU). The population for this research was obtained by researching African American demographic and psychographic statistics in the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau divides the nation into four Regions and nine Districts for data reporting purposes. These boundaries are formed to include "areas with comparable social, economic, and housing characteristics" (Lavin, 1996). The highest percent of the African American population live in the South region of the United States at 55.3 percent which represents 19.8 percent of the South's total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Because the South region holds the highest percent of African Americans, its four districts were examined in greater detail. State Census statistics of districts of West South Central, East South Central, and South Atlantic were studied to uncover similarities. *Percent Black* or African Americans of total state population, and *percent minority owned firms* were chosen for comparison. *Percent minority owned firms* exhibits the high degree of professionalism and integrity that African Americans bring into the workplace. Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Kentucky, South Carolina and North Carolina provided parallel figures for these two criteria. Mississippi and Louisiana had the highest *percent Black* or African American

population (MS 36.3%, LA 32.5%) in the South and in the United States, and had corresponding percentages for minority owned firms (MS 13.1%, LA 14.1%) (U.S. Census, 2000).

Mississippi and Louisiana were chosen as host states due to similar enrollment of African Americans attending Land-Grant Universities. Four universities in the two states were selected based on the historical intentions of the Land-Grant Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890: two Land-Grant Universities of 1862 (Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge; and Mississippi State University, Starkville, MS) and two 1890 Land-Grant Institutions (Southern University and A&M College of Baton Rouge, LA; and Alcorn State University, Alcorn State, MS).

The Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 designated federal land grants and money in exchange to teach classical studies along with agriculture, military tactics, and the mechanical arts. This was to insure that any member of the working class, regardless of income could obtain a liberal, practical education. This was extremely important because higher education was largely unavailable to many agricultural and industrial workers. Social and legal segregation prohibited African Americans from attending these schools. As a result in 1890 a second Morrill Act was passed to prohibit distribution of federal funding to southern states that regarded race as an admission standard. However, the Morrill Act of 1890 allowed southern states that provided a separate land-grant institution for African Americans to receive the funds. As a result, the 1890 Land-Grants became African American colleges that were federally funded (NASULGC, 1999).

The method of selection depended on what type of university (PWI or HBCU) the researcher contacted. To obtain the greatest concentration of African American students at PWI, the researcher contacted all minority student organizations by emailing or telephoning the presiding president for the Spring 2006 term. Of the organizations that responded, eight contact persons agreed to administer the survey to its members and mail the completed surveys back to

the researcher within two weeks. At the Historically Black Colleges and Universities the researcher contacted professors of various subjects through the method of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling occurs when the first contact person recommends a friend to the researcher and that friend recommends a friend, and so on. Of the professors that responded from the HBCU, three agreed to allow the survey to be administered by the researcher in their classes.

The Preliminary Focus Group

After the researcher developed the preliminary survey, a focus group was formulated to detect any problems or additional questions the research should address. Pre-planned, open-ended questions were discussed with a panel of seven African American college students (four undergraduates and three graduates) (see Appendix B). The questions were broadly worded in order to allow the group members to use their own language to describe their opinions and experiences. These participants were chosen by convenience, but represented ages 20 through 26, both sexes (four women and three men), and diverse areas of study including: History, Psychology, Child and Family Development, and Fashion Merchandising. The meeting was scheduled at a convenient location on campus one month prior to survey distribution. Food was served and name badges were worn to allow an informal atmosphere. Originally the meeting was to last forty-five minutes, but because of unexpected enthusiasm from the group, the members chose to discuss for one hour and 40 minutes. Thirty minutes was devoted to evaluation of the survey including: selection of suit photographs to include in Section 4, opinions of garments listed in Section 3 with garment additions, length, wording, and organization (see Appendix A for Survey).

The group participated in selection of the professional suit photographs by rating 33 photographs the researcher had previously selected from Overstock.com based on past

researchers' descriptions of appropriate suits for corporate interviews (Damhorst et al., 2002). The group unanimously agreed that the pale color of the headless mannequins did not affect their opinion of the suits. One female participant went as far to say "I am used to seeing White mannequins. (*laugh*). It doesn't bother me anymore." Of the 33 suits, the group suggested 10 that were easy to see and that met the descriptions of each category. Of the 10 photographs selected, the researcher then narrowed the selection to six suits, two absolute appropriate, two maybe, and two absolute inappropriate.

Focus groups are commonly suggested for the initial method of exploring a theoretical idea that has not warranted any empirical research (Franz and Norton, 2001). Due to the lack of empirical research examining African American college students and their views of professional dress, the first step was a qualitative assessment of African American perceptions of traditional professional dress and that of non-traditional/ fashion professional dress. This one-time interview was used to validate the developed survey and create new questions, but not to make generalizations about the population. The researcher understood that a small group of African Americans could not possibly represent the entire population's perception and beliefs. Because the focus group will not be part of the sample, these students were identified through convenience.

Grounded theory approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1968) is conducted by reading and re-reading a data set or database and discovering variables called categories, concepts and properties and their relationships. For the present study the researcher observed behavior, examined personal field notes and questionnaires completed by participants (see Appendix D), and keenly listened to the recorded tapes over and over until a pattern developed.

The open coding identified, named, categorized, and described the important topics mentioned in the focus group discussion. The initial codes were based on a broad set of questions and topical areas guiding the discussion, but were expanded to include unexpected information that could emerge from the focus group (See Appendix B). As suggested by past research each sentence and topic was sensitively reviewed in search of hidden meanings (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Possible codes or categories that the researcher speculated to be uncovered were nouns such as work activities, social behaviors, fashion and topics of race. Properties of these categories revealed code words such as unique body size, patronizing marketing campaigns, mentoring, coordinating outfits, personal satisfaction from dress, reference group, self-esteem, code switching, and fashion leadership. The important topics were then incorporated into the survey to authenticate the instrument.

Description of Instrument

The researcher received permission from the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board to begin the study November 2005 and received permission to implement the survey March 2006. The data for this research was collected using a survey questionnaire (see Appendix A). As previously mentioned, the survey sections were created from past research, in collaboration with the focus group. The survey contained five sections which related to the respondent's self-esteem, overall fashion behavior, perception of professional dress, and demographic questions (Table 1).

Table 1

Survey Description

Variable	**Questions**
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale	Section 1 (10 questions)
Importance of Clothing	Section 2.1 (8 questions)
Fashion Innovativeness	Section 2.2 (5 questions)
Traditional Professional Dress or Fashion Oriented Dress	Section 3.1 (44 garments)
Business Casual Dress or Casual Dress	Section 3.2 (46 garments)
Professional Interview Dress	Section 4 (6 pictures)
Demographic Information	Section 5 (6 questions)

For the purposes of this empirical study, self-esteem was assessed by a self-report questionnaire yielding a quantitative result. The first section was used to measure the subject's self-esteem level using Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1986) (see Appendix A). The validity and reliability of Rosenberg's scale used for minority research had been established by previous research prior to use (Crocker & Luhtanen, 2003; Phiney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997; Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001). Originally, Rosenberg's scale was developed to measure children's global feelings of self-worth. It is now considered the standard for self-esteem measurement. The 10 item scale is easy for the respondent to read and complete. As suggested by past literature (Kuhnert, 2005; the University of Maryland, 2005) a four-point response ranging from one, indicating "strongly agree" to four, indicating "strongly disagree" was used. The survey asked each subject to assess their own self-esteem using both positively and negatively worded items; for example: "I feel that I have a number of good qualities" and "I feel that I do not have much to be proud of." The negatively worded items 3, 5, 8, 9, & 10 were reverse scored using SPSS before averaging the total score for each participant. The range of

possible scores for the respondents was 10 through 40. The purpose of using a four point system and omitting the 'neutral' fifth answer box is to force respondents to have an opinion on the subject and to eliminate any researcher bias. Karl Kuhnert, professor of Organizational Psychology at the University of Georgia believes, "because the neutral answer box allows the respondent to ignore the survey question, investigators often misinterpret the data to view a more positive relationship than the sample's true opinion" (lecture, 2005).

The second section of the survey consisted of Fashion Behavior Measures dealing with fashion innovativeness and importance of clothing to the individual. This scale was adapted from Kwon and Workman (1996) with permission. Eight questions addressed fashion innovativeness and five questions addressed the importance of clothing. As suggested by psychologist Kuhnert (2005) a 4-point scale ranging from one, indicating "strongly agree" to four, indicating "strongly disagree" was used. Fashion innovators were separated from fashion followers based on previous research that established fashion leaders are the minority of consumers (Goldsmith, Flynn, & Moore, 1996; Solomon, 1994) and only the top 15% of participant scores should be considered as fashion innovators (Forsythe, Butler, & Kim, 1991; Goldsmith, Flynn, & Moore, 1996).

Section 3 of the survey is divided into two parts; both evaluating perceptions of professional dress (see Appendix A). Section 3.1 consisted of 44 specific garments found in female work attire. For each garment listed, respondents were asked to rate the female garment on a five-point scale ranging from one, indicating "*Business Professional,*" three indicating "*Neither,*" to five, indicating "*Fashion-Oriented.*" Section 3.2 consisted of 46 specific garments found in female work attire. A five-point response ranging from one, indicating "*Business Casual,*" three, indicating "*Neither*" to five, indicating "*Casual*" was used. This section was

adapted from Franz and Norton's (2004) study which surveyed 95 college students with 82% of subjects claiming Caucasian ancestry to determine their perception of male and female degree of professionalism in dress. The survey provided female articles of clothing for male and female respondents to assess the professional appearance of each garment.

Survey Section four asked the respondents to look at six photographs of female professional suits found in the workplace (see Appendix A). Respondents were asked to indicate whether each suit would be appropriate for an interview for a middle management position as an executive assistant in a law firm or accounting firm. For each suit pictured, respondents were asked to rate the suit on a five-point scale ranging from one, indicating "*Absolute Appropriate Suit,"* three indicating "*Maybe Suits,"* to five, indicating "*Most Inappropriate Suits."* Once again, male and female respondents were asked to rate female work dress and its degree of professionalism. This section was adapted from Damhorst et al. which assessed how human resource managers, recruiters, and employment interviewers viewed women's job interview dress. Damhorst et al. used 113 controlled and tested photographs taken from mail order catalogs to rate the three categories based on appropriateness. This study based its initial selection of photographs on Damhorst et al. study using their detailed descriptions of appropriate, maybe, and inappropriate suits. Thirty-three suits were selected from Overstock.com and presented to the focus group for evaluation. Of the 10 selected, six were chosen by the researcher to be included in the survey based on previous studies and the focus group discussion.

Section five of the survey addressed the respondent's demographic characteristics (see Appendix A). These included: *Age, Sex, Race, Current education level, College major,* and for the respondent to *List the student organizations that you hold membership.* Participants

responded by two methods: by placing a mark beside the category that was most suitable to their situation or by writing in the answer.

Administration of the Instrument

Specific sampling procedures varied, depending on which type of Land-Grant College was sampled. The researcher surveyed undergraduate and graduate students of various ages by using a convenience sample on PWI and the snowball method on HBCU (see Appendix F). The universities surveyed were Louisiana State University, Southern University, Mississippi State University, and Alcorn State University. There were no incentives offered to participants of the survey, however, of the eight contact persons from PWI, two were awarded a one year subscription to an African American magazine/ journal of their choice. The selection criteria for the incentive awards were based on the volume of completed and returned surveys to the researcher.

Louisiana State University had a total enrollment of 28,423 (Spring 2006) with 2,647 students reporting African American ancestry. Accordingly, Mississippi State University reported enrollment of 14,395 (Fall 2005) with 2,843 African American students. LSU is considerably larger in enrollment, but ironically relatively equal in African American presence. The small percentage of African Americans enrolled in LSU could be due to the fact that Southern University (HBCU) is located within a few miles in the same city. Both HBCU, Alcorn State University and Southern University have enrollment of approximately 95% of African American students; ASU enrolled 3,100 in Fall 2004, and SU-BR enrolled 9,438 in Fall 2004.

The subjects for this research were selected by two different methods depending on the type of Land Grant Institution. The subjects from HBCU were obtained by surveying students

during regularly scheduled class times taught by professors that had given the researcher permission to administer the survey. Because both Alcorn State University and Southern University have 95 percent African American students, there was no problem surveying entire classrooms. The researcher spent one day at each university administering the survey to students (see Appendix F).

The subjects from PWI were obtained by surveying students in African American student organizations (see Appendix F). Surveying entire classrooms at PWI would not have been feasible due to the high enrollment of non-African American students per classroom. Due to this limitation, all African American student organizations and fraternities were contacted by email or telephone on both MSU and LSU campuses for participation in the study. The researcher initially intended to attend actual club meetings to survey the members, but time and finances did not permit. The researcher scheduled a meeting with each contact person at a convenient location on their campus. The researcher introduced herself, the research topic, and why this research is important to African Americans. In addition, the surveys were left with a self stamped envelop for the contact person of each organization to mail back after completion. During both campus visits, a total of eight appointments were held with contact persons explaining the research and answering the questions they had about the survey.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Of the 311 surveys distributed, 251 were completed and returned resulting in an 80.71% overall response rate. Biemer and Lyberg (2003) reported several interviewer characteristics that facilitate high response rates including: gender, interviewer's voice, accent, positive expectations and confidence. In addition to the researcher's characteristics, the high response rate was due to two different collection methods depending on which university was the host site. HBCU allowed a higher response rate of 99.12% due to the distribution and collection of the survey by the researcher, within the same time period. PWI allowed a lower, but still sufficient response rate of 80.20% due to lag time between the distribution of the surveys to each contact person and the actual completion of each survey administered by the contact person. Among the returned surveys, none were discarded, but several surveys were not completed in their entirety. However, the incomplete surveys were utilized for several of the hypotheses. The results from the survey are as follows.

Participant Demographics

Table 2 shows a summary of the participants' demographic characteristics. All of the respondents were African American. This was assured by the fact that the survey cover-letter stated "Please note that I am only interested in African American respondents, therefore, other ethnicities may wish not to participate in this research." In addition to the written request, the researcher verbally discussed the instructions to each contact person and survey participants at HBCU. All of the respondents were college students from four major universities in Mississippi

and Louisiana. The survey was distributed and collected in HBCU classrooms and distributed to student organization presidents during a meeting held on PWI campuses. More than two thirds of the total respondents (73.3%) were female, and for each individual school all respondents were more than two thirds female except for Mississippi State University (57.1%). The female demographic characteristic of Mississippi State University is lower in comparison to the other universities sampled due to MSU enrolling only 47.59% females (Mississippi State University Office of Institutional Research, Fall, 2005). Almost all the respondents (81.6%) were between the ages 18-24, which is representative of the student body at Mississippi State University (76.35%) (MSU Office of Institutional Research, Fall, 2005) and Southern University (77%) (Southern University and A&M College Office of Budget and Planning, Spring, 2006). The current education level varied for the total sample allowing for a greater range of reliable data. College majors of the respondents varied from university to university.

The high percentages in specific majors at HBCU can be explained due to the fact that entire classrooms of students were surveyed. At Southern University a marketing course (56.9% Business Related) and two Fashion Merchandising courses (25.9% Family and Consumer Science) were surveyed. At Alcorn State University two Nutrition courses (70.9% Health Related) were surveyed. However, at the PWI surveys were distributed to contact persons who acted as presidents to minority student organization. Mississippi State University respondents reported 30.9% Engineer/ Computer majors which can be explained since the student chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) were surveyed. Minorities in Agriculture, Resources, and Related Sciences (MARRS) accounted for 18.6% of science majors at MSU. Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity and Holmes Cultural Diversity Center were the other two organizations represented and neither are professional organizations in a specific field of study.

Louisiana State University respondents reported a greater diversity of majors due to the fact only two professional minority student organizations that cater to specific majors were surveyed. The National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) accounts for 20.6% of Engineer/ Computer majors and the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) accounted for 14.7% of Family and Consumer Science majors. Both MSU 22.9% and LSU 19.1% reported significant percentages in Business majors. Respondents from ASU 63.6% and SU-BR 63.8% were not members of student organizations or they chose to skip the question. This is expected due to the fact entire classrooms were surveyed at both HBCU and not student organizations. However, respondents 14.3% from MSU and 20.9% from LSU reported not belonging to a minority student organization. This is problematic because only organizations were asked to participate. It could be assumed the participant did not want to disclose the information.

Table 3 shows the results for the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of each survey section for the overall sample. Reliability coefficient for Section 1, Rosenberg's self-esteem Scale (Cronbach's alpha .83) mirrors that of previous studies with African American samples (Whiteside-Mansell and Corwyn, 2003). Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is the most widely used scale to measure global self-esteem because it maintains a high internal consistency across research (Whiteside-Mansell and Corwyn, 2003). The original research of the Fashion Behavior Scale reported a high level of internal consistency of alpha = .88 for the overall scale, Fashion Leadership was alpha = .89, and Importance of Clothing was alpha = .76 (Kwon and Workman, 1996). Table 3 shows that the study's reliability is similar to the original study that developed the Fashion Behavior Scale. Section 3.1 and 3.2 were adapted from previous studies (Damhorst, Jondle, & Youngberg, 2002; Franz & Norton, 2001) and no statistics on reliability

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of the Four Universities (N = 251)

Characteristic		**MSU** (*n*=70)	**LSU** (*n*=68)	**ASU** (*n*=55)	**SU-BR** (*n*=58)	**TOTAL** (*n*=251)
		n (%)	*n (%)*	*n (%)*	*n (%)*	*n (%)*
Age (in years)						
	Under 18 yrs	/	/	/	/	/
	18 – 24 yrs	59(84.4)	59(86.8)	45(81.8)	41 (71.9)	204(81.6)
	25 – 30 yrs	11(15.7)	8(11.8)	10(18.2)	15(26.3)	44(17.6)
	Over 30 yrs	/	1 (1.5)	/	1(1.8)	2(.8)
Gender						
	Men	30 (42.9)	15 (22.1)	7 (12.7)	15 (25.9)	67 (26.7)
	Women	40 (57.1)	53 (77.9)	48 (87.3)	43 (74.1)	184(73.3)
Current Education level						
	Freshman	10 (14.3)	4 (59.0)	8 (14.5)	3 (5.3)	25 (10.0)
	Sophomore	13 (18.6)	20 (29.4)	20 (36.4)	3 (5.3)	56 (22.4)
	Junior	14 (20.0)	19 (27.9)	9 (16.4)	22 (38.6)	64 (25.6)
	Senior	19 (27.1)	15 (22.1)	16 (29.1)	29 (50.9)	79 (31.6)
	Graduate	14 (20.0)	10 (14.7)	2 (3.6)	/	26 (10.4)
College Major						
	Undecided	2 (2.9)	2 (2.9)	2 (3.6)	2 (3.4)	8 (3.2)
	Business related	16 (22.9)	13 (19.1)	/	33 (56.9)	62 (24.7)
	Education	5 (7.1)	4 (5.9)	/	/	9 (3.6)
	Engineer/ Computers	21 (30.0)	14 (20.6)	/	3 (5.2)	38 (15.1)
	Family and Consumer Science	2 (2.9)	10 (14.7)	12 (21.8)	15 (25.9)	39 (15.5)

(Table 2 continues)

(Table 2 continued)

Characteristic		**MSU** (n=70)	**LSU** (n=68)	**ASU** (n=55)	**SU-BR** (n=58)	**TOTAL** (n=251)
			n (%)	*n (%)*	*n (%)*	*n (%)*
	Health Related	3 (4.3)	7 (10.3)	39 (70.9)	/	49 (19.5)
	Journalism related	1 (1.4)	3 (4.4)	/	2 (3.4)	6 (2.4)
	Liberal Arts	7 (10.0)	8 (11.8)	/	2 (3.4)	17 (6.8)
	Sciences	13 (18.6)	7 (10.3)	2 (3.6)	1 (1.7)	23 (9.2)
Member of a student organization?						
	Yes	60 (85.7)	53 (79.1)	20 (36.4)	21 (36.2)	154 (61.6)
	No	10 (14.3)	14 (20.9)	35 (63.6)	37 (63.8)	96 (38.4)

were provided for comparison. The original study Section 4 was adapted and therefore, did not report a measure of reliability.

Table 3

Results of the Cronbach Alpha Test For the Survey Sections

Variable	Items	Reliability
Section 1 Self-Esteem	10	.83
Section 2.1 Fashion Leadership	8	.90
Section 2.2 Importance of Clothing	5	.73
Section 2.1-2.2 Fashion Behavior	13	.87
Section 3.1 Traditional Professional Dress	44	.77
Section 3.2 Business Casual Dress	46	.73
Section 4 Appropriate Professional Dress	6	.63

Note. N = 251.

Descriptive Findings

The data for the variables of Sections 3.1 *Traditional Professional Dress* or *Fashion-Oriented Dress*, 3.2 *Business Casual Dress* or *Casual Dress*, and 4 *Appropriate Professional Dress* were condensed by reporting the variables that maintained a significant difference for the subsamples in question. The subsamples used for comparison within the overall African American college student sample were a) HBCU and PWI, b) Louisiana and Mississippi, c) men and women, and d) fashion innovators and fashion followers. Pearson Correlation tests were

used to analyze any correlation between self-esteem and any aspect of fashion behavior within the subsamples. Descriptive statistics were generated using SPSS for each variable and are found in Tables 2 through 10.

Due to respondents skipping random questions on the survey, the total responses from HBCU and PWI differ for each variable. The range of subjects that responded to each question comprising the valid percent was between 109 and 113 from HBCU, and 130 and 132 from PWI. It is important to note for Section 3.1 *Traditional Professional Dress or Fashion-Oriented Dress*, a mean score closer to five indicates that the respondent perceives the garment to be fashion-oriented, likewise the lower the mean score the more the respondent perceives the garment to be *traditional professional dress*. Section 3.2 *Business Casual Dress* or *Casual Dress* is on a different scale. The closer the mean score is to one, the respondent believes the garment to be *business casual dress*, and the closer the mean score is to five, the respondent perceives the garment to be *casual dress*. There was not a significant difference found in Section 4 between students enrolled in HBCU and PWI.

Section 3.1 in Table 4 revealed that two out of 44 items had a significant difference at a .05 level. Using the t-test for independent samples, there was a significant difference between HBCU and PWI in their perception of garment 1: suits with embroidered jackets ($p<0.05$), and in garment 2: loafers ($p< 0.05$). The mean score (with standard deviations in parentheses) of garment one for HBCU was 2.99 (1.47), and 3.35 (1.28) for PWI. Therefore the mean score suggests that African American students enrolled in PWI are less accepting of suits with embroidered jackets into the standard definition of traditional professional dress. In addition African American students enrolled in HBCU perceive embroidered jackets as acceptable attire for the traditional professional dress. After examining the SPSS frequency output found in Table

1 of Appendix E, 46% students enrolled in HBCU considered suits with embroidered jackets as traditional professional dress and 27% students enrolled in PWI considered it to be traditional professional dress.

Section 3.2 in Table 4 revealed that five out of 46 items had a significant difference at a ($p < .05$) or ($p < .01$) level. Using the t-test for independent samples, there was a significant difference between the two subsamples in their perception of garment 3: dress pants/ slacks ($t = 2.71$, $df = 205$, $p< 0.01$), garment 4: dress pants wide-leg ($p< 0.05$), garment 5: short sleeve blouses (not sheer) ($p< 0.05$), garment 6: t-shirts (no collar) ($p< 0.05$), and garment 7: tank tops ($p< 0.05$). The mean score (with standard deviations in parentheses) for garment 3: dress pants/ slacks for HBCU was 2.33 (1.50), and for PWI was 1.85 (1.20). Therefore the mean score suggests that students enrolled in PWI perceive dress pants/ slacks more as business casual dress than their HBCU counterparts. After examining the SPSS frequency output found in Table 1 of Appendix E, 78% students enrolled in PWI believe dress pants/ slacks as *business casual dress* and 65% students enrolled in HBCU believe it to be *business casual dress*. Based on previous studies (Damhorst, et al., 2002; Franz and Norton, 1997) and University publications (Ball State University Career Center, 2003; Louisiana State University Career Services, 2006; Mississippi State University Career Center, 2005), the male and female African American students enrolled in the PWI had a more accurate perception of the garments than did the students enrolled in HBCU. Using independent t-tests, there was not a significant difference between HBCU and PWI in response to the Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for HBCU and PWI Subsamples

Variables	HBCU *M (SD)*	PWI *M (SD)*	*t*
Section 3.1 Traditional Professional Dress (1), Fashion Oriented Professional Dress (5)			
1. Suits with Embroidered Jackets	2.99 (1.47)	3.35 (1.28)	-2.10*
2. Loafers (no laces)	2.75(1.473)	2.40 (1.24)	1.99*
Section 3.2 Business Casual Dress (1), Casual Dress (5)			
3. Dress pants/ slacks	2.33 (1.50)	1.85 (1.20)	2.71**
4. Dress pants- wide leg	3.23 (1.50)	2.85 (1.37)	2.02*
5. Short-sleeve blouses (not sheer)	2.77 (1.32)	2.42 (1.17)	2.21*
6. T-shirts (no collar)	3.96 (1.06)	4.23 (1.08)	-1.97*
7. Tank tops	4.07 (1.00)	4.34 (1.01)	-2.06*

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 3.1: 1 = Traditional Professional Dress, 2 = Semi Traditional Professional Dress, 3 = Neither, 4 = Semi Fashion-Oriented Professional Dress, 5 = Fashion-Oriented Professional Dress. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 3.2: 1 = Business Casual Dress, 2 = Semi Business Casual Dress, 3 = Neither, 4 = Semi Casual Dress, 5 = Casual Dress.

Table 5 represents the descriptive data for the sample of Mississippi and Louisiana. Due to missing data the total responses from Mississippi and Louisiana differ for each variable in question. The range of subjects that responded to each question comprising the valid percent was between 76 and 125 from MS, and 115 and 122 from LA. It is important to remember the

same rules follow in Table 5 as in Table 4 in regards to section 3.1 and section 3.2. Section 4 asks the respondent to evaluate the appropriateness of a female business suit to a professional interview. The higher the mean score the more inappropriate the respondent perceives the suit to be, in contrast, the lower the mean score the more the respondent perceives the suit to be absolute appropriate for a professional interview.

Section 3.1 *Traditional Professional Dress* or *Fashion-Oriented Dress,* revealed that 14 out of 44 items had significant differences, Section 3.2 *Business Casual Dress* or *Casual Dress*, revealed that 16 out of 46 items had significant differences, and Section 4 *Appropriate Professional Dress,* revealed that two out of six items had significant differences. Using the t-test for independent samples, there was a significant difference between MS and LA in their perception of garment 1: suits with embroidered jackets ($p<0.05$), garment 2: suits with jacket hem above waist ($p< 0.05$), garment 3: pink suits with skirt ($p< 0.05$) , garment 4: suits with high contrast trim ($p< 0.05$), garment 5: suits with dress pants- wide leg ($p< 0.001$), garment 6: suits with Bermuda shorts ($p< 0.001$), garment 7: suits with Capri pants ($p< 0.001$), garment 8:suits with turtlenecks ($p< 0.05$), garment 9: suits with halter tops ($p< 0.001$), garment 10: leather shoes (2-3" heels) ($p< 0.05$), garment 11: Sandals ($p< 0.001$), garment 12: chandelier/ medium earrings ($p< 0.05$), garment 13: cultural head wrap ($p< 0.05$), garment 14: broach/ pin ($p< 0.05$).

Using the t-test for independent samples, there was a significant difference between MS and LA in their perception of garments found in Section 3.2 *Business Casual Dress* or *Casual Dress*, including: 15: dresses ($p<0.05$), garment 16: jeans/ denim pants ($p< 0.05$), garment 17: Bermuda/ walking shorts ($p< 0.001$) , garment 18: fitted Capri pants ($p< 0.01$), garment 19: long-sleeve blouses (not sheer) ($p< 0.001$), garment 20: long sleeve blouses (sheer) ($p< 0.001$), garment 21: three-quarter sleeve blouse ($p< 0.05$), garment 22:short sleeve blouses (sheer) ($p<$

0.001), garment 23: t-shirts (no collar) (p< 0.01), garment 24: tank tops (p< 0.001), garment 25: Halter tops (p< 0.01), garment 26: sleeveless blouses (p< 0.01), garment 27: mules/ backless shoes (p< 0.05), garment 28: canvas shoes (p< 0.001), garment 29: Athletic shoes (p< 0.01), and garment 30: white athletic socks (p< 0.01).

Section 4 *Appropriate Professional Dress*, in Table 5 revealed two items with a significant difference using the t-test for independent samples, item 31 (p< 0.05), and item 32 (p< 0.01). Overall the male and female African American students enrolled in the Louisiana schools had a more accurate perception of the garments than did the students enrolled in Mississippi schools.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for the Mississippi and Louisiana Samples

Variables	MS *M (SD)*	LA *M (SD)*	*t*
Section 3.1 Traditional Professional Dress (1), Fashion Oriented Professional Dress (5)			
1. Suits with Embroidered Jackets	3.00(13.85)	3.39 (1.35)	-2.20*
2. Suits with jacket hem above waist	3.06 (1.47)	3.72 (1.38)	-3.65*
3. Pink suits with skirts	3.60 (1.29)	3.94 (1.12)	-2.23*
4. Suits with high contrast trim	3.45 (1.08)	3.92 (1.02)	-3.46*
5. Suits with dress pants-wide leg	3.12 (1.42)	3.79 (1.24)	-3.95***
6. suits with bermuda shorts	3.79 (1.23)	4.47 (.84)	-5.06***
7. Suits with capri pants	3.72 (1.26)	4.39 (.91)	-4.78***
8. Suits with turtlenecks	2.63 (1.12)	2.93 (1.18)	-2.07*
9. Suits with halter tops	3.72 (1.22)	4.21 (.92)	-3.48***
10. Leather shoes (2-3" heels)	2.38 (1.40)	2.03 (1.20)	2.12*
11. Sandals	3.63 (1.25)	4.04 (.88)	-3.00**
12. Chandelier/ medium earrings	3.37 (1.23)	3.76 (1.23)	-2.39*
13. Cultural headwrap	3.50 (1.25)	3.81 (1.11)	-2.05*
14. Scarf around neck	2.69 (1.26)	3.06 (1.39)	-2.20*
Section 3.2 Business Casual Dress (1), Casual Dress (5)			
15. Dresses	2.49 (1.30)	2.91 (1.39)	-2.41*
16. Jeans/ denim pants	4.18 (1.13)	4.46 (.88)	-2.134*
17. Bermuda/ walking shorts	3.98 (1.13)	4.42 (.91)	-3.36***

(Table 5 continues)

(Table 5 continued)

Variables	MS *M (SD)*	LA *M (SD)*	*t*
Section 3.2 Business Casual Dress (1), Casual Dress (5)			
18. Fitted capri pants	4.06(1.15)	4.47(.84)	-3.19**
19. Long-sleeve blouses (not sheer)	2.25(1.22)	1.77(.99)	3.32***
20. Long-sleeve blouses (sheer)	2.85 (1.24)	3.44 (1.38)	-3.57***
21. Three-quarter sleeve blouses	2.71 (1.25)	2.38 (1.26)	2.04*
22. Short-sleeve blouses (sheer)	3.08 (1.24)	3.63 (1.22)	-3.47***
23. T-shirts (no collar)	3.97 (1.13)	4.26 (.99)	-2.15*
24. Tank tops	4.00 (1.10)	4.45 (.86)	-3.53***
25. Halter tops	3.97 (1.06)	4.36 (.91)	-3.07**
26. Sleeveless blouses	3.60 (1.19)	4.03 (1.13)	-2.83**
27. Mules (backless shoes)	3.43 (1.27)	3.74 (1.22)	-1.93*
28. Canvas shoes	3.56 (1.23)	4.15 (1.01)	-4.01***
29. Athletic shoes	4.03 (1.11)	4.44 (.90)	-3.15**
30. White athletic socks	4.01 (1.11)	4.38 (.90)	-2.89**
Section 4 Absolute Appropriate Dress (1), Absolute Inappropriate Dress (5)			
31. Black skirt suit with lace trim	2.32 (1.09)	2.99 (1.02)	-4.38*
32. Black pants suit with long jacket	2.41 (1.31)	2.92 (1.32)	-3.05**

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 3.1: 1 = Traditional Professional Dress**,** 2 = Semi Traditional Professional Dress, 3 = Neither, 4 = Semi Fashion-Oriented Professional Dress, 5 = Fashion-Oriented Professional Dress. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 3.2: 1 = Business Casual Dress**,** 2 = Semi Business Casual Dress, 3 = Neither, 4 = Semi Casual Dress, 5 = Casual Dress. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 4: 1 = Absolute Appropriate**,** 2 = Semi Appropriate, 3 = Maybe, 4 = Semi Inappropriate, 5 = Absolute Inappropriate.

Table 6 represents the descriptive data for the subsamples of men and women. Due to missing data the total responses from men and women differ for each variable in question. The range of subjects that responded to each question comprising the valid percent found in Table 2 of Appendix E was between 176 and 183 for women, and 60 and 64 for men. It is important to remember the same rules follow in Table 6 as in the previous tables in regards to Section 3.1, Section 3.2 and Section 4.

Section 3.1 *Traditional Professional Dress or Fashion-Oriented Dress* revealed that 10 out of 44 items had significant differences, Section 3.2 *Business Casual Dress or Casual Dress* revealed that 15 out of 46 items had significant differences, and Section 4 *Appropriate Professional Dress* revealed that one out of six items had a significant difference. Using the t-test for independent samples, there was a significant difference between men and women in their perception of garments listed in Section 3.1 including: 1: suits with skirts ($p<0.05$), garment 2: suits with jacket hem above waist ($p< 0.05$), garment 3: suits with high contrast trim ($p< 0.01$) , garment 4: suits with dress pants- wide leg ($p< 0.05$), garment 5: suits with Bermuda shorts ($p< 0.05$), garment 6: Loafers (no laces) ($p< 0.05$), garment 7: leather shoes (3-5" heels) ($p< 0.01$), garment 8: leather flats. Shoes (no heels) ($p< 0.001$), garment 9: Open-toed dress shoes ($p< 0.001$), and garment 10: chandelier/ medium earrings ($p< 0.001$).

Using the t-test for independent samples, there was a significant difference between men and women in their perception of garments listed in Section 3.2 including: 11: jacket/ blazer, with skirts ($p< 0.05$), 12: dresses ($p<0.05$), garment 13: jeans/ denim pants ($p< 0.001$), garment 14: Khakis ($p< 0.05$), garment 15: long-sleeve blouses (not sheer) ($p< 0.05$), garment 16: long sleeve blouses (sheer) ($p< 0.05$), garment 17:short sleeve blouses (sheer) ($p< 0.01$), garment 18: Polo/ knit shirts with a collar ($p< 0.05$), garment 19: v-neck low cut blouse ($p< 0.05$), garment

20: tank tops ($p < 0.05$), garment 21: Halter tops ($p < 0.01$), garment 22: sleeveless blouses ($p < 0.001$), garment 23: leather shoes (2-3" heels) ($p < 0.05$), garment 24: leather shoes (3-5" heels) ($p < 0.05$), and garment 25: open-toed dress shoes ($p < 0.01$).

Section 4 in Table 6 revealed one item with a significant difference using the t-test for independent samples, the black skirt suit with lace trim ($p < 0.05$). The mean scores for the two subsamples suggest the African American female sample had a more accurate perception of the garments listed in Sections 3 and Section 4.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for the Male and Female Subsamples

Variables	Women *M (SD)*	Men *M (SD)*	*t*
Section 3.1 Traditional Professional Dress (1), Fashion Oriented Professional Dress (5)			
1. Suits with Skirts	1.27 (.77)	1.52 (.69)	-2.28*
2. Suits with jacket hem above waist	3.49 (1.50)	3.08(1.32)	2.06*
3. Suits with high contrast trim	3.80 (1.09)	3.35 (.97)	2.81**
4. Suits with dress pants-wide leg	3.57 (1.37)	3.10 (1.34)	2.40*
5. suits with bermuda shorts	4.21 (1.08)	3.87 (1.16)	2.08*
6. Loafers (no laces)	2.46 (1.36)	2.85 (1.32)	-1.98*
7. Leather shoes (3-5" heels)	3.90 (1.29)	3.35 (1.30)	2.90**
8. Leather flats. (no heels)	2.15 (1.13)	2.73 (1.18)	-3.44***
9. Open-toed dress shoes	3.96 (1.14)	3.32 (1.11)	3.80***
10. Chandelier/ medium earrings	3.74 (1.28)	3.07 (1.18)	3.61***
Section 3.2 Business Casual Dress (1), Casual Dress (5)			
11. Jacket/ Blazer with skirt	1.35 (.89)	1.68 (1.20)	-2.29*
12. Dresses	2.79 (1.41)	2.41 (1.17)	1.89*
13. Jeans/ denim pants	4.46 (.88)	3.89 (1.28)	3.26***
14. Khakis	3.83 (1.34)	3.39 (1.39)	2.16*
15. Long-sleeve blouses (not sheer)	1.93 (1.82)	2.25 (.96)	-1.87*
16. Long-sleeve blouses (sheer)	3.25 (1.36)	2.80 (1.15)	2.50*
17. Short-sleeve blouses (sheer)	3.47 (1.28)	2.98 (1.13)	2.83**
18. Polo/ knit shirts with a collar	3.80 (1.24)	3.39 (1.32)	2.25*
19. V-neck low cut blouse	3.90 (1.08)	3.55 (1.08)	2.17*
20. Tank tops	4.31 (.96)	3.95 (1.12)	2.25*

(Table 6 continues)

(Table 6 continued)

Variables	Women *M (SD)*	Men *M (SD)*	*t*
Section 3.2 Business Casual Dress (1), Casual Dress (5)			
21. Halter tops	4.27 (1.00)	3.83 (.96)	2.94**
22. Sleeveless blouses	3.98 (1.14)	3.32 (1.17)	3.88***
23. Leather shoes (2-3" heels)	1.90 (1.15)	2.27 (1.13)	-2.22*
24. Leather shoes (3-5" heels)	3.44 (1.48)	2.98 (1.24)	2.38*
25. Open-toed dress shoes	3.50 (1.37)	2.87 (1.27)	3.17**
Section 4 Absolute Appropriate Dress (1), Absolute Inappropriate Dress (5)			
26. Black skirt suit with lace trim	2.74 (1.14)	3.11 (.99)	-2.33*

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 3.1: 1 = Traditional Professional Dress, 2 = Semi Traditional Professional Dress, 3 = Neither, 4 = Semi Fashion-Oriented Professional Dress, 5 = Fashion-Oriented Professional Dress. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 3.2: 1 = Business Casual Dress, 2 = Semi Business Casual Dress, 3 = Neither, 4 = Semi Casual Dress, 5 = Casual Dress. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 4: 1 = Absolute Appropriate, 2 = Semi Appropriate, 3 = Maybe, 4 = Semi Inappropriate, 5 = Absolute Inappropriate.

Table 7 shows the mean score of variables that maintained a significant difference between fashion innovator and fashion follower subsamples. All survey sections were tested using the Mann-Whitney non-parametric test to determine if differences existed between fashion innovators and fashion followers. Only the variables with a significant difference were reported. Fashion innovators were separated from fashion followers based on previous research that established fashion innovators are the minority of consumers (Rogers, 1983; Solomon, 1994; Goldsmith, Flynn, & Moore, 1996) and only the top scoring 15% of the participants should be

considered as fashion innovators (Goldsmith, Flynn, & Moore, 1996; Forsythe, Butler, & Kim, 1991). However, based on distribution of scores, the African American sample was split by the top 18.4% reflecting a score of 47 and higher out of a perfect score of 52. This yielded 46 innovators (37 women and nine men) and 203 others. Those who scored 47 and higher represented 20.2% of women and in the same distribution represented 13.5% of men.

Table 7 shows four of the survey's variables indicated a statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) mean difference between innovators and followers. Using SPSS to compare the Mann-Whitney non-parametric version of the independent samples t-test, there was a significant difference between fashion innovators and fashion followers in the importance of clothing in their lives ($p< 0.001$), the influence of fashion trends over their friends ($p< 0.001$), overall fashion behavior ($p< 0.001$), and self-esteem ($p< 0.001$).

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for the Fashion Innovator and Fashion Follower Subsamples (1)

Variables	***Z***
Importance of Clothing	7.19***
Fashion Leadership	10.58***
Fashion Behavior	10.27***
Self -Esteem	3.37***

Note. ***p < .001. Fashion innovators (*n*) = 46. Fashion followers (*n*) = 203. Table indicates a significant difference using Mann-Whitney non-parametric tests.

Table 8 represents the descriptive data for the subsamples of fashion innovators and fashion followers. There are no missing data; all respondents in this subsample completed this portion of the survey. Forty-six respondents were classified as fashion innovators while 203 were classified as fashion followers. Table 8 reveals that three of the survey's 96 garments had a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) or ($p < 0.01$) mean difference between fashion innovators and followers. Using SPSS, the Mann-Whitney non-parametric tests showed there was a significant difference between fashion innovators and fashion followers in garments found in Section 3.1 *Traditional Professional Dress or Fashion Oriented Dress*: 1: suits with medium size prints ($p<0.01$), garment 2: jacket/ blazer with skirts ($p< 0.05$), garment 3: sandals ($p< 0.05$). It is important to remember the same rules follow in Table 10 as in the previous tables in regards to section 3.1. Section 4 was compared for mean differences at ($p< 0.05$), but none were found significant. After examining the output for the selected samples, fashion innovators classified the garments much like the previous research.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Fashion Innovator and Fashion Follower Subsamples (2)

Variables	***z***
1. Suits with Medium size prints	2.65**
2. Jacket/ blazer with skirts	-1.58*
3. Sandals	2.14*

(Table 8 continues)

(Table 8 continued)

Note. *p < .05. *p < .01. Fashion innovators (*n)* = 46. Fashion followers (*n*) = 203. Table indicates a significant difference using Mann-Whitney non-parametric tests. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 3.1: 1 = Traditional Professional Dress, 2 = Semi Traditional Professional Dress, 3 = Neither, 4 = Semi Fashion-Oriented Professional Dress, 5 = Fashion-Oriented Professional Dress.

Correlations

Pearson Correlation tests were used to determine whether relationships between self-esteem and the different types of fashion behavior existed for the HBCU and PWI samples. Past quantitative research shows that the strength of the Pearson r relationship follows specific rules (Muijs, 2004). If the effect size is over .8 it is *very strong*, between .79 and .6 is *strong*, between .4 and .59 is *moderate*, between .2 and .39 is *modest*, and any number below .19 is considered *weak* (Muijs, 2004).

Table 9 shows the results of the Pearson Correlation test and confirms there are significant relationships common to both subsamples at ($p < .05$) and ($p < .01$). Table 9 revealed a *modest* positive relationship between self-esteem and fashion leadership within the HBCU sample at ($p < .01$). The correlation value is .293, which is the highest correlation among the independent variables and self-esteem. There is a *modest* positive correlation (.284) between self-esteem and overall fashion behavior within the HBCU sample at ($p < .01$). The results show a *modest* negative relationship between self-esteem and fashion innovativeness within the HBCU

sample at ($p < .05$). In addition, the results indicate that self-esteem is not a good predictor of the importance of clothing. It is important to note, Table 9 confirms no significant relationship between self-esteem and the other fashion behavioral variables within the PWI sample.

Table 9

Correlations for HBCU and PWI Subsamples

		Self-Esteem	**Fashion Leadership**	**Importance of Clothing**	**Fashion Behavior**	**Fashion Innovativeness**
Self-Esteem:						
	HBCU		.293**	.136	.284**	-.220*
	PWI		.113	.133	.145	-.124
Fashion Leadership						
	HBCU		-	.364**	.933**	-.737**
	PWI			.395**	.922**	-.616**
Importance of Clothing						
	HBCU			-	.674**	-.459**
	PWI				.720**	-.405
Fashion Behavior						
	HBCU				-	-.762**
	PWI					-.636**
Fashion Innovativeness						
	HBCU					-
	PWI					

Note. HBCU N = 115. PWI N = 136. *p < .05. **p < .01.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The present study had six hypotheses. This chapter will discuss and elaborate upon the current research findings as they pertain to each of the six hypotheses. A conclusion will be discussed, as well as, suggestions for future research, the implications, and limitations of the study.

Hypotheses

Ho1: There will not be a significant difference in their perceptions of female professional dress between African American college students enrolled in Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU).

The researcher originally assumed that African American college students enrolled in HBCU and PWI would perceive professional dress in the same manner due to findings that cultural heritage has been found to be a key factor in affecting an individual's clothing preferences (Lavin, 1996; Yoo, 2003; Lee, 2005). As noted in the previous chapter there was a significant difference between the two subsamples at .05 level of suits with embroidered jackets, loafers without laces, dress pants/ slacks, wide-leg dress pants, short-sleeve blouses (not sheer), t-shirts (no collar), and tank tops. Based on previous research (Damhorst, et al., 2002; Franz and Norton, 2001) and University publications (Mississippi State University Career Center, 2005; Southern University Systems and A&M College Career Services, 2005; Louisiana State University Career Services, 2006), male and female African American students from PWI had a better understanding of the classification of each garment in workplace attire (see Table 4).

Suits with embroidered jackets have been classified by past researchers as fashion-oriented dress, but 46% of survey participants from HBCU believed they are traditional professional dress (see Table 4). This represents almost half of the survey participants that responded to this question compared to 27% of African American students from PWI that believed the garment to be traditional professional dress.

The researcher purposefully surveyed members of minority student organizations due to research that suggested joining African American student groups at Predominantly White Institutions allow comfort and support through weekly communication with like peers (Guiffrida, 2003), maintain a positive self-esteem (Allen, 2001; Guiffrida, 2003), and teaches the individual what is socially acceptable (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969). It has been suggested, "For most African Americans, it is the African American community that provides them with a frame of reference…." (Allen, 2001, p.70). In addition, Shibutani (1968) believed individuals from a specific group or culture digest the perspective of that group which shapes their view of the world. If this is true, why did African American students from predominantly white institutions have a better understanding of professional dress than did the students enrolled in Historically Black Universities and Colleges?

Porter and Washington (1979) maintained that African Americans refer to Caucasians for comparisons of economic and social status, but refer to African Americans for personal issues. For this study's purposes, the African American subsample from PWI could consider professional dress a determinant of social status, and not an issue of personal or group culture. Professional dress is outside the realm of everyday cultural dress because it is the vehicle that can be attributed to corporate success or social status. Past research reports African American professionals are aware of hidden racism and combat its negative influence on their job success

or upward mobility by dressing professionally to work (McLeod, 1999; Schneider, 1998; Thomas, 1995; Russell & Reynolds. 1992). Franklin (2001) claimed that African American women frequently scrutinize what they wear to predominantly Caucasian settings in order to not draw attention to their cultural heritage. African Americans in the PWI and in the workplace dress more conservatively than their HBCU cohorts to compete with the majority for social status and to not "look White" (Franklin, 2001; McLeod, 1999; Russell & Reynolds, 1992; Schneider, 1998). This idea mirrors Guiffrida's (2003) idea of code switching, the nurturing of two opposing personas, one reserved for Caucasians and the other for fellow African Americans. The African American students from Predominantly White Institutions appear to have crossed racial boundaries to refer themselves to the majority group. Code switching does not occur on HBCU because the African American culture is the dominating culture on those campuses, and the non-Black population percentage at the schools is less than 10%. This study can only speculate that the differences of dress between the students from PWI and HBCU can be influenced by the majority Caucasian population at PWI. The study of Caucasian's perception of professional dress is beyond this study's focus, however, it is a valid explanation based on past research.

Another possibility as to the differences in perception of professional dress of African American students enrolled in PWI and HBCU could be the varying levels of attention each university places of their Career Center services. Mississippi State University Career Center (2005) devoted multiple web pages to tips for dressing for success. The page devoted to female dress for success included color photographs of an African American female dressed in correct traditional professional dress and incorrect professional dress. The written text provided descriptive information on the perfect suit, blouse, shoes, accessories, and personal grooming on

appropriate interview attire. The other PWI, Louisiana State University Career Services (2006) places the same emphasis on appropriate professional dress. Not only did LSU provide written text descriptions, but provides pictures of actual garments for appropriate professional dress and business casual dress.

Contrary to PWI, HBCU career centers do not place as high an importance on female professional dress. Southern University Career Services (2005) allows one page of professional dress advice for women and three pages of text for men. Alcorn State University in Mississippi did not have a career service webpage or professional dress advice located on ASU's homepage. The lack of importance Historically Black Colleges and Universities places on advising its female students on how to dress professionally in the workplace is a possible explanation for the significant difference in perception between the HBCU and PWI college student samples.

Ho2: There will not be a significant difference in perceptions of female professional dress between Louisiana and Mississippi African American college students.

The researcher originally hypothesized that African American college students enrolled in universities in Mississippi and Louisiana would perceive professional dress in the same manner due to Fiore and Kimle (1997) findings that geographic locations in combination with temperature and cultural heritage can influence clothing preferences of an individual. In addition, the population for this research was obtained by researching African American demographic and psychographic statistics in the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau divided the nation into four Regions and nine Districts for data reporting purposes. These boundaries were formed to include "areas with comparable social, economic, and housing characteristics"

(Lavin, 1996). Mississippi and Louisiana are both found in the Southern Region and both in the South Central Divisions.

As noted in the previous chapter there was a significant difference between the two subsamples of garments listed in Section 3.1(*Traditional Professional Dress* or *Fashion-Oriented Dress*), Section 3.2 (*Business Casual Dress* or *Casual Dress*), and Section 4 (*Appropriate Interview Dress*). Significant differences were found in fashion-oriented garments from Section 3.1 (*Traditional Professional Dress* or *Fashion-Oriented Dress*) which included suits with embroidered jackets, suits with jacket hem above waist, pink suits with skirt, suits with high contrast trim, suits with dress pants- wide leg, suits with Bermuda shorts, suits with Capri pants, suits with turtlenecks, suits with halter tops, sandals, chandelier/ medium earrings, cultural head wrap (see Table 5). Of the garments listed, all were considered fashion-oriented dress. Based on previous research (Damhorst, et al., 2002; Franz and Norton, 2001) and University publications (Mississippi State University Career Center, 2005; Southern University Systems and A&M College Career Services, 2005; Louisiana State University Career Services, 2006), the results imply that the African American students from Louisiana had a significantly better understanding of fashion-oriented dress and the appropriateness of workplace attire (See Table 5). The data did not show a significant difference using independent t-tests between the Mississippi and Louisiana students in the amount of fashion innovators, or the fashion leadership and importance of clothing variables. The Mississippi sample was not more fashion innovative, rather, the sample clearly has not been educated on traditional professional dress. The Mississippi sample's inability to understand appropriate professional dress could affect their occupational success. Research found that co-workers and employers judge employee competence based on the appropriateness and attractiveness of their clothing (Forsythe, 1988;

Molloy; 1996; Bixler, 1997). In addition, the occurrence of fads and other trendy garments in the professional dress code are perceived as showy and drawing unnecessary attention to an individual in order to create an elite identity (Damhorst et al., 2002; Kimle & Damhorst, 1997). Some even negatively juxtapose fashion garments with poor work ethic. In addition, outsiders perceive others who wear fashion items to make poor decisions and hasty judgments (Kimle & Damhorst, 1997).

Based on previous research (Damhorst, et al., 2002; Franz and Norton, 2001) and University publications (Mississippi State University Career Center, 2005; Southern University Systems and A&M College Career Services, 2005; Louisiana State University Career Services, 2006), it was evident from the results of Section 3.2 (*Business Casual Dress* or *Casual Dress*) that the Louisiana sample understood what garments were considered female business casual dress and which should be considered causal dress. Ironically, both LA and MS students perceived the two absolute inappropriate suits as absolute appropriate for a professional interview. Section 4 revealed two suits that had a significant difference in means. Garment 31: black skirt suit with lace trim, and garment 32: black pants suit with long jacket were both labeled *absolute inappropriate dress* for a professional interview (Damhorst, Jondle, & Youngberg, 2002) (see Appendix A). Over half of the MS and LA samples answered incorrectly in comparison to past research, though there is a significant difference between the means. Regardless, LA students were 17% less accepting of garment 31, the black skirt suit with lace trim, and 20% less accepting of garment 32, the black pants suit with a long jacket (see Table 6 in Appendix E). It is interesting to note the overall African American sample accepted the two absolute inappropriate suits as appropriate. The components which made the suits inappropriate stem from fashion-oriented mechanisms. Garment 31 pictured a straight knee length skirt that

revealed approximately 2 ½ inches of leg above the knee due to a chiffon ruffle with black sparkle beading. The same see-through ruffle was shown in place of a traditional sleeve cuff. Garment 32 pictured a pants suit with a long jacket that stopped at mid thigh with a revealing neckline and bright red buttons. Previous findings suggest African Americans are more fashion conscious and that 34% of African Americans stay informed on fashion trends compared to 25% of Whites (Gardyn & Fetto, 2003). In addition, the focus group participants preferred dressier more fashion-oriented workplace attire. This could be why both samples were eager to accept the fashionable suits as interview attire. Another explanation could be that the respondents could not distinguish the photograph's detail, but this is unlikely due to the internal reliability of (alpha = .63) (see Table 3), and the suit had been previously tested on the study's focus group. Two of the focus group's seven participants (one male and one female) agreed that garment 31 would be appropriate even after discussion of the garment's fashion oriented components. Both focus group participants believed the suit would allow the female interviewee to show her personality and give her a competitive edge. In addition, focus group participants in unison approved of long suit jackets shown in garment 32, however, several members did not approve of the low neck line.

The notable difference in perception between the MS and LA African American students could be explained by the college town's geographic location. Both universities surveyed in Louisiana are located in Baton Rouge, which the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) defines as a metropolitan area. Metropolitan areas must have a large population center city with at least 100,000 inhabitants with surrounding communities having high economic interaction with the core city. Metropolitan areas offer greater work opportunities, a greater depth and breadth of shopping, and more current and advanced media. Baton Rouge has 178,626 persons over sixteen

years of age. Contrarily, the two cities that host the campuses of MSU (18,041) and ASU (3,351) have a combined total of 21,392 over sixteen years of age (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). MSU and ASU are located in rural areas of Mississippi without the access of U.S. interstate system. Contrarily, Baton Rouge is located on a major interstate system. In addition, Baton Rouge has a lower household poverty rate 27% compared to MSU's Starkville, MS 36%, and ASU, MS 43%. All of the geographic disadvantages found near the MS schools play a major role in the lack of opportunities and information available to these college students.

H3: There will be a significant difference between African American male and female perceptions of female professional dress.

The researcher originally assumed that there would be a difference between African American male and female college students' perception of female professional dress due to findings that men are less accepting of fashion forward garments in the workplace and more accepting of sexuality in dress (Damhorst, Jondle, & Youngberg, 2002; Kwon, 1994). As noted in the previous chapter there was a significant difference in section 3.1 (*Traditional Professional Dress* or *Fashion-Oriented Dress*) between the two subsamples in suits with skirts, suits with jacket hem above waist, suits with high contrast trim, suits with dress pants-wide leg, suits with Bermuda shorts, loafers (no laces), leather shoes (3-5" heels), leather flats (no heels), open-toed dress shoes, and chandelier/ medium earrings. Only one garment listed in section 3.1 with significantly different means was considered traditional professional dress, the other nine were fashion-oriented garments.

Studies show that males view women's professional dress more critically than females (Damhorst et al., 2002; Kwon, 1994), but this was not the case with the study's African

American male sample. Damhorst et al. (2002) found females were more eager to approve fashionable items, but this study did not confirm those results. The African American male sample was more accepting of the fashion-oriented garments than were the women. The findings of this study do not support past research that suggests females tend to be more innovative (Kwon & Workman, 1996) and more fashion conscious than males (Goldsmith, Stith, and White, 1987). However, the findings do support Molloy's (1996) assertion that women are more critical of other female coworker's professional dress.

As noted in the previous chapter there was a significant difference among 15 garments found in Section 3.2 (*Business Casual Dress* or *Casual Dress*) (see Table 8). Overall, women understood appropriate business casual and casual dress, and were more conservative than the African American men. This supports research from Kwon (1994) that found women are taught to pay closer attention to clothing and appearance than men. Men were more accepting than females of tank tops, halter tops, and v-neck low cut blouses as business casual dress, which supports Damhorst et al. (2002) findings that male human resource managers and recruiters were overall more positive than their women cohorts toward sexual display in professional dress.

Section 4 revealed one suit that had a significant difference in means. Garment 26: black skirt suit with lace trim was labeled *absolute inappropriate dress* for a professional interview (Damhorst, Jondle, & Youngberg, 2002) (see Appendix A). It is interesting to note the overall African American sample accepted the *absolute inappropriate* suit as *appropriate dress* for a professional interview. The components which made the suit inappropriate stem from fashion-oriented mechanisms. Garment 26 pictured a straight knee length skirt that revealed approximately 2 ½ inches of leg above the knee due to a chiffon ruffle with black sparkle beading. The same see-through ruffle was shown in place of a traditional sleeve cuff. The

acceptance of the inappropriate garment was not due to poor visibility of the suit. Section 4 had a moderate internal reliability rate (see Table 3) and as mentioned, the suit had been previously tested on the study's focus group. Previous findings suggest African Americans are more fashion conscious and that 34% of African Americans stay informed of fashion trends compared to 25% of Caucasians (Gardyn & Fetto, 2003). This could be why both men and women were eager to accept the fashionable suits as interview attire.

One possible explanation for the significant difference between the male and female samples' perception of professional dress could be explained by reexamining the focus group discussion. Of the three African American men who participated in the focus group, one slowed the conversation considerably to ask for descriptions of the garments listed in Section 3. The other two men in the group were not confused as to the garments meanings. However, this does support the common assumption that females are socialized to pay closer attention to clothing and new fashions than men (Kwon, 1994).

Ho4: There will not be a significant difference in their level of self-esteem between African American college students enrolled in PWI and HBCU.

After examining past research on the self-esteem of African American college students, the researcher believed students enrolled in PWI and HBCU would not have a significant difference in self-esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale proved this true. This could be explained by the fact that most of the respondents from PWI were members of minority student organizations, and studies show that the membership in minority student organizations helps African American students to maintain a positive self-esteem (Allen, 2001; Guiffrida, 2003). In addition, Drury (1980) suggested that minorities are inclined to stick together when outnumbered

by the dominant culture. Other research has maintained that African American students are at a disadvantage when attempting to academically and socially integrate in PWI. Therefore, formal associations with peers in minority student organizations are essential to social integration and consequently retention at PWI (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Guiffrida, 2003; Tinto, 1993). Perhaps the close bonds formed in the minority student organizations at PWI are more for support and survival than other ordinary causal friendships. As mentioned, 63.6% of respondents from ASU and 63.8% from SU-BR were not members of student organizations; however, the HBCU in this study enrolled less than 10% non-African American students. The need for support and group identity that minority student organizations provide on predominantly white campuses is not as important at HBCU.

The mean self-esteem score for the entire sample is (35.12) on a scale from 10 to 40. While there is not a definite cut-off point to separate subjects with high self-esteem and those with low self-esteem (University of Maryland, 2005), it has been suggested that any score over the mean is relatively high self-esteem and anything below is considered low self-esteem (Antonio, 2004). The present study reported an overall 66.3% of respondents scoring higher than the average of the study. This study revealed 60.8% of respondents from HBCU and 69% of respondents from PWI scored higher than sample average.

H5: There will be a significant difference in their level of self-esteem and fashion behavioral variables between fashion innovators and fashion followers.

The researcher originally assumed that there would be a difference between African American fashion innovators and fashion followers in their level of self-esteem and of fashion behavioral variables. As reported in the previous chapter there was a significant difference

between fashion innovators and fashion followers in variables: importance of clothing, fashion leadership, fashion behavior, and self-esteem (see Table 7).

To date, past research did not examine the relationship between self-esteem and fashion innovativeness, though there has been much focus on self-concept (Goldsmith et al., 1996). Although there is lack of research in the area of self-esteem and innovativeness, the findings of the current study show ($m = 36.66$) fashion innovators have a significantly higher self-esteem than do ($m = 34.75$) fashion followers at ($p < .01$) (see Table 7). The findings were not surprising due to research that shows fashion followers use clothing to demonstrate group belonging, disregarding identity to fit in socially (Workman & Kidd, 2000). Seeking approval and conforming to a group's typical behavior or dress are characteristic of individuals with low self-esteem.

Table 7 reported a significant difference in fashion innovators and fashion followers' level of self-esteem. An explanation for the significant difference could have been because fashion innovators describe themselves (self-concept) as contemporary, vain and indulgent (Goldsmith, Flynn, & Moore, 1996). Individuals pay more attention to variables that enhance their actual or ideal self-concept (Malhotra, 1988), and it could be assumed that fashion innovators' *vanity* or *indulgent* behavior stimulated a more positive ranking of themselves in order to preserve their ideal self-concept. In addition, innovators' need to feel and look different could have motivated their positive response.

The present study's findings showed there is a significant difference between the subsample on the importance of clothing (see Table 7). The findings showed that fashion innovators believe clothing is more important for social status, social mobility, and a way of expressing individuality than do fashion followers. What is interesting to note, but wasn't

involved in the hypothesis, is that there was no significant difference between men and women on the importance of clothing. This supports Kwon and Workman's (1996) study that found there was no significant difference between male and female college students on the importance of clothing (study does not report race/ ethnicity). In addition, fashion innovators believe they are the leaders in new fashions and influence their friends' clothing decisions more than did the fashion follower sample. In this study 80% of fashion innovators were women and 20% were men. This mirrors past research that maintains female college students are more fashion conscious and innovative than male college students (Goldsmith et al., 1987; Kwon & Workman, 1996). Past research (Goldsmith et al., 1987; Kwon & Workman, 1996) has primarily focused on Caucasian male and female college students, so it is interesting to note that African American females are more fashion conscious than their male counterparts. The research supports that regardless of race, women pay more attention to new fashions and to maintain appearance more than men (Kwon, 1994; Kwon & Workman, 1996).

It is important to note that 58.7% of the fashion innovators are enrolled in HBCU which is not the majority, but should be noted. The large number of innovators being enrolled in HBCU did not occur by chance. As mentioned before African Americans are more fashion conscious (Good Looks, Good Food, 2002; Kochman, 1981) and 34% of African Americans stay informed on fashion trends compared to 25% of Caucasians (Gardyn & Fetto, 2003). Rudd and Lennon (1994) stated that every culture has a primary appearance that is internalized as the standard aesthetic people use to adorn their bodies and to compare the created appearance. It can be assumed based on current literature on reference groups that African American students enrolled in HBCU are constantly surrounded by one unified culture, which happens to be the

most fashion conscious culture (Gardyn and Fetto, 2003), and therefore includes more fashion innovators.

It is interesting to note of the fashion innovators, less than half 43.5% are in minority student organizations. These results coincide with past research that suggest fashion innovators are less likely to be influenced by reference groups (student organizations) and media (Cholachatpinyo, Padgett, Crocker, & Fletcher, 2002). Most research suggests fashion innovators do not desire conformity into particular groups, but enjoy autonomy from formal associations.

H6: There will be a significant difference in their perception of female professional dress between fashion innovators and fashion followers.

The present study hypothesized fashion innovators and fashion followers would have a significant difference in perceptions of professional dress due to findings that support innovators are more involved and knowledgeable about new fashions, and shop more for new clothes than fashion followers (Goldsmith, Flynn, & Moore, 1996). As noted in the previous chapter there was a significant difference between the two subsamples in three garments at ($p < .05$). Due to the lack of research on this topic, the researcher originally assumed there would be additional garments that would provide significant differences. The results are a little disappointing, but provide a sturdy foundation for the similarities of fashion innovators and fashion followers in their understanding of garments found in professional dress. Based on previous research (Damhorst, et al., 2002; Franz and Norton, 2001) and University publications (Mississippi State University Career Center, 2005; Southern University Systems and A&M College Career Services, 2005; Louisiana State University Career Services, 2006), fashion innovators had a

better understanding of the true meaning of professional dress than did followers. This supports Goldsmith et al. (1996) findings that fashion innovators are more knowledgeable about new fashions. The study shows that innovators in the African American sample understood what garments are considered *Traditional Professional Dress*, *Fashion-Oriented Dress*, *Business Causal* Dress, and *Casual Dress*, but the study did not test what fashion innovators would actually wear to a professional interview. In the future, it would be interesting to research if fashion innovators compromise their need to feel and look different in order to fit in and remain professional during a career interview.

In conclusion, within the sample of African American college students the current study examined relationships between the subsamples: HBCU and PWI, Louisiana and Mississippi, men and women, and fashion innovators and followers. All of the findings were supported with past research, and several of the results provide new information for academia to build upon. Overall, the African American college student sample had high self-esteem, an above average percentage of fashion innovators, and a unique perception of professional garments found in the workplace.

Implications

The results of the current study imply that even in today's career driven world the meanings of professional dress and business causal are still unclear. This could cause great obstacles for the African American sample when interviewing for a professional career. Based on the results, some African Americans sample from the study are not ready for professional interviews. Incongruent appearance between employees and their employer could limit their career opportunities for African Americans fresh out of college. Employers assume if you do not dress the part then you do not want the job. In addition, male and female black employees face

many racial barriers toward upward mobility and appearance should not be one of those barriers (Dortch, 1994; Ryan, 2005).

It is extremely important that professors, career counselors, and mentors at HBCU stress the importance of understanding the meaning of professional dress. It is not enough for universities to define professional dress on a website; all of Academia should emphasis the importance of appropriate dress for interviews and in the workplace. With the vast amount of overt racism and competition in the workplace today, it is imperative that African Americans college graduates do not give employers the opportunity to discredit them because of inappropriate dress.

Numerous reports prove that it is not just employees fresh out of college who do not understand appropriate professional dress. It would be beneficial for employers to write specific guidelines for professional dress for each work setting. Research shows that dress codes are rarely formally written in employee manuals and are most often informal codes that are assumed and rarely discussed (Miller, 1999; *Power-dressing for Professionals*, 2005). Employers assume that employees will observe what upper management is wearing and reflect those adornment practices in their own dress. Without a written dress code, individuals determine for themselves what they perceive as appropriate types of clothing for various work places. It is common for perceptions of proper or improper dress for each job to differ from person to person (Kwon, 1994); in this study it was different from HBCU to PWI, MS to LA, fashion innovators to fashion followers, and men to women.

The findings of this research imply that there is an outside factor influencing the perceptions of dress of African American college student enrolled in predominantly white institutions. It is important for sociologists and psychologists to determine what reference

groups are impacting the African American population's perception of professional dress at the predominantly white institutions and causing an unequal standard within the African American college student culture. Swindel (2001) stated, "Culture determines whether or not the group survives, and if it survives, to a great extent, it determines the survivor's quality of life" (p. 22). Individuals in dissimilar cultural groups have their own aesthetic because of separating themselves from outsiders, and the differences in viewpoints within a culture occur due to disparity in contact and affiliation. Likewise, HBCU maintained a unified rich culture by preserving their social distance with the non-Black community. However, African American students enrolled in PWI are surrounded daily with a culture that is dissimilar to their own. Often, individuals will adopt new forms of dress to adopt to roles in a new culture. This contradiction can lead to incongruent beliefs and perceptions within the African American community allowing for differences in dress and behavior.

This information is not only important to academia, but retailers and marketers need to be aware of the outside influences impacting African American perceptions of professional dress and purchasing decisions. It is evident from the research that African Americans perceive professional work attire in differently, so it would not be accurate to assume that the lifestyle-oriented appeal and affirming African Americans' sense of Black pride as Holloman (1997) suggested would always persuade African Americans to frequent a particular retailer. However, Caucasian retailers have primarily focused on Caucasian consumers, ignoring African American markets (Miller, 1993; Walker, 2003), despite evidence that proves African Americans spend a larger percentage of their income on adornment practices than Caucasians (Miller, 1993; Stith & Goldsmith, 1989; Walker, 2003). *American Demographics'* analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's *Population Survey Data* 2001, reported "the top priority in the African American

household budget is buying clothes to establish and enhance one's identity" (Good Looks, Good Food, 2002; Kochman, 1981). In addition to this, the University of Georgia's Selig Center for Economic Growth (2002) projected that African American buying power of 2009 to be the highest of all minorities, topping at $965 billion dollars. It is evident that retailers who do not target the African American consumer market may be missing a significant opportunity. Marketers should study the population in greater detail to better understand their desires and perceptions.

The results of the current research imply that retailers should not always rely on geography to market merchandise to a specific population in the area. This is evident because African American college students from Louisiana perceived professional dress differently than did the college students from Mississippi. This is striking information due to the fact that the states share a border in the Southern United States, and the universities in the study are within distance of 330 miles. Since these two states are quite similar in geography, demographics, and psychographics, it is hard to assume that African American students throughout the United States perceive professional dress in the same manner. Fiore and Kimle (1997) reported that geographic locations in combination with temperature can influence clothing preferences of an individual. Traditionally, consumers on the West coast preferred a more causal relaxed look, while consumers located on the East coast were more conservative in dress. Retailers usually market different fashions of the same brand depending on the geographic location (Yoo, 2003), also called geographic segmentation (Mowen & Minor, 1998). Geographic Segmentation occurs when marketers divide up the market into groups of consumers with similar needs and wants based on geographic location; however, based on the current study's results, this would be a financially problematic decision for retailers. Instead of focusing on the overall geographic

divisions like the North, South, East, West, and Central, retailers and marketers should focus on the psychographics and infrastructure of individual areas. Retailers should observe the major interstates, populations of surrounding cities, and employment statistics before assuming to implement any product assortment for a particular niche market. Based on the survey, it is evident that African Americans enrolled in the Mississippi schools will purchase more fashion-oriented garments to wear to the professional workplace juxtapose, Louisiana college students lean toward a more traditional professional appearance.

Future Research

Results of this study suggest that future research regarding the influence of reference groups on perceptions would be beneficial in understanding why African American students enrolled in PWI have a significant difference in perception of professional dress than African American students enrolled in HBCU. It would be interesting to research if African American men and women at PWI refer to their Caucasian peers or to fellow African Americans. Another possible avenue to build upon this research is to incorporate Caucasian college students' perception of the professional garments found in the survey.

Past research found African American females to be more fashion conscious (Gardyn & Fetto, 2003), and have higher self-esteem levels than any other female racial group (Akan & Grilo, 1995; Lennon, Rudd, Sloan, & Kim, 1999). It would be interesting to verify if there is a difference between African American and Caucasian women from the same universities in terms of fashion innovativeness and self-esteem. While the study was not focused on whether the students would wear the professional dress, Section 4 did ask what the respondent thought was appropriate for a professional interview. In addition, none of the subsamples perceived the suits in Section 4 accurately. The present study did not actually test what African American female

college students would wear to a professional interview, however it did test their understanding of professional dress. In the future, it would be interesting to determine what specific garments African American men and women would actually wear themselves to a professional interview.

Limitations

The current research has the following limitations:

1. Due to time and financial restraints only four universities in two southern states were surveyed. In addition, the researcher relied on contact persons from PWI to administer the survey to their minority student organization during a regularly scheduled meeting.
2. Depending on which university surveyed, the sample of college students was limited to the class or the minority student organization that the researcher had permission to survey.
3. The researcher's racial identity (Caucasian) may have hindered the willingness and objectivity of African American participants.
4. It could be assumed that not all participants were aware of the meaning of the fashion-oriented garments listed in Section 3.1 and 3.2.
5. The results cannot be generalized to all African American college students living in the southern portion of the United States.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH SURVEY

University of Georgia

presents

African American College Students' Perceptions of Professional Dress

Section 1

1.1 Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. If you **STRONGLY AGREE**, circle **SA**. If you **AGREE** with the statement, circle **A**. If you **DISAGREE**, circle **D**. If you **STRONGLY DISAGREE**, circle **SD**.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
9. I certainly feel useless at times.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
10. At times I think I am no good at all.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**

Section 2

2.1 These eight items ask how innovative you are or whether you are one of those consumers who is the first to buy a new item when it appears in the marketplace. Please respond by circling the letter(s) that describes whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. My friends and neighbors often ask my advice about clothing fashions.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
2. I feel that I am generally regarded by my friends and neighbors as a good source of advice about clothing fashions.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
3. My friends come to me more than often than I go to them for advice about clothes.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
4. I sometimes influence the types of clothes my friends buy.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
5. I can think of at least two people whom I have told about some clothing fashion in the last 6 months.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
6. I am the first to try new fashions; therefore, many people regard me as being a fashion leader.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
7. I am aware of fashion trends and want to be one of the first to try them.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
8. I am confident in my ability to recognize fashion trends.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**

2.2 These five items ask how important it is to you to be well dressed or whether you are one of those consumers who believe clothing expresses who you are. Please respond by circling the letter(s) that describes whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. If you want to get ahead you have to dress the part.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
2. It is important to be well dressed.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
3. What you think of yourself is reflected by what you wear.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
4. Wearing good clothes is part of leading a good life.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**
5. Clothes are one of the most important ways I have of expressing my individuality.	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**

Section 3

3.1 Below is a list of garments found on women in the workplace. Beside each female garment please indicate if you think the clothing is considered ***Traditional Professional Dress,*** or ***Fashion-Oriented Dress.*** If you believe the garment is considered *Traditional Professional Dress*, circle a number from the far left side of the scale. If you feel the garment is *Fashion-Oriented Dress***,** circle a number on the far right, and if you feel the appropriateness of the garment falls between these extremes, circle a number in the middle of the scale to show your opinion.

	Traditional Professional Dress		*Neither*		*Fashion-Oriented Dress*
1. Suits with skirts	1	2	3	4	5
2. Suits with pleated skirts	1	2	3	4	5
3. Suits with embroidered jackets	1	2	3	4	5
4. Suits buttoned to the neck	1	2	3	4	5
5. Suits with medium size prints	1	2	3	4	5
6. Suits with jacket hem above waist	1	2	3	4	5
7. Plaid suits with skirts	1	2	3	4	5

8. Pink suits with skirts	1	2	3	4	5
9. Suits with high contrast trim	1	2	3	4	5
10. Black suits with pants	1	2	3	4	5
11. Suits with knee length jackets	1	2	3	4	5
12. Jacket/blazer, with skirts	1	2	3	4	5
13 Jacket/ blazer, with pants	1	2	3	4	5
14. Coat-dress (one piece)	1	2	3	4	5
15. Suits with A-line skirts	1	2	3	4	5
16. Suits with ankle-length skirts	1	2	3	4	5
17. Suits with mid calf-skirts	1	2	3	4	5
18. Suits with skirts-above knee	1	2	3	4	5
19. Suits with knee length skirt & slit	1	2	3	4	5
20. Dresses	1	2	3	4	5
21. Jacket/ blazer with dresses	1	2	3	4	5
22. Suits with dress pants/ slacks	1	2	3	4	5
23. Suits with dress pants- wide leg	1	2	3	4	5
24. Suits with Bermuda shorts	1	2	3	4	5
25. Suits with Capri pants	1	2	3	4	5
26. Suits with Turtlenecks	1	2	3	4	5
27. Suits with polo/knit shirt	1	2	3	4	5
28. Suits with v-neck low cut blouse	1	2	3	4	5
29. Suits with t-shirts (no collar)	1	2	3	4	5
30. Suits with halter tops	1	2	3	4	5
31. Loafers (no laces)	1	2	3	4	5
32. Leather shoes (2-3” heels)	1	2	3	4	5
33. Leather shoes (3-5” heels)	1	2	3	4	5
34. Leather flats. Shoes (no heels)	1	2	3	4	5
35. Open-toed dress shoes	1	2	3	4	5
36. Sandals	1	2	3	4	5
37. Mules (backless shoes)	1	2	3	4	5
38. Nylons/ hose	1	2	3	4	5
39. Tights/ leggings	1	2	3	4	5
40. Large pearl necklace	1	2	3	4	5
41. Chandelier/ medium earrings	1	2	3	4	5
42. Cultural Headwraps	1	2	3	4	5
43. Scarf around neck	1	2	3	4	5
44. Broach/ Pin	1	2	3	4	5

3.2 Below is a list of garments found on women in the workplace. Beside each female garment please indicate if you think the clothing is considered ***Business Casual Dress,*** or ***Casual Dress.*** If you believe the garment is considered *Business Casual Dress*, circle a number from the far left side of the scale. If you feel the garment is *Casual Dress,* circle a number on the far right, and if you feel the appropriateness of the garment falls between these extremes, circle a number in the middle of the scale to show your opinion.

	Business Casual Dress		*Neither*		*Casual Dress*
1. Jacket/blazer, with skirts	1	2	3	4	5
2. Jacket/ blazer, with pants	1	2	3	4	5
3. Coat-dress (one piece)	1	2	3	4	5
4. Dresses	1	2	3	4	5
5. Jacket/ blazer with dresses	1	2	3	4	5
6. A-line skirt	1	2	3	4	5
7. Skirts-ankle-length, (straight)	1	2	3	4	5
8. Skirts-below knee/ mid calf	1	2	3	4	5
9. Skirts-above the knee	1	2	3	4	5
10. Skirts-knee length with slit	1	2	3	4	5
11. Dresses	1	2	3	4	5
12. Dress pants/ slacks	1	2	3	4	5
13. Dress pants- wide leg	1	2	3	4	5
14. Jeans/ denim pants	1	2	3	4	5
15. Khakis	1	2	3	4	5
16. Bermuda/ walking shorts	1	2	3	4	5
17. Fitted Capri pants	1	2	3	4	5
18. Loose Capri pants	1	2	3	4	5
19. Turtlenecks	1	2	3	4	5
20. Long-sleeve blouses (not sheer)	1	2	3	4	5
21. Long-sleeve blouses (sheer)	1	2	3	4	5
22. Three-quarter sleeve blouses	1	2	3	4	5
23. Short-sleeve blouses (not sheer)	1	2	3	4	5
24. Short-sleeve blouses (sheer)	1	2	3	4	5
25. Polo/knit shirts with a collar	1	2	3	4	5
26. V-neck low cut blouse	1	2	3	4	5
27. T-shirts (no collar)	1	2	3	4	5
28. Tank tops	1	2	3	4	5
29. Halter tops	1	2	3	4	5
30. Sleeveless blouses	1	2	3	4	5
31. Loafers (no laces)	1	2	3	4	5
32. Leather shoes (2-3” heels)	1	2	3	4	5
33. Leather shoes (3-5” heels)	1	2	3	4	5
34. Leather flats. Shoes (no heels)	1	2	3	4	5

35. Open-toed dress shoes	1	2	3	4	5
36. Rubber soled shoes/ loafers	1	2	3	4	5
37. Sandals	1	2	3	4	5
38. Mules (backless shoes)	1	2	3	4	5
39. Canvas shoes	1	2	3	4	5
40. Athletic shoes	1	2	3	4	5
41. Nylons/ hose	1	2	3	4	5
42. Tights/ leggings	1	2	3	4	5
43. White athletic socks	1	2	3	4	5
44. Large necklace	1	2	3	4	5
45. Chandelier/medium earrings	1	2	3	4	5
46. Cultural Headwrap	1	2	3	4	5

Section 4

4.1 On the insert are six pictures of women's professional clothing found in the workplace. Please indicate if you think pictures 1-6 are appropriate for a *middle management employment interview as an Executive Assistant in a Law firm or Accounting firm*. Circle one if you believe the suit is *Absolute Appropriate*; circle five if you believe the suit is *Most Inappropriate*. If you feel the appropriateness of the garment falls between these extremes, circle a number in the middle of the scale to show your opinion.

PICTURE	***Absolute Appropriate***		***Maybe***		***Most Inappropriate***
One	1	2	3	4	5
Two	1	2	3	4	5
Three	1	2	3	4	5
Four	1	2	3	4	5
Five	1	2	3	4	5
Six	1	2	3	4	5

(APPENDIX A continued)

Section 5

Please indicate the demographic characteristics that describe you best.

5.1 Age
_____ under 18
_____ 18 – 24
_____ 25 – 30

5.2 Sex
_____ Female
_____ Male

5.3 Race
_____ Black
_____ White
_____ Other

5.4 Current education level
_____ Freshman
_____ Sophomore
_____ Junior
_____ Senior
_____ Graduate

5.5 College Major _____

5.6 List the student organizations that you are a member of

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel that retailers market merchandise to African Americans?
2. Do you feel you are expected to copy and appropriate consumer goods which have been considered beautiful or fashionable by someone else?
3. Do you consider yourself a fashion leader or fashion follower?
4. If you consider yourself a fashion leader what are your motivations for dressing in a forward fashion?
5. Do you preferred to be called Black, African American, Person of Color or other?
6. How do stereotypes affect your life and your fashion choices?
7. Are you aware of Code switching? Do you now anyone who does this?
8. What do you consider traditional professional dress?
9. Do you think Black men are more innovative in clothing than White men?
10. Do you feel your aesthetic of dress comes from mainstream White American or some other avenue?
11. Do you incorporate fashion items in your interview dress?
12. Are you a member in a minority organization?
13. Do you get your fashion advice from these groups?
14. What is your opinion of casual workdays?
15. What is your opinion of appropriate dress for causal workdays?
16. As a Black man or woman, how do you negotiate clothing and appearance within the workplace or where the majority devalues any culture outside mainstream Anglo-America?
17. What are specific garments that you think are appropriate for business casual dress that may be high-fashion?
18. Where did you learn how to dress professionally?
19. Do you believe employers hire for positions based on clothing?
20. Do you believe employers discriminate based on unfashionable clothing?
21. Do you consider church dress and professional dress to be in the same genera?
22. Is it hard to maintain a positive self-esteem at a predominantly White institution like UGA?
23. Do you try to assimilate into the established culture of your company/office through clothing? Why or why not?
24. How do stereotypes affect your life and more specifically your fashion choices?

APPENDIX C

FOUCS GROUP SURVEY

Participant Name:_____

African American College Students' Perceptions of Professional Dress

On the power-point slides are 33 pictures of women's professional clothing found in the workplace. Please indicate to what degree you think pictures 1-33 are appropriate for a middle management employment interview as an Executive Assistant in a Law firm. Circle one if you believe the suit is *Absolute Appropriate*; circle five if you believe the suit is *Most Inappropriate*. Feel free to write comments about each suit on this paper☺.

PICTURE	*Absolute Appropriate*				*Most Inappropriate*
1	1	2	3	4	5
2	1	2	3	4	5
3	1	2	3	4	5
4	1	2	3	4	5
5	1	2	3	4	5
6	1	2	3	4	5
7	1	2	3	4	5
8	1	2	3	4	5
9	1	2	3	4	5
10	1	2	3	4	5
11	1	2	3	4	5
12	1	2	3	4	5
13	1	2	3	4	5
14	1	2	3	4	5
15	1	2	3	4	5
16	1	2	3	4	5
17	1	2	3	4	5
18	1	2	3	4	5
19	1	2	3	4	5
20	1	2	3	4	5
21	1	2	3	4	5
22	1	2	3	4	5
23	1	2	3	4	5
24	1	2	3	4	5
25	1	2	3	4	5
26	1	2	3	4	5
27	1	2	3	4	5
28	1	2	3	4	5
29	1	2	3	4	5
30	1	2	3	4	5
31	1	2	3	4	5
32	1	2	3	4	5
33	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION SHEET

March 3, 2006
Focus Group Discussion
"African American College Students' Perceptions of Professional Dress"

Participant Name:_____ Age:_____
Sex:_____
Major:_____
Undergrad/ Grad:_____

Do you prefer to be called: *African American, Black, Person of Color,* or *other?* Why? _____

Is clothing an important aspect of your life?_____

Do you consider yourself a fashion leader? (meaning: do your friends look to you for clothing advice?)_____

Do you try to assimilate into the established culture of your company/office/school through clothing? Why? _____

Do you wear your clothing with style or does your clothing wear you? _____

What is your opinion of causal Fridays or casual dress at work?_____

What do you consider business professional dress?_____

Where did you learn the definition of professional dress?_____

Did your parents have an opinion of your everyday dress as a child and as a teenager?_____

Do you believe employers hire for positions based on clothing?_____

Have you ever heard of code-switching? Do you experience this here at UGA?_____

"African American households' top priority is buying clothes to *enhance identity*" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002; Fisher, 1996; Kochman, 1981; Yankelovich partners, 1995). Do you agree? _____

Additional comments about the discussion: (wait until the end of all discussion)

APPENDIX E

FREQUENCY TABLES

TABLE ONE

Descriptive Statistics for HBCU and PWI Subsamples

Variables	HBCU %	PWI %	HBCU *M (SD)*	PWI *M (SD)*	*t*
Section 3.1 Traditional Professional Dress (1), Fashion Oriented Professional Dress (5)					
1. Suits with Embroidered Jackets	46%	27%	2.99 (1.47)	3.35 (1.28)	-2.10*
2. Loafers (no laces)	43%	54%	2.75(1.473)	2.40 (1.24)	1.99*
Section 3.2 Business Casual Dress (1), Casual Dress (5)					
3. Dress pants/ slacks	65%	78%	2.33 (1.50)	1.85 (1.20)	2.71**
4. Dress pants- wide leg	34%	44%	3.23 (1.50)	2.85 (1.37)	2.02*
5. Short-sleeve blouses (not sheer)	46%	58%	2.77 (1.32)	2.42 (1.17)	2.21*
6. T-shirts (no collar)	63%	73%	3.96 (1.06)	4.23 (1.08)	-1.97*
7. Tank tops	64%	76%	4.07 (1.00)	4.34 (1.01)	-2.06*

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 3.1: 1 = Traditional Professional Dress**,** 2 = Semi Traditional Professional Dress, 3 = Neither, 4 = Semi Fashion-Oriented Professional Dress, 5 = Fashion-Oriented Professional Dress. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 3.2: 1 = Business Casual Dress**,** 2 = Semi Business Casual Dress, 3 = Neither, 4 = Semi Casual Dress, 5 = Casual Dress.

TABLE TWO

Descriptive Statistics for the Male and Female Subsamples

Variables	Women %	Men %	Women *M (SD)*	Men *M (SD)*	*t*
Section 3.1 Traditional Professional Dress (1) verse Fashion Oriented Professional Dress (5)					
1. Suits with Skirts	95%	91%	1.27 (.77)	1.52 (.69)	-2.28*
2. Suits with jacket hem above waist	57%	40%	3.49 (1.50)	3.08(1.32)	2.06*
3. Suits with high contrast trim	65%	38%	3.80 (1.09)	3.35 (.97)	2.81**
4. Suits with dress pants-wide leg	61%	41%	3.57 (1.37)	3.10 (1.34)	2.40*
5. suits with bermuda shorts	72%	62%	4.21 (1.08)	3.87 (1.16)	2.08*
6. Loafers (no laces)	52%	40%	2.46 (1.36)	2.85 (1.32)	-1.98*
7. Leather shoes (3-5" heels)	71%	52%	3.90 (1.29)	3.35 (1.30)	2.90**
8. Leather flats. (no heels)	64%	45%	2.15 (1.13)	2.73 (1.18)	-3.44***
9. Open-toed dress shoes	70%	50%	3.96 (1.14)	3.32 (1.11)	3.80***
10. Chandelier/ medium earrings	63%	35%	3.74 (1.28)	3.07 (1.18)	3.61***
Section 3.2 Business Casual Dress (1) verse Casual Dress (5)					
11. Jacket/ Blazer with skirt	92%	86%	1.35 (.89)	1.68 (1.20)	-2.29*
12. Dresses	43%	57%	2.79 (1.41)	2.41 (1.17)	1.89*
13. Jeans/ denim pants	82%	61%	4.46 (.88)	3.89 (1.28)	3.26***
14. Khakis	18%	31%	3.83 (1.34)	3.39 (1.39)	2.16*
15. Long-sleeve blouses (not sheer)	77%	64%	1.93 (1.82)	2.25 (.96)	-1.87*
16. Long-sleeve blouses (sheer)	33%	44%	3.25 (1.36)	2.80 (1.15)	2.50*
17. Short-sleeve blouses (sheer)	24%	38%	3.47 (1.28)	2.98 (1.13)	2.83**
18. Polo/ knit shirts with a collar	63%	56%	3.80 (1.24)	3.39 (1.32)	2.25*
19. V-neck low cut blouse	66%	53%	3.90 (1.08)	3.55 (1.08)	2.17*
20. Tank tops	74%	59%	4.31 (.96)	3.95 (1.12)	2.25*

Variables	Women %	Men %	Women *M (SD)*	Men *M (SD)*	*t*
Section 3.2 Business Casual Dress (1) verse Casual Dress (5)					
21. Halter tops	71%	55%	4.27 (1.00)	3.83 (.96)	2.94**
22. Sleeveless blouses	12%	24%	3.98 (1.14)	3.32 (1.17)	3.88***
23. Leather shoes (2-3" heels)	77%	65%	1.90 (1.15)	2.27 (1.13)	-2.22*
24. Leather shoes (3-5" heels)	31%	42%	3.44 (1.48)	2.98 (1.24)	2.38*
25. Open-toed dress shoes	27%	47%	3.50 (1.37)	2.87 (1.27)	3.17**
Section 4 Absolute Appropriate Dress (1) verse Absolute Inappropriate Dress (5)					
26. Black skirt suit with lace trim	24%	37%	2.74 (1.14)	3.11 (.99)	-2.33*

(Table 2 continues)

(Table 2 continued)

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 3.1: 1 = Traditional Professional Dress, 2 = Semi Traditional Professional Dress, 3 = Neither, 4 = Semi Fashion-Oriented Professional Dress, 5 = Fashion-Oriented Professional Dress. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 3.2: 1 = Business Casual Dress, 2 = Semi Business Casual Dress, 3 = Neither, 4 = Semi Casual Dress, 5 = Casual Dress. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 4: 1 = Absolute Appropriate, 2 = Semi Appropriate, 3 = Maybe, 4 = Semi Inappropriate, 5 = Absolute Inappropriate.

APPENDIX E (continued)

TABLE THREE

Difference Between HBCU and PWI On Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale

Question		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		n (%)	*n (%)*	*n (%)*	*n (%)*
1. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.					
	HBCU	88(76.5%)	25 (21.7%)	1 (.9)	1 (.9)
	PWI	121 (89%)	12 (16.2%)	3 (2.2%)	/
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.					
	HBCU	95 (82.6%)	17 (14.8%)	/	3 (2.6 %)
	PWI	112 (82.4%)	22 (16.2%)	1 (.7%)	1 (.7%)
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.					
	HBCU	7 (6.1%)	8 (7%)	26 (22.6%)	74 (64.3%)
	PWI	6 (4.4%)	7 (5.1%)	36 (26.4%)	87 (64%)
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.					
	HBCU	76 (66.1%)	32 (27.8%)	6 (5.2%)	1 (.9%)
	PWI	84 (61.8%)	47 (34.6%)	5 (3.7%)	/
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.					
	HBCU	4 (3.5%)	9 (7.8%)	16 (13.9%)	86 (74.8%)
	PWI	5 (3.7%)	7 (5.1%)	20 (14.7%)	104 (76.5%)
6. I take a positive attitude towards myself.					
	HBCU	77 (67%)	33 (28.7%)	2 (1.7%)	3 (2.6%)
	PWI	94 (69.1%)	37 (27.3%)	4 (2.9%)	1 (.7%)
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.					
	HBCU	61 (53%)	42 (36.5%)	10 (8.5%)	2 (1.7%)
	PWI	75 (55.1%)	54 (39.7%)	7 (5.1%)	/
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.					
	HBCU	9 (7.8%)	17 (14.8%)	41 (35.6%)	48 (41.7%)
	PWI	7 (5.1%)	20 (14.7%)	41 (30.2%)	68 (50%)
9. I certainly feel useless at times.					
	HBCU	8 (7%)	23 (20%)	38 (33%)	46 (40%)
	PWI	2 (1.5%)	28 (20.6%)	41 (30.1%)	65 (47.8%)
10. At times I think I am no good at all.					
	HBCU	6 (5.2%)	15 (13%)	30 (26.1%)	64 (55.7%)
	PWI	3 (2.2%)	11 (8.1%)	43 (31.6%)	79 (58.1%)

(Table 3 continues)

(Table 3 continued)

Note. HBCU N = 115. PWI N = 136. Boldface indicates a significant difference using t-test for independent samples. Question one at $t(249) = -1.14$, $p < .001$. Question seven at $t(249) = -2.22$, $p < .05$. Question ten at $t(249) = -1.30$, $p < .05$.

APPENDIX E (continued)

TABLE FOUR

Correlations for Mississippi and Louisiana Samples

		Self-Esteem	Fashion Leadership	Importance of Clothing	Fashion Behavior	Fashion Innovators
Self-Esteem:						
	Mississippi		.135	.192*	.180*	-.063
	Louisiana		.266**	.081	.245**	-.267**
Fashion Leadership						
	Mississippi		-	.415**	.933**	-.643**
	Louisiana			.363**	.923**	-.705**
Importance of Clothing						
	Mississippi			-	.715**	-.444**
	Louisiana				.693**	-.438**
Fashion Behavior						
	Mississippi				-	-.670**
	Louisiana					-.726**
Fashion Innovators						
	Mississippi					-
	Louisiana					

Note. Mississippi N = 125. Louisiana N = 126. *p < .05. **p < .01.

APPENDIX E (continued)

TABLE FIVE

Correlations for Male and Female Samples

	Self-Esteem	Fashion Leadership	Importance of Clothing	Fashion Behavior	Fashion Innovators
Self-Esteem:					
	Man	.016	.130	.068	-.088
	Woman	.262**	.123	.251**	-.185*
Fashion Leadership					
	Man	-	.191	.910**	-.659**
	Woman		.441**	.933**	-.683**
Importance of Clothing					
	Man		-	.580**	-.349**
	Woman			.734**	-.468**
Fashion Behavior					
	Man			-	-.694**
	Woman				-.704**
Fashion Innovators					
	Man				-
	Woman				

Note. Man N = 67. Woman N = 184. *p < .05. **p < .01.

APENDIX E (continued)

TABLE SIX

Descriptive Statistics for the Mississippi and Louisiana Samples

Variables	MS %	LA %	MS *M (SD)*	LA *M (SD)*	*t*
Section 3.1 Traditional Professional Dress (1) verse Fashion Oriented Professional Dress (5)					
1. Suits with Embroidered Jackets	42%	30%	3.00(13.85)	3.39 (1.35)	-2.20*
2. Suits with jacket hem above waist	40%	20%	3.06 (1.47)	3.72 (1.38)	-3.65*
3. Pink suits with skirts	22%	10%	3.60 (1.29)	3.94 (1.12)	-2.23*
4. Suits with high contrast trim	18%	10%	3.45 (1.08)	3.92 (1.02)	-3.46*
5. Suits with dress pants-wide leg	39%	16%	3.12 (1.42)	3.79 (1.24)	-3.95***
6. suits with bermuda shorts	14%	2%	3.79 (1.23)	4.47 (.84)	-5.06***
7. Suits with capri pants	19%	3%	3.72 (1.26)	4.39 (.91)	-4.78***
8. Suits with turtlenecks	44%	35%	2.63 (1.12)	2.93 (1.18)	-2.07*
9. Suits with halter tops	13%	2%	3.72 (1.22)	4.21 (.92)	-3.48***
10. Leather shoes (2-3" heels)	62%	73%	2.38 (1.40)	2.03 (1.20)	2.12*
11. Sandals	18%	2%	3.63 (1.25)	4.04 (.88)	-3.00**
12. Chandelier/ medium earrings	31%	15%	3.37 (1.23)	3.76 (1.23)	-2.39*
13. Cultural headwrap	23%	9%	3.50 (1.25)	3.81 (1.11)	-2.05*
14. Scarf around neck	44%	39%	2.69 (1.26)	3.06 (1.39)	-2.20*
Section 3.2 Business Casual Dress (1) verse Casual Dress (5)					
15. Dresses	54%	38%	2.49 (1.30)	2.91 (1.39)	-2.41*
16. Jeans/ denim pants	72%	82%	4.18 (1.13)	4.46 (.88)	-2.134*
17. Bermuda/ walking shorts	60%	79%	3.98 (1.13)	4.42 (.91)	-3.36***
18. Fitted capri pants	68%	81%	4.06 (1.15)	4.47 (.84)	-3.19**
19. Long-sleeve blouses (not sheer)	66%	81%	2.25 (1.22)	1.77 (.99)	3.32***
20. Long-sleeve blouses (sheer)	28%	53%	2.85 (1.24)	3.44 (1.38)	-3.57***
21. Three-quarter sleeve blouses	50%	60%	2.71 (1.25)	2.38 (1.26)	2.04*
22. Short-sleeve blouses (sheer)	36%	54%	3.08 (1.24)	3.63 (1.22)	-3.47***
23. T-shirts (no collar)	64%	73%	3.97 (1.13)	4.26 (.99)	-2.15*
24. Tank tops	8%	.8%	4.00 (1.10)	4.45 (.86)	-3.53***
25. Halter tops	62%	72%	3.97 (1.06)	4.36 (.91)	-3.07**
26. Sleeveless blouses	20%	10%	3.60 (1.19)	4.03 (1.13)	-2.83**
27. Mules (backless shoes)	25%	18%	3.43 (1.27)	3.74 (1.22)	-1.93*
28. Canvas shoes	50%	73%	3.56 (1.23)	4.15 (1.01)	-4.01***
29. Athletic shoes	61%	79%	4.03 (1.11)	4.44 (.90)	-3.15**
30. White athletic socks	57%	78%	4.01 (1.11)	4.38 (.90)	-2.89**
Section 4 Absolute Appropriate Dress (1) verse Absolute Inappropriate Dress (5)					
31. Black skirt suit with lace trim	87%	67%	2.32 (1.09)	2.99 (1.02)	-4.38*
32. Black pants suit with long jacket	81%	64%	2.41 (1.31)	2.92 (1.32)	-3.05**

(Table 6 continues)

(Table 6 continued)

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 3.1: 1 = Traditional Professional Dress, 2 = Semi Traditional Professional Dress, 3 = Neither, 4 = Semi Fashion-Oriented Professional Dress, 5 = Fashion-Oriented Professional Dress. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 3.2: 1 = Business Casual Dress, 2 = Semi Business Casual Dress, 3 = Neither, 4 = Semi Casual Dress, 5 = Casual Dress. Item mean scores reflect the following response choices for Section 4: 1 = Absolute Appropriate, 2 = Semi Appropriate, 3 = Maybe, 4 = Semi Inappropriate, 5 = Absolute Inappropriate.

APPENDIX F

SURVEY DISTRIBUTION

Survey #	University	Class/ Organization	Date Collected
1-30	MSU	Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences	4/7/2006
190-216	MSU	Holmes Cultural Diversity Center	4/7/2006
51-70	MSU	Kappa Alpha Psi	4/29/2006
71-85	LSU	Career Service Center	5/2/2006
106-126	LSU	African American Cultural Center	4/27/2006
148-168	LSU	National Society of Black Engineers	5/5/2006
169-189	LSU	National Association of Black Social Workers	4/20/2006
308-403	ASU	(NUTR) Maternal & Child Nutrition	4/13/2006
	ASU	(NUTR) HACCP/ ServSafe	4/13/2006
217-260	SU	(TMI) Textile Evaluation	4/10/2006
	SU	(TMI) Computer Applications in Design	4/10/2006
261-287	SU	(MKT) Intro to Marketing Principals	4/10/2006