

Performing the 1%: Class Rules in Lifestyle Brand Production and Consumption

Author: Emilie Dubois

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/2889>

This work is posted on [eScholarship@BC](#),
Boston College University Libraries.

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2012

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.

Boston College
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Department of Sociology

PERFORMING THE 1%: CLASS RULES IN LIFESTYLE BRAND PRODUCTION
AND CONSUMPTION

a thesis

by EMILIE DUBOIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts

May 2012

Performing the 1%: Class Rules in Lifestyle Production and Consumption

Emilie Dubois

Thesis Advisor: Juliet Schor

Abstract

To date, consumption and culture scholars have not considered the impact of occupations that require workers to perform the desire for an elite, moneyed lifestyle through conspicuous consumption. I use participant observation and interviews among a lifestyle brand's producers and consumers to address this fissure. The analysis considers the lifestyle clothing brand *Island Outfitters* as it is created for and employed by the young male finance community aspiring to the top 1% of wage earners on Wall Street. I document how this brand is both created and consumed cynically by the cultural intermediaries responsible for its formation and the status-savvy consumers who perform loyalty to its goals of affluence. The argument is set in a homogenous high-status American occupational group within which many of the preconditions that motivate conspicuous consumption in a traditionally Veblenian sense still exist. The lived experiences of these workers are far more nuanced than this utilitarian goal suggests, yet informants express their complicity with the profit prescriptive by employing recognizable aesthetic scripts that are read for whiteness, conservatism, and wealth. Because it is too problematic for these young men to embody the goals of global finance in their everyday decisions, they texturize their professional identities with textiles.

How does the top 1% of wealthy Americans perform their lifestyle? Some of the most vehement outcries against affluent bankers issued from the valleys of this recession's double-dip have been spurred by their lifestyle choices. *Occupy Wall Street* protesters, media pundits, and scholars alike have censured the 1% for its extravagance as a shorthand critique in the place of universal complaints against industry infrastructure. From CEOs of Wall-Street firms who received federal bail-out money yet still lease private jets to the tune of \$1.5 million dollars a year to junior investment banking analysts whose \$10,000 tabs for lavish afterhours partying are billed to firm ledgers, the lifestyle excesses of the Wall Street crowd are as well documented as they are maddening to the 99%.¹ Aspirational, young male workers in the finance sector commonly wear clothing that signals "old" money yet rarely do they inherit vast family wealth. The "Preps" they emulate have long favored pastel palettes appropriate for most only on Easter, yet these young professionals don this style everyday perhaps to signal to the rest of us that they are in the springtime of their reign.

Elements of the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) aesthetic first emerged at the turn of the 20th century among the American preparatory school students just as Veblen penned his famous inquiry into conspicuous consumption of the upper class (Birnbach 1980; Schurnberger 1991). A century ago, he described "an affirmative desire to engage in 'invidious comparison,' or to trump others by amassing more than they have, [which] became less important than a self-protective attempt to keep up" concluding that "consuming conspicuously was as much a defensive, as an offensive behavior" (Veblen

¹ Private jets: http://articles.cnn.com/2008-11-19/us/autos.ceo.jets_1_private-jets-auto-industry-test-vote?_s=PM:US; Afterhours partying // www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/355/the-giant-pool-of-money.

1899; Schor 2010). Consumer fashion's rise to prominence in the century that followed has been heavily documented and theorized (Simmel 1957). Many writing in this tradition highlighted the poor fit between a closed Veblenian universe of salient, easily understood consumptive possibilities and the complexity of today's consumption arenas (Felson 1976, 1978). Analyses from cultural studies scholars arguing from the reception perspective largely agreed that as options for consumers proliferated, the meaning hinged on those objects became less recognizable across subgroups of differently situated consumers (Crane and Bovone 2006; Griswold 1987; Rafferty 2011). Others in this tradition have punctured his analysis of the static consumer whose symbolic goals are explicit and pursued in earnest (Jameson 1984; Featherstone 1991; Firat and Venkatesh 1995). Many accounts have shown that the postmodern consumer is a “playful adventurous individual, putting on and taking off roles like costumes from [an] eclectic closet, shunning conventional (upscale) status aspiration” (Schor 2010). Despite Bourdieu's definitive counter example, evidence for the fragmented identities of individuals suggests that in heterogeneous, democratic societies choices about self-presentation are bound by class differences (Lamont and Lareau 1988; Halle 1993; Holt 1997, 2002). There has even been considerable disagreement about whether a recognizable stratification of symbolic status objects can exist across a bricolaged American context (Aldrich, 1979; Axelrod and Cohen 2000).

These accounts have contextualized the modern consumer experience and liberated it from the stable, coherent, and earnest identity-based goals of consumption Veblen described. However, they have yet to consider situations in which strategically employed

consumption based identities are immutable. Although the lifestyles that are expressed through consumption may be adopted cynically, they are not always easily exchanged. Second, status symbols may have variable meaning across different contexts, however occupations that crosscut fragmented identities are often lined with coherent and stable status displays. To date, consumption and culture scholars have not considered the impact of occupations that require workers to perform the desire for an elite, moneyed lifestyle en route to vocational success.

This perceived occupational dictate snares the postmodern consumer, holding him in one particular style of consumptive practice in the name of advancement. This paper addresses these fissures through a case study of a lifestyle brand of clothing as it is employed within the finance community. I document how the production and consumption of this brand are pursued cynically by the cultural intermediaries responsible for its formation and the status-savvy consumers who perform loyalty to its goals of affluence. The lifestyle consumption studied here occurs in a homogenous high status American occupational community. Many of the preconditions that motivate a traditionally Veblenian type of conspicuous consumption still exist in this example.

The young finance professionals sampled here engage in purposeful, explicit and stable identity projects in order to make professional development possible. Specifically, they are all fans of a “mass luxury” clothing brand founded by Wall Street expatriates that targets the young Wall Street community. Image maintenance through conspicuous displays of wealth are necessary but not sufficient to career advancement within this insular and peculiar occupational field. Behavioral and purchased displays of

recognizable symbols of affluence are present among the informants' accounts, but the displays are crafted and consumed with an aspirational implication. This aspiration recognizes individual wealth maximization as the fundamental motivating goal of finance professionals and is key to career advancement. Although the lived experiences of these workers are far more nuanced and complex than the singularity of this utilitarian goal suggests, informants expressed their complicity with that perspective by purchasing and employing recognizable scripts of aesthetics. Because it is too problematic for these young men to embody the goals of global finance in their decisions, they texturize their professional identities with textiles.

My analysis also shows that the producers of this brand conform to the industry trend to “imagine the [ideal] consumer” in order to reproduce the lifestyle and image of who they believe their consumer wants to emulate (Blasczyk 2000). In their production, the cultural intermediaries also perform this lifestyle to communicate their deep knowledge of who their clients would like to become. Consumers purchase and display easily identifiable lifestyle products to establish status group boundaries, send signals to superiors that they are willing to submit to the demands of their jobs, and, finally, to signal that they too recognize the importance of accumulating wealth. The performance of lifestyle taken up by both producers and consumers in this example is characterized by coherence, endurance, and a deep cynicism.

This paper is based primarily on interviews with the producers and consumers of a lifestyle clothing brand, *Island Outfitters*, and on participant observation among them.

Labor scholars have long relied on participant observation to capture the essence of organizational culture (Burawoy 1979). Recently, sociologists working in the tradition of luxury lifestyle production and consumption have applied this classic method in novel settings (Williams 2006; Sherman 2007; Mears 2011). This next generation of lifestyle scholars also typically combine their time in the field among participants with more formal and in-depth interviews to gain deeper insight into the participant psyche. In the past decade, this combination has been largely hailed, as it is able to reveal symbolic relationships among participants within the larger organizational field of study. When combined with extended case method, this approach also facilitates researcher responsibility as the sociological practitioner is required to describe her relationship to the field of study as an integral part of the ethnographic praxis (Haraway 1988; Salzinger 2003; Hesse-Biber 2007).

The work also relies on the framework for studying material culture synthesized by Crane and Bovone in 2006. They outline analyses that attribute “symbolic values to material culture by consumers and [chronicle] their responses to symbolic values attributed to material culture by producers” (p. 317). This paper continues work in this tradition that uses clothing as an avenue into interior understanding of the individual. The authors point out that it “is especially suitable for studying the relationship between personal values attributed to material goods because of its close association with perceptions of self” (320). Crane and Bovone summarize that “clothes both affect and express our - perceptions of ourselves” (321). Others working in the subdiscipline “suggest that clothing has a special character as a material object because of its location on our bodies,

thereby ‘acting as a filter between the person and the surrounding social world’” (Ruggeron 2001). The ultimate aim of this study is to uncover the values of the participants by considering seriously the lifestyle that they value. Clothing is also particularly well suited to this task. Hiltin and Piliavin remind material culture scholars that “values have also been interpreted as being intimately tied to the self’ and as forming the core of one's personal identity” (2004, p. 382).

This paper considers how lifestyles are constructed for and maintained by those who aspire to the 1% working on Wall Street. It attempts to illuminate one small corner of the larger “black-boxed” problem of understanding how those who control the majority of our nation’s wealth make sense of their lifestyle. I consider how symbolic goods are constructed for them to show their willingness to do “whatever it takes” to increase the profit margins in their firms and how they understand their performances. In a time in which the concerns of the 99% have never been more amplified, this work considers the perspective of the 1% to whom their outcry is wholly muted by irrelevance. It considers one example of the status-oriented work, the purchasing and displaying of clothing, that goes into maintaining the 1% to show the conditions under which their dominance is maintained.

Consumption and meaning at work

In the late 1890s Veblen argued that "an affirmative desire to engage in 'invidious comparison,' or to trump others by amassing more than they have, became less important than a self-protective attempt to keep up ... consuming conspicuously was as much a defensive, as an offensive behavior" (Veblen 1899; Schor, 2010). Postmodern theorists argued that the closed Veblenian universe of salient, easily-understood consumptive possibilities was poorly able to analyze the complexity of today's consumption arenas (Felson 1976, 1978). Interpretive analyses from cultural studies scholars largely agreed that as options for consumers proliferated, the meaning hinged on those objects became less recognizable across subgroups of differently situated consumers. Others in this tradition have punctured his analysis of the static consumer whose symbolic goals are explicit and pursued in earnest (Jameson 1984; Featherstone 1991; Firat and Venkatesh 1995). Many accounts have shown that the postmodern consumer is a "playful adventurous individual, putting on and taking off roles like costumes from [an] eclectic closet, shunning conventional (upscale) status aspiration" (Schor, 2010). Despite arguing in the shadow of Bourdieu's definitive counter example, the evidence for the fragmented identities of individuals suggests that choices about self-presentation are sealed by the borderlands of class difference in heterogeneous, democratic societies (Lamont and Lareau 1988; Halle 1993; Holt 1997, 2002). There has even been considerable disagreement about whether a recognizable stratification of symbolic status objects can exist across a bricolaged American context. This work brings empirical evidence to bear on an understudied aspect of status consumption. The lifestyle consumption studied here

occurs in a homogenous high status American community within which many of the preconditions that motivate conspicuous consumption in a traditionally Veblenian sense still exist. The community of young finance professionals working on Wall Street sampled here engage a purposeful and explicit identity projects to make professional development possible. Specifically, they are all fans of a mass luxury clothing brand founded by Wall Street ex-pats that targets the young Wall Street community. For the adherents of this lifestyle brand, status goals are clear and occupationally prescribed. Image maintenance through conspicuous displays of wealth are necessary but not sufficient to career advancement within this insular and peculiar occupational field. Behavioral and purchased displays of recognizable symbols of affluence are present among the informants' accounts, but the displays are crafted and consumed with an aspirational implication. Unwavering recognition of individual wealth maximization as the fundamental motivating goal of finance professionals and is key to career advancement. Although the lived experiences of these workers are far more nuanced and complex than the singularity of this utilitarian goal suggests, informants expressed their complicity with that perspective by purchasing and employing recognizable scripts of aesthetics. Because it is too problematic for these young men to embody the goals of global finance in their decisions, they texturize their professional identities with textiles.

Identity construction, in this case expressed through brand “buy in,” is one of the hallmarks of postmodern consumption and, therefore, relating this study to the literature on self-concept is key to unraveling what drives an individual consumer’s investment in a particular lifestyle brand. Over a half century of rich scholarship has concluded that the

postmodern consumer does not make certain consumptive choices based primarily on utility. Instead, the symbolic meaning laden in objects takes on primary importance (Belk, 1988; Bourdieu, 1994; Dittmar, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Goffman, 1959; McCracken, 1988). This literature has recognized that the symbolic meanings of products work publically as social symbols and privately to aid construct self-identity, however, it has yet to sufficiently consider “the extent to which the project of the self is driven by individual traits or whether it is heavily influenced by class and other group positionality and constrained by economic resources” (Schor, 2010). In this case study, the signals of success are clear. For example, owning a wide array of moderately expensive ties that feature symmetrically situated patterns of yachts, martinis, or bulls is hardly covert symbolism. Both order and opulence are expressed purposefully in a professional group whose classed position uniformly dictates work uniforms. Loyalty to the "White Anglo-saxon Protestant " (WASP) style, in which what is valued stylistically remains constant over time, refutes Simmel's notion of fashion as unceasingly variable (1957). These fashionable signifiers are invariant in form, but what is signified by them when employed in this context has morphed from parody to pastiche over the last thirty years. In Simmel's formulation, classic styles may be "immune to change" in a physical sense, but the symbolic work they perform for the bodies they clothe has fundamentally shifted. Narratives from both producers and consumers of the lifestyle brand in this analysis collude to provide a fresh example of a stable signifier whose signified meaning has been perverted in the working world where it is applied.

Lifestyles, brands, and identity

Designers, situated at the beginning of the production chain considered here, seek out a specific aesthetic, which is recognizable for its form rather than its function. Gross' 1984 translation of product design theory to textile design resulted in the industry's dominant model, which divided a specific object into its formal aesthetic functions, those perceptible independent from content and meaning, and its semantic function, those "that bear meanings the wearer wishes to impart" (Gros, 1984). Design theory simultaneously considers the syntax, for example, which materials are chosen or the placement of a pocket, and the symbol. Designers are sensitized to these styles and employ them strategically to generate brand recognition "landmarks" in a dizzying array of products (Slater, 1999). Lifestyle brand cultivation relies on what Slater termed the "testimonials, product placement and storytelling in mass media," and is "strongly connected with their brand heritage, with definite values, a distinct way of life, and significant imagery" (1999). Once designers couple their syntactic choices for product design with what they imagine are the symbolic goals of the ideal consumer, advertisers must intervene to champion the symbolic lifestyle meaning to the customer.

Similar to the connection between the designer and his imagined consumer, the merchandiser engages in a dialectical relationship with his desired client that is mediated by fluctuating sales figures (Ritson, 1995). Long acknowledged as the Rosetta stone of consumerism's symbolic meaning, advertising attempts to delineate the consumer's cultural existence by helping her present (Goffman, 1976; Mick and Buhl, 1992). The

meanings derived from lifestyle brand advertisements are those that resonate within a specific community. Merchandisers act as translators who seek out the value in exogenous real world variables for a specific subset of wealthy lifestyle consumers. Drawing on design theory and projected consumer desire, these workers navigate the dialectical relationship between the creative producers of brand meaning and the post-modern consumer. Envisioning this relationship as a lifestyle estuary into and from which symbolic currents constantly flow, merchandisers are clearheaded and diligent about their role as cultural intermediaries. They work to capture a core set of brand “values” that they believe will reify brand identity.

Bourdieu’s concepts of *cultural intermediaries*, is also applicable for the discussion of this brand's merchandisers, who mediate between consumers and various types of consumption. Consumption scholars in this tradition consider the way that cultural intermediaries “help to link consumers to specific products and services, and to a more fundamental consuming mentality” (Maguire 2010). The work that focuses on the symbolic dimension of culture in advertising, sales, and fashion will be especially helpful to my analysis of the meaning-making role taken up by cultural intermediaries (du Gay 2004; Nixon & Crewe 2004). Recently, another group of scholars have considered the potential of a service workplace to act as a site of class production. After working in a luxury toy store, Williams views the organization as a site capable of reproducing class, gender, and race inequities (2006). Hanser and Sherman argue that while these worker-client interactions do respond to class differences, the workers engaged in luxury service work also influence the class dispositions among clients.

Lifestyle brands hope to embody the aspirations and norms of a particular group or culture and provide an especially appropriate window into the way group norms are recreated. Workers that produce lifestyle brand clothing do produce material goods for consumption, but the success of their brand relies on an ability to see past their products to what their customers want to say about themselves by wearing a specific style.

Lifestyle brands work within Warner' model of class emulation helping people spread over different socioeconomic levels to adopt distinctive consumption-based identities "through pecuniary symbolism (Veblen), stylistic innovation (Simmel), and activities bounded by closed social networks (Warner)" (Holt 1998). Though marketing textbooks, trade publications, and popular media outlets differ in their definitions of what constitutes a lifestyle brand, most agree that "products or services produced [within this type of branding] provide consumers with an emotional attachment to an identifiable lifestyle - a rugged outdoorsman, the posh executive or an urban hipster, for example" (Jung and Merlin 2003, 40). The lifestyle brand consumer then is able to reflect whatever image they've invested in through brand purchases back out into society. These companies see profit margins that result from developing long-lasting and emotional bonds with their consumers. The company under study here is no exception. Jung summarizes that lifestyle brands achieve success through three main attributes: "using a product with self-expressive benefits, implementing an integrated marketing communications strategy and using range branding" (2003, 41). The consumers highlighted in this study employ all three elements as they purchase garment pieces from a the lifestyle brand under analysis.

They make choices with the knowledge of the symbolic work that brand adherence will do for them within their classed, social networks.

The design teams working for the lifestyle brand clothing company in this analysis report relying on one, unified image of a consumer who embodies their brand's physical and social archetype. Designers personalized their archetypical consumers when developing a new piece of clothing. For example, they often used a proper name like "Abigail" or "Robert" and theorized about when, where, and why their imagined consumer would wear the new apparel piece they're designing. Their workspaces were lined with collages of personal photographs, magazine clippings, and historical advertisements to help them keep in mind images of the ideal consumer and his life while crafting new accouterments to help him articulate it clearly. Merchandisers worked with designers to link the logistics of garment production with consumer need by providing a wide range of administrative services, particularly managing garment production from initial prototype to final retail placement. They engaged in imagination work similar to the designers but focus more directly on differentiating the merchandise offered by their brand identity from that offered by similar lifestyle producers. In this account, consumers also had a hand in the development of the lifestyle brand throughout its development. They expressed pride in their purchases, relationship with the brand's identity, and jokingly reinforce similar consumption among other members of their social and professional peer groups.

Although garments have signaled the class status of their owners for many centuries, the

lifestyle clothing industry that emerged in the early 1990s drew upon a set of three unified tactics. Pottery Barn, a home furnishings corporation drawing inspiration from "time honored style traditions of American excellence," is one of the most identifiable leaders in leveraging the benefits of self-expressive consumption for profit. Brands that rely on the self-expressive benefits hold clout "in social setting through the use of "second-skin" products such as clothes, cars, cosmetics and drinks (Belk 1998, 47). Many lifestyle brands now employ integrated marketing communication strategies (IMC) to establish a consistent brand personality for all stakeholders. Integrated marketing communication mixes a wide variety of reputation building tactics, from consumer affinity events to online social media promotion, to manufacture "authentic" brand personality. Finally, range branding makes use of the popularity of brand personality to extend its reach across many product categories (Aaker, 1996). Today, both large and small lifestyle-branding corporations enact these three tactics successfully. The majority of the lifestyle clothing brands in the United States today, however, are large businesses. Both my interviews and a 2010 *Standard & Poor's Apparel Industry Profile* suggest that these businesses focus on small affinity groups although the draw of their brand popularity may extend beyond the intended audience. Lifestyle clothing retailers range from local, informal "Mom & Pop" shops to international, highly bureaucratized organizations.

All of these scholars work to clarify the organizationally mediated relationship between worker and client as related to production and consumption. This case demonstrates that class dispositions are often played out and reinforced in these exchanges. The narratives

built up around these commodities are an aperture through which to view the peculiarities and patterns of class reification by sharpening the pixels of meaning in “upper middle” classed consumption.

Methods

This paper is based primarily on interviews with designers, merchandisers, and consumers and on participant observation among them. I conducted formal interviews with a total of 10 people working on the production side of a lifestyle clothing brand, talking at length with 6 designers and 4 merchandisers. I also held formal interviews with 14 self-professed “loyal fans” of this brand mostly in and around a large East coast city (Table 1.1). I found respondents through professional connections to a top-tier business school and a lifestyle brand clothing retailer in the Northeast. Interviews lasted, on average, about 70 minutes. Eight interviews took place on the telephone. All but four interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and systematically coded and analyzed on the topics of consumption and class for the purposes of this paper.

My respondents' current employment and class backgrounds did differ across groups, however, all had at least a bachelor's degree. The most significant differences in income and class background occur within the consumer respondent group where, on average, respondents reported “upper middle class” backgrounds and most (n=9) stated that they earned between \$125,000 - \$210,000 annually. Designers and merchandisers most often reported working and middle class backgrounds when asked about their family history.

Though I was unable to collect annual income information from the former two producer groups the *Bureau of Labor Statistics* reports \$64,260 as the median annual income for fashion designers and \$50,420 for merchandisers. Fifteen of the 24 respondents are men, all except two were born in the United States, and most were between 25 - 45 years old.

Interview Group	Participants ²	Age	Self-Reported Class Background	Parents' Highest Education Level
Designers	Logan	37	middle class	high school diploma
	Bree	29	working class	high school diploma
	Chelsea	28	middle class	high school diploma
	Melissa	35	middle class	high school diploma
	Haley	39	working class	some college
Merchandisers	Dominique	55	working class	technical school
	Bethany	40	upper middle class	graduate degree
	Mark	49	working class	some college
	Dirk	48	working class	technical school
Consumers	Deb	56	middle class	technical school
	Mark	24	upper middle class	undergraduate degree
	Claire	28	middle class	graduate degree
	Michael	51	upper middle class	some college
	Brit	27	upper class	graduate degree
	Mary	25	upper middle class	undergraduate degree
	Dean	21	upper class	undergraduate degree
	Edward	28	middle class	graduate degree
	Christopher	27	upper middle class	graduate degree
	George	43	working class	undergraduate degree
	Kyle	22	upper middle class	some college
	Stephen	26	upper middle class	undergraduate degree
	Ryan	23	upper middle class	graduate degree
	Sarah	24	upper middle class	graduate degree
	Harold	29	upper middle class	graduate degree
	Gregory	22	upper middle class	undergraduate degree

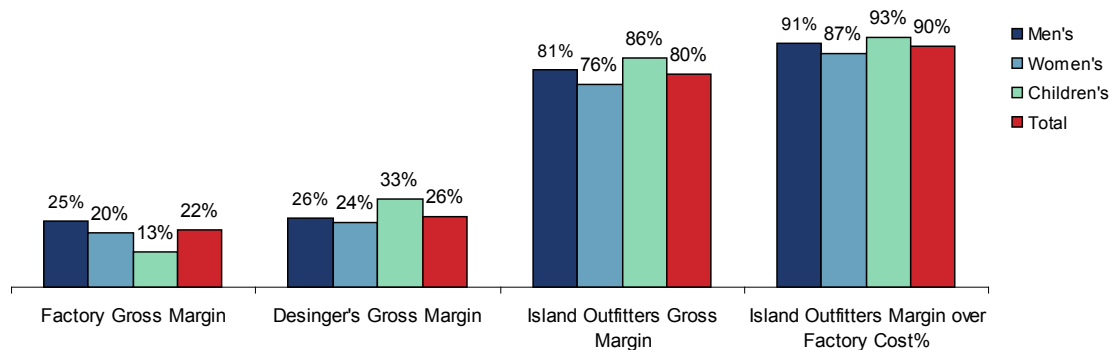
Table 1.1

I also report the results of informal observation during a period of participant observation at the headquarters of a lifestyle clothing retailer with corporate roots in New England. For ten weeks in September - November 2010, I worked an average of 8 hours per week at a company I call Island Outfitters (IO), for a total of about 80 hours. I gained access to the site through a referral provided by a merchandiser working at a design house in a

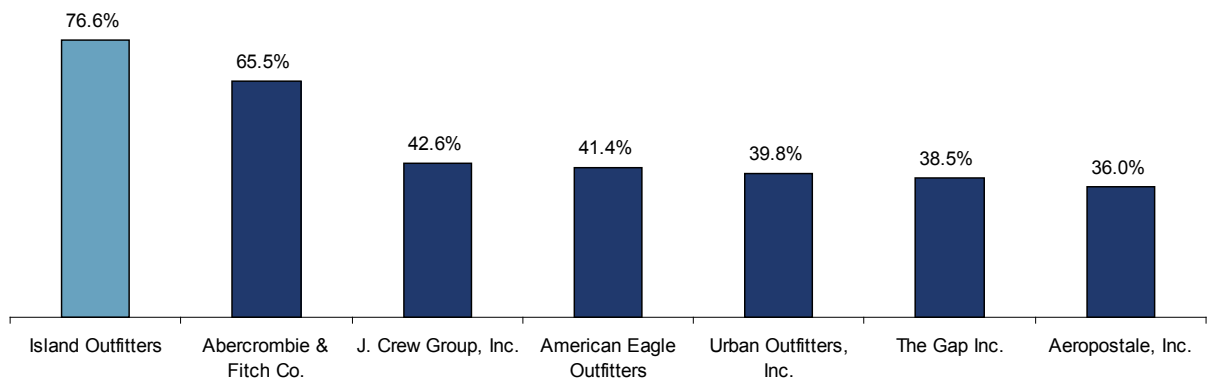
² All identifying information about the participants and organizations in this study have been changed for purposes of confidentiality.

neighboring town that Island Outfitters sometimes relies on for creation and production assistance. This corporation specializes in lifestyle clothing designed to reflect the WASP aesthetic. Its products stretch over a wide variety of categories, ranging from brightly colored polo shirts to patchwork wine "koozies." Casual clothing ranges in price from approximately \$50 - \$125 per item, while the average price of more formal attire is \$180. The company is distinguishable by its high gross profit margins over factory and design costs (Figure 1.1) as well as its above average within industry profit margin (Figure 1.2).

Island Outfitters Product Economics
Figure 1.1



Gross Margin by Retailer: All Products
Figure 1.2



Remarkable given the brand's profitability, I discovered that systematic demographic information about the corporation's clientele was lacking and, as a result, Island Outfitters relied on ad hoc, impressionistic data about the racial and socioeconomic composition of its consumers. This model of 'impressionistic' marketing functions well for Island Outfitters because its efforts center around creating an affinity for its image of the ideal consumer - white, wealthy, and conservative - across the range of its actual consumers.

I interned at the corporation's headquarters and completed a wide variety of tasks. I sorted, measured and fitted sample garment pieces that the design department received from overseas factories. Through this work I also was responsible for correcting sizing inconsistencies to "technical design packets," blueprints that international fabric mills and factories follow to construct garments. Bethany, a senior merchandiser who has worked at Island Outfitters for 7 years, was my supervisor for this work. I spent considerable time completing many other administrative tasks as assigned by a rotating cast of designers, technical designers, merchandisers, marketers, and office administrators. I was able to build a considerable rapport with several office employees as I spent afternoons delivering mail, filing fabric swatches, preparing meeting agendas, and working on three of the company's viral marketing projects. Most office employees involved in creative design tasks were young - the majority less than 40 years old - while the merchandising staff had an approximate mean age of 48.

This paper first describes the various elements of class reproduction as I encountered them in the design and merchandising department of Island Outfitters. Second, I look at the how the work of reproducing normative class clothing styles is impacted by its producers. Designers and merchandisers are dually influenced by preconceived notions of what their idealized consumer 'should' want to purchase and have the agency to shape those choices for the future. Finally, I use my sample of 'idealized consumers' to show the way the messages imbued in this clothing interact with old and new meanings of privilege, whiteness, and wealth. Next, I will turn to ethnographic data gathered through participant observation as a pathway leading into the multiple layers of meaning I have

summarized above.

Setting the scene: *the producers*

My colleague Bethany drives me through tidy streets on our way to the Island Outfitter's headquarters. She alternates between sipping an artisan espresso drink (\$4.75) and swearing as her BMW hydroplanes over the remnants of a tropical storm lining the woodland street. Though it is early October, the air has the weight of soup and my preppy costume (a tan J.Crew woolen shirt dress cinched by a Hermes knockoff horse and hound print scarf, smart Ralph Lauren riding boots, a Cape Cod bracelet, and dangling pearl earrings) crawls over my skin. We approach the town center, which is orderly and charming in a calculated way as if a grandmotherly architect made a life-sized foam core mock-up of "the all American town." The corporation is located in one of the lesser-known elite suburbs in New England. In 2009 the mean home price was just over \$2.3 million, while the median was a more conservative \$1.85 million. The median family income was over \$175,000 during the same year. Men earned \$100,000 on average while the median income for women was \$54,000.

Island Outfitter's office building is a repurposed garage burnished in a black lacquer. Ivy covers half of the structure's front and is pruned symmetrically around each of the 40 rectangular windows making a mosaic of glass and green. The office space consists of two long lofts stacked on top of one another with a conference room parceled off on each floor. The lobby is sleek and airy, with proto samples (first drafts of new garments)

hanging like color-coded molding from the high ceiling on one side and the fabric library lining the other. A middle aged receptionist, Merritt, stands as we enter and causes a traffic jam of six David Yurman cuffs on her wrist as she extends it in greeting. That, in combination with her engagement ring's diameter, make me wonder why she's chosen to remain working at the front desk.

Designing class

It is by no accident that the Island Outfitter's headquarters is located in such a tony suburb. In fact, all of the organization's employees I asked about its setting have on some level articulated that being immersed in an environment of wealth was not only an intentional decision made by company leadership, but also imperative to their creative on-the-job tasks. This creative work marries industry sector research, described as "always looking around like a friggin' hawk all the time to see what's 'being done' by the real luxury brands" with an eye-roll over shared pints of Narragansett Lager by accessories designer Chelsea. A lithe, languid and air-quote wielding young woman, it became clear to me through our many conversations that her work often left her smarting from a dual class consciousness. Though Island Outfitter's ideal consumer is conceptualized as affluent, the creative workers or *cultural intermediaries* who create the lifestyle of this brand, on the average, occupy a more modest socioeconomic position. Unlike Merritt, the bedazzled receptionist, who later told me that she took on her position as "sort of like a novelty ... something to get me out of the house and get me back in touch with being helpful to people in small ways," most of the designers and

merchandisers I worked and talked worked out of financial necessity. Although I was asked not to inquire about the specific salaries of employees, anecdotal conversational evidence leaves me confident that few lived the kind of carefree luxury they were charged with creating. The kind of taste work capable of successfully anticipating what styles the Island Outfitter customer would purchase required a deep cultural knowledge and ability to discern which goods could be recognized by clientele as 'high class.' Haley, a designer who defines her own style, complete with geometric, clay-colored tunics, in opposition to the Easter-colored pallet and conservative hemlines of the Island Outfitters lifestyle has been, nevertheless, influenced by her work creating the image of a specific type of affluent life. Haley describes how she imagines what Island Outfitter's clients might like, highlighting how her imagination work has altered her tastes:

Before I worked here, I couldn't stand the idea of this kind of life. Everything being easy all the time ... all of the white fences and golden retrievers ... yuck. I started being more extreme [laughing] ... wearing the ties I designed to work even though I knew it was sort of a farce. But, well, sometimes I think now that since I spend so much time thinking about what they might like to wear, I think about how I could leverage those looks for myself, you know, like how I could translate them to my group.

As she discusses the relationship between her work and the consumers she imagines producing it for, Haley reveals a mixture of distain and affinity for Island Outfitters fans that I heard often from the creative workers I shadowed. Haley did not come from a privileged home and was raised by a single mother who worked as a bookkeeper for a Catholic elementary school in a rural Northeastern town. The comment above typifies

her attitude towards the Island Outfitter's consumer she spends so much time envisioning. By defining her lifestyle in opposition to the archetypical consumer she engages in a class specific version of identity definition theorized by queer theorist Diana Fuss. Fuss relies on the work of deconstructionist theorists to argue that identity asserted as "different" must always refer to another preferable identity. She writes to "the extent that identity always contains the specter of non-identity within it, the subject is always purchased at the price of the exclusion of the Other, the repression or repudiation of non-identity" to describe the false dichotomy that sets homosexuality in opposition to heterosexuality. Although sexual orientation isn't the object of study in this analysis, Fuss' critique implicates Haley's description of her minority "working class" family background in its opposite, the upper class whose preferences she spends her days both anticipating and shaping. Bree, a technical designer, mother of two small children, and recent immigrant from Romania, intervenes in the middle of the process of garment production. While conceptual designers debate the meaning behind clothing and draw on design theory specific to lifestyle brands, it is the technical designer who transforms these abstractions into reality. Most of the technical designer's days are spent editing "tech-packs," an industry term for an excel workbook that serves as the blueprint for a specific garment piece. Once Bree receives a sketch from the conceptual design team she begins her own imagination work:

I start usually by fiddling around on the internet [*she slides her computer over a number bookmarked tumblr blogs, luxury hotel websites, and country club event calendars as she speaks*] to sort of get in the mood of my consumer. This is important ... because sometimes the feeling of each fabrication and starter

garment specification is hard for me because I am not from here. I need to almost lift myself into the body of my client. Even though my job is mainly explaining how the mills and factories in Asia should cut, sew, and dye the fabric, I still want to be thinking of what my customer is going to be doing in those clothes. She doesn't want to feel confined, she wants to feel at ease like she just had a massage and is in control. We wouldn't sell anything by making people feel fat and stuck.

It is surprising that there is any room for cultural inflection in Bree's seemingly straightforward tasks of measurement and fabric specification. Known within the industry as "vanity sizing" the convention of assigning a smaller size to what, historically, would have been a larger size is designed to boost consumer self-esteem and, in turn, encourage brand loyalty (Simon 1996). Mary, one of young female customers I spoke with several months later, reflected "I am an Island Outfitters size 2 ... I love that ..." when I probed about the measurements of their generous waistlines. She agreed with my suggestion that sizing was more generous among expensive brands, but then assured me that, despite her knowledge of a skewed scale, she liked "cheating [her] way into believing that [she was] thinner ... kind of like ... eating dessert off of someone's plate and pretending it doesn't have any calories."

Unlike Mary, Bree does not aspire to membership in the IO consumer world her color swatch and hemline choices reproduce. She recounted that this tactic of online research I have overheard her refer to as "rich surfing" was pitched as an important part of her job during her initial interviews. Bree acquiesces, attributing this requirement "to my boss's

initial worry about hir[ing] someone who didn't have the Island Outfitters kind of background *and* hadn't lived in the country that long ... he didn't think I would be able to pick 'it' out in the right way." Although Bree did not express shame about her socioeconomic class and nationality stigmatization outright, she did drop her eyes to the floor and lower her voice to a whisper as I leaned in over her cubicle wall to hear her almost inaudible musings. During the time we worked together, Bree's behavior suggested that she experienced a dual shame because of her class background ("my parents were plant workers") and status as a new American on the job. Seminal theorists of symbolic interaction, Charles Horton Cooley and Ervin Goffman, wrote about the way societies rely on shame for behavior modification. Often, people "read our cues, categorize us, attribute attitudes, and expect us to live up to normalized traits and behaviors" all without realizing the demands for performance of self their regulatory work places on the other (Cooley 1998, 155-178).

It is doubtful that Bree's supervisor consciously stigmatized her, yet his request that she continually educate herself on the practices of the upper class American targeted by Island Outfitters is also inherently a request to modify her role-related behaviors by engaging in a self-presentation project. Goffman would describe the internal conflict that Bree experienced as shame and Haley as disillusionment in terms of the distance between virtual and actual selves (1963a, 129). The potential stigma presented by a lower class background is considerable in an occupation where anticipating classed preferences is paramount to success as a *consumption intermediary* (Sherman 2011). Experiencing this discomfort, Bree took extreme care to show she had internalize her supervisor's

suggestion often inserting screen shots of her internet culture mining into the "tech packs" she prepared. I first discovered the practice after reviewing the measurements in one of the returned "tech packs" shipped back to the IO offices along with garment piece proto-samples it described. I was surprised to find this cultural clip art embedded within a workbook of measurement specifications. These blueprints were first emailed to a Chinese translation service housed in Southeast Asia, forwarded to the "mill," a raw material producer, and then to the "factory" that assembled the sample garment piece. Finally, the proto-sample is mailed back to IO offices and the cycle is repeated until the client, Island Outfitters in this case, is satisfied. It was during one of these final test runs that I discovered screenshots in the workbook as I double-checked its specifications against a physical garment piece sent from overseas. Bree laughingly admitted that she was the source of these images and explained "well ... they know even less about the flavor of the IO world than I did, so I thought the photos could help" in a reasonable, matter-of-fact tone. Bree's experience shows that although differences were not always apparent in the Island Outfitters office environment stigmatization nevertheless occurred regularly. Goffman illustrated the power of stigmas using disabilities and deformities as an extended example to argue that "normals" discredit those with visible differences (1963). Bree, dedicated to *role embracement* in the Goffmanian sense, seemed to enjoy decoding the cultural nuances accompanying her job.

The work experience of Dominique poses an opposite case in which *role distancing* endangered her reputation and, eventually, resulted in her termination. A veteran seamstress turned designer, Dominique's time at Island Outfitters highlights the

occupational hazards of exposing the gaps in her cultural capital despite her technical proficiency. Less overt than the easily recognizable stigma of disability, Island Outfitter employee Dominique had her credibility and competence questioned as a result of what another intern called her "White Trash" manner and language in the office. Logan, a middle aged creative designer who grew up among the "yuppie jerks we make shirts for" in New York City, explained that "even if we all can't stand the IO (Island Outfitters) end consumer ... we have to know how he works ... what he wants ... where and how he wants to be seen." Originally brought onto the staff to fill a gap in practical knowledge of textiles, Dominique saw no merit in "incorporating and exemplifying the officially accredited values of the [Island Outfitters] society" (Goffman 1959, 35). Several decades older than most of the creative workforce, Dominique had a wealth of experience in the industry but resisted participating in the brainstorming sessions common to creative meetings at Island Outfitters. Few jobs at Island Outfitters required sustained, first-hand experience with the lifestyle the brand aimed to embody.

Dominique's job was not an exception to this rule. Indeed it didn't matter where the staff members had "summered" as children - in reality few had access to this type of privilege - but what did "count" for others' evaluation of on-the-job efficacy was an employee's ability to imagine themselves in those situations. Dominique's painful silences and begrudging admittances that she "wasn't sure" when asked about the fabric weight of lawn tennis whites were unique in their honesty. Though she was seen as "a great seamstress" by management, their praise of her work rang as hollow as someone being pitched as having "a great personality" to a potential blind date. There was a sense that

her inability to manage the impression given off by her own image at tradeshow, in meetings with industry contacts, and most infamously, through email was a serious liability (Goffman 1959, Turner 1969). English was not her first language and though her younger colleagues were deferential in her presence, I more than once snapped on the intern computer monitor to discover that I was one of many recipients of an email chain mocking and correcting her grammatical missteps. Committed to print, Dominique's failures in the linguistic marketplace were laid bare. Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant marry the embodiment and durability of *habitus* with the speech act as they argue that "every linguistic exchange contains the *potentiality* of an act of power, and all the more so when it involves agents who occupy asymmetric positions in the distribution of the relevant capital" (1991, 145). Her job now required her to express her needs in written form and ascribe to a set of linguistic conventions with which she was, self-admittedly, unskilled. The specialized language of the design department inflicted symbolic violence on her "condemn[ing her] to a more or less desperate attempt to be correct, or to be *silent*" (Bourdieu 1991, 97). During my time there I read other emails that were just as hastily composed and riddled with typographical errors as hers. However, Dominique's refusal to pretend herself into the Island Outfitters lifestyle was atypical and legitimated her colleagues' suspicion and, ultimately, their censure.

Late in the summer of each year, the management of Island Outfitters treats employees to a day of sailing and drinking. There was an expectation of lifestyle "buy in" among the creative staff despite how shallow and inauthentic any individual staff member may have found the Island Outfitter's lifestyle. The stories told about how "amazing" and "perfect"

this day of leisure were recounted with a folkloric tone. The lifestyle brand producers I worked with admitted that participating in this style of leisure activity was rare for them. During the beginning of my time at Island Outfitters, I assumed my colleagues would genuinely believe that lives filled with this type of leisure were normal for the IO consumer. The truth about their perception is far more nuanced and contemptuous. Perhaps because employees believed they were 'lower' on the class ladder than the consumers they designed for and certainly because they had direct access to pricing information showing how great the distance between manufacturer and retail cost was, they often joked about "tricking" or "robbing those guys blind." Dirk, the son of a school teacher and principle, works as a senior merchandising manager at Island Outfitters and dresses as a member of the American aristocracy. Sitting around the break table during Friday happy-hour at the office Dirk once explained the corporation relationship to the consumer as "Main Street pretending to be Wall Street in order to overcharge Main Street also pretending to be Wall Street."

Stunned by both his levity and happy participation in the reconstitution of class, I remember staring blankly at him and then off into the distance over his shoulder in silence for the remainder of my drink. My gaze then shifted to a series of photographs above the break table which had been hung with purposeful symmetry across the brushed cement wall. They were meant to look like art pieces and could have easily accompanied a National Geographic feature discussing the ills of globalization and the garment industry. The wane-looking workers peering out from dusty factory floors on display were undoubtedly Dickensian in connotation, but they also happened to be actual

employees captured in snapshots from the factories and fabric mills that IO works with exclusively. The conditions vary across the different photographs, but what made them appear especially strange to me on the day of Dirk's consumer description was the oddity of the Island Outfitter's whimsical, pastel patterns within those spaces. The successfully acclimated lifestyle brand producer has as little care for the actual identity of his end consumer as he does for those whose lives are devoted to producing the materiality of affluent American culture. To him, both are reduced to far-away fictions. I heard no mention of these photographs, nor the conditions they suggest in my time at Island Outfitters. This reduction makes profit-driven posturing on both the producer and consumer side of the lifestyle brand the primary focus. Table 1.2.³

	Factory Gross Margin	Desinger's Gross Margin	Island Outfitters Gross Margin%	Island Outfitters Margin over Factory Cost%
Men's Tops	38.3%	25.3%	75.0%	90.5%
Women's Tops	32.1%	26.0%	73.4%	87.0%
Total Tops	33.7%	25.8%	73.8%	87.9%
Men's Bottoms	52.2%	26.2%	77.5%	93.5%
Women's Bottoms	48.7%	23.5%	76.0%	92.3%
Children's Bottoms	47.7%	26.4%	67.8%	89.3%
Total Bottoms	49.5%	25.0%	74.5%	91.9%
Women's Dresses	39.6%	24.7%	85.1%	94.3%
Men's Accessories	24.7%	26.1%	81.2%	91.1%
Women's Accessories	20.5%	23.9%	75.9%	87.4%
Children's Accessories	13.2%	32.8%	85.7%	93.2%
Total Accessories	21.5%	26.2%	79.8%	90.0%
Total Home Goods	48.3%	27.3%	70.3%	90.4%
Total	36.1%	26.1%	76.6%	90.7%
Table 1.2				

³ Table 1.2 shows data aggregated from 2010 Island Outfitters collections to illustrate profit breakdown.

Marx and Bourdieu's theories describe the reproduction of inequity through these types of ideological misrecognitions and suggest the weight of what could otherwise be dismissed as an isolated incident of callousness. Bourdieu expands Marx's definition of the social world as a place where all compete for limited resources to include several types of capital: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic. Marx might argue, for example, that when the Island Outfitter's consumer purchases a polo shirt, he would also fail to see the potentially oppressive conditions it was produced under. Dirk's comment is certainly typical of this Marxian of misrecognition, but it also sets the stage for another type of symbolic violence and oppression. The symbolic power Dirk wields over his employees, his end consumers, and himself "is that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it" (Bourdieu 1991, 164).

Workers who produce lifestyle brand clothing do produce material goods for a relatively low cost in comparison to their eventual retail price. The ability to see past products to what customers want to say about themselves by wearing them is what sustains Island Outfitter's success. Deb is a senior development merchandiser, who refines consumers' visions of themselves in Island Outfitters garments. In meetings, she often times refers to consumers as "she" and "he" saying things like "Oh, no, he wouldn't like that collar line," referencing some imaginary vision of Island Outfitter's end consumer while holding a fabric swatch taut over a mannequin's shoulder. I've even heard her assign these imagined consumers proper names like "Benjamin" during design concept meetings. Deb, who is

single, white and 53 years old, previously worked at Eddie Bauer and has had a long career in the garment industry.

Deb, like most of the other merchandisers on staff, is convinced that it is easiest for consumers to shop from catalogs. She echoes the opinion I have heard from other merchandisers, "the experience of reading catalogs and curling up with them at home as you imagine the kind of life we paint for them [the consumers] is really wonderful and online shopping pales in comparison." Regardless of the medium of transport, the message from producer to consumer is clear Deb tells me plainly:

It's a thought process it's a state of mind, a way of life ... I don't care who my customers actually are, I care about who they want to pretend to be ... the image is way easier to understand and predict than the reality.

While Bree did online research to compensate for gaps in her cultural knowledge and "get in the mood of her consumer" Deb performs a parallel exercise with some of the catalogs she receives at her home, dog-earing pages and ripping out things that "feel" like Island Outfitters. She has told me that she receives about "75 to 90 catalogs each month" at her house. When I follow up about this to see if she's exaggerating, she stands firm and clarifies that not only does she receive that many catalogues monthly but that those are only apparel catalogues. She says this type of research gives her vital information about how different apparel companies are "positioning or placing garments in a setting." Deb also has a separate e-mail address reserved specifically for online shopping. She reported that if she were to give her 'real' email address her inbox would be completely overwhelmed by the amount of online shopping offers and specials she received daily.

Every one of the merchandisers I've worked with at Island Outfitters considers this omnivorous marketing consumption very important research. Since these workers envision their job as the producers of a very particular type of *habitus*, it is imperative that they understand the array of lifestyles being produced by other corporations so that theirs remains distinctive and attractive to consumers. It is clear that Deb has cultivated a special way of decoding messages through years of research and that she loves this kind of detective work.

Often times, as Deb reads magazines, she imagines how the Island Outfitters consumer could use this item (or something just like it with the company's signature emblem embroidered on it). Many of the merchandisers echo the consistency with which they perform imaginative *taste work*. Most, with the notable exception of the team's most junior employee Chelsea, report experiencing a great degree of freedom because the brand produces a wide variety of items. Island Outfitters has such a strong "ideal customer image" that merchandisers report the expectation to pitch many more types of items than they would have opportunity to do an organization with a less salient identity. Deb explained this to me over email:

Instead of being able to offer her [the customer] three shirts, we are able to offer her anything from dog leashes to tennis shoes to Island Outfitters bumper stickers to purses or golf clubs. I've been in the industry long time and because of that she is a very high hit rate. When I get comfortable with "him" (her customer) and get to know him well I will have about a 8/10 success rate pitching a specific garment piece to the buyers and decision-makers to be adopted into the catalog.

It is clear that she enjoys the autonomy her position affords while simultaneously exercising her creativity ("you have to be visual!") and intellect ("you have to have an organized mind to do this job!").

Other producers on staff make a habit of carrying around a small camera so that "if you see someone with a particular look that I like while I'm out I can just snap up that look with a client in mind." Deb practices this type of afterhours *taste work* and often encourages junior staff members to do so repeatedly (Sherman 2010). She once told me proudly that she "swiped a look from her niece's friend who had tied her running sneakers with grosgrain ribbon" instantly recognizing that as something that could appeal to Island Outfitters customers. I am reminded again and again "it isn't about function" the suggestion to be doing "well enough" to have leisure time, rather than actually having the time is the prime commodity of this lifestyle brand. Because this brand markets explicitly to a Wall Street crowd, they are keenly focused which material markers of wealth are most recognizable and hold legitimacy for that population.

The most senior team members, Deb and Dirk, both assert that one of the most important things about being a successful lifestyle producer is believing in your product. Surprised to hear this from Deb I trail her, following her jerky, caffeinated steps as she moves from her work station to the cutting table, a large flat gray table in the center of the office where the merchandisers and designers check sample pieces. I demand "But you're not preppy!" "Nope," she replies teasingly throwing her hand over her forehead in mock horror "I'm *not*." Deb's ability to understand and articulate what makes this kind of

wealth signaling unique and attractive while, at the same time, distinguishing the idealized identity from her own is mirrored countless times across the observational data. Similarly, I spoke with Dirk about how he visualized the Island Outfitter consumer and recorded our exchange in my fieldnotes:

"It is more than the colors, of course. There's a sentiment of hard work that goes before the reward that this look also gets at if you ask me. Of austerity and the generalized feeling that 'Hey, we are going somewhere and it's going to take a lot of energy and smarts to get where we're going.'" "I think it says something fantastic about hard work and about the American dream that you can come from nothing and end up everything." "Really?" I question, "that seems ... idealistic."

"That's the point Emilie" he shakes his head at me, "we're selling the idea." "Oh!" I say holding my eyes wide in feign surprise.

This merchandiser's idea that preppy clothing signals hard work isn't unique to this set of field notes, rather, I've heard it repeated by designers and consumers alike. The more adept of these producers recognize that selling clothing designed to stand for "old" money precisely to display that you've worked hard enough to be able to purchase leisure class status is a superficial power play at best. The successful producer is, unavoidably, emerged in research to anticipate the lifestyle his consumer desires and, more often than not, finds himself embodying the trappings of that lifestyle as well. Dirk, for example, delivered the status savvy soliloquy above while wearing Island Outfitter's brand khakis, a blue, pink, and lime green checkered Thomas Pink shirt reminiscent of the graph paper used in high school geometry classes complete with his initials monogrammed onto the cuff covered by a camel hair Brooks Brother's jacket . He was also sporting Ferragamo

loafers, a TUMI belt, a Panerai watch, and a signet pinky ring. A conservative estimate of his outfit's cost, including his watch, would land approximately around the \$9,000 mark. Dirk and Deb's respective distance from and embodiment of the lifestyle they produce is different, but their complicity with its contours and conventions begs the question: What does the rise of lifestyle brands mean in a period in which society lauds those who have worked for their wealth if those people are displaying their ascension by wearing the clothes of those who did not have to work for their privilege? Next, I present the thoughts of Island Outfitter consumers to answer this question and demystify the taken-for-granted smoke and mirror show of lifestyle consumption in order to challenge the legitimacy of class and status reproduction.

Setting the scene: *the consumers*⁴

Yeah, like if you're having a company dinner you want to go somewhere that people have heard of, and that's expensive. Probably the more expensive the better especially if you're not paying for it because then obviously you don't care. You're not paying for it but you still get the experience ... even if you're trying to impress one of your co-workers or something. You're rarely going to just go to a bar around the corner. It's like when we have our company parties. It's like who is going to plan the after party for recruitment events for new analysts - we have to go to some club and get bottle service because it helps them see what's waiting for them if they put in the time. So, then as soon as the bottles start coming. It's like to draw even more attention to us, even before like half of

⁴ This vignette is an excerpt of a December 2010 follow-up phone interview conducted with a 26-year-old private equity associate who hails from a self-described working class background made approximately \$390,000 in 2009.

*the bottle is gone, it's like "Oh we need two more!" Everything's in so much excess that it's kind of ridiculous. It is a ploy to get more attention and show off. I remember this specific time when there were little sparklers in the tops of the champagne bottles that the waitresses would set off as they brought them over to our section. As soon as the guys figured out the brands with the sparklers, they would order those exclusively. I think it was like \$170 a bottle, which is cheap because we were in some town in Florida. There were like 15 people and the tab was north of \$5,000 and that was for like four hours. And all I can remember about the bill from that night is that everyone kept talking about how much we were getting for our money and how much more expensive it would have been if we were in NYC. Like, oh, look at us we have so much money, look at us, we're from New York. And we're all there in a roped off section all wearing different versions of the same pink tie like in a reverse white rap video saying f***-you to everyone whose money we're spending. It's a game but, hey, if you show up on game day without your uniform they won't let you play.*

Class designs

Almost all of the consumers I spoke with had designs on a specific class. Whether they were born into an affluent family and, in a new situation, wanted to reassert their positional privilege or whether their background was more humble, the explicit and purposeful nature of their class aspirations underwrote most of their narratives. All but three of the Island Outfitter's fans I interviewed had worked in client-facing positions in the financial services industry in New York City - the remaining three interviewees were

a lawyer, a management consultant, and the girlfriend of a hedge fund analyst I also interviewed as part of this project. Whether employed as commodity traders, investment banking analysts, or private equity associates it was clear that the young men I spoke with wanted to leave me with the resounding impression that they were all "on the make." Back at Island Outfitter's headquarters I had asked Deb about who she believed bought IO merchandise regularly: "in all likelihood these [customers] are quite varied by region, by specific consumer, by types of items purchased. But, well, whatever." The one image that Deb and the rest of the creative team spent most of their time tracking and anticipating wasn't actually who their consumers were, but rather who they wanted to imagine they were. I asked Deb to list some adjectives that might describe the ideal whose essence Haley and Bree spent hours hunting for online and whose images - torn from countless magazines - lined Deb's cubicle walls. She gave me a list of essential characteristics in the following order: "white, Protestant, rich, happy, married, and successful."

Rather than focus my recruitment energy on the margins of brand identity, I sought out participants that I could fit into as many of these 'ideal' categories as possible. Island Outfitter's brand narrative is one that combines the idea of being "by and for" the Wall Street crowd with a sentiment that "doing finance" isn't the primary part of "the good life" but rather, what you have to do if you hope to achieve it. After all, the brand's mantra that "men should wear ties to work that remind them of what they're working for" necessitates both the existence of hard work and the acknowledgment that "playing hard" - or at least looking like you could - is actually the work of life. I spoke with analysts at

two hedge funds, associates and vice presidents at Goldman Sachs, former Wall Street investment bankers taking what they called "vacations" at Harvard, Stanford, Wharton, and Columbia Business Schools, and private equity associates with freshly minted undergraduate degrees from MIT, Princeton, Harvard, Columbia, Brown, Cornell, and University of Virginia. Clearly, my almost all male sample was privileged and sharp. It was also overwhelmingly white, young, and conservative. Though the classed realities of this small and purposefully homogenous group cannot stand in for all of the multifarious ways class is being defined and redefined in America today, their dual "buy-in" to a profit-driven, hierarchical, and demanding workplace as well as to a brand designed to send signals of their seriousness and levity is worth reporting. As long as Americans continue to privilege wealth accumulation above all else, then thoughtfully considering the behavior, internal conflicts, and insecurity of the young men leading that charge is a venture worth investment.

The following section shows that most of the consumers in my sample wear this style of clothing earnestly; however, the designers at Island Outfitters report that many of the items in their current collection were inspired by *The Official Preppy Handbook* (OPH). Written in 1980, the OPH was a parody of WASP culture that, over the past 30 years, has now morphed into instrumentally applied pastiche. Several participants detailed when and why they began wearing Island Outfitter's attire. Mark an unassuming 24-year-old financial planning analysis at a major retail bank who told me he grew up "middle" class outside Syracuse, New York remembered:

Three and a half years ago, I wore a v-neck sweater over a shirt and tie on a cold

fall day. My boss told me that was not formal enough for the office. I've made a conscious effort to dress richer than him every day since.

Others, like 28 year-old Edward, whose father was a family-bread winner as an accountant in Ohio, works at a Japanese-based investment bank and cites upward professional mobility as his initial motivation:

How you dress, at least on Wall Street, is equated with professionalism. Also, last-second meetings pop up so being in a suit is essential if you want to participate (which is a good career move). I have three ties at my desk so I can put one on if this situation arises. People who dress like the intern below could have a hard time gaining respect from their co-workers.

George, who attends an elite business school in the South and formerly worked as a management consultant in Washington DC, remembers his first attraction to Island Outfitters as part of his "self improvement" project:

Well, I didn't grow up wearing this stuff. I didn't wear it in college, but I really was messing around then. I was just drinking and a mess. When I decided to man up and take myself seriously I started to wear it to buy into them. I loved their story.

Mary, 28 and living in Manhattan is George's long-time girlfriend, and although she does not "buy in" to the brand, nevertheless, she corroborates his story:

He was basically like, you know, a goof off in college and didn't take anything seriously and didn't care about his image so much. He didn't dress preppy in college and all of a sudden, you know, he graduated and decides he wants to become part of this elite community and that's when he started buying preppy

clothing.

Mary, on the other hand, likens the style to snobbishness and has purposefully avoided it despite George's urgings for her to "buy in." Lowering her voice conspiratorially her forehead crinkled with concern as she said "I just associate that style with people who are stuck up and snobby. Or people who try to act better than you ... that style of dress goes hand in hand with conservatism, with traditional patriarchal values."

For most though, the connection between clothing and conservatives was less explicit. Britt, an affluent hedge fund analyst who lives in a famously wealthy Connecticut town, remembers his first exposure to the brand and the affinity he felt for the brand's underdog story:

[The ties] weren't cheap but were relatively inexpensive in comparison with their peers. And that was great. But when I got to know their whole brand, that there were these two brothers who, whether or not this is true 100% or a little artist's editing, that they up and left NYC to make this company. I thought "that's awesome." I viewed myself as someone going into the financial world but had always fantasized about being a mariner. I was totally buying what they were selling. I think their growth patterns corresponded with my supply of discretionary income pretty well. As they were growing product lines, I graduated from college and got my first job. I made decent money and then I got promoted and made even more money. I was more likely and more willing to spend more money as they added more products for me to buy.

Although the interviewees differed in their initial motivation to adopt a "preppy style" or

begin shopping at Island Outfitters, most viewed it as part of a self-improvement project that would yield direct vocational rewards. When I inquired about who they thought were the "typical" Island Outfitter customers, I was met with responses that could just have easily come from the designers.

Both groups, it seems, were dealing in archetypes. For example, Harold, a managing partner at a private equity firm, surprised me by saying his salary had "priced him beyond Island Outfitters" and he saw the brand catering to "real estate brokers and salesmen. The kind of people who aren't power players at all." This one counter example stands out from the many similar responses I gathered from the younger finance employees whose occupational success was less certain. George reported that brand affiliation was an important social marker, saying "all my friends [buy Island Outfitters]. He next told me that, when given the choice, he will elect to be with "people will look Southern and sort of, well, sort of rich ... [elaborating that he likes] PLU bars." I must have looked confused by the acronym because he then gestured widely from our high top table to the restaurant's tavern area, remarking amusedly "You know, bars that have, *people like us*." The theme of homogenization of aesthetic and personhood came up elsewhere in my interviews. Britt mentioned in the importance of religious similarities among consumers, explaining that the ideal Island Outfitters peer group is "young, wealthy, carefree ... preppy so WASP-y so white too and not Jewish ... something Christian." When I inquired about how he thought of the exact financial position of this type of consumer he equated the young Island Outfitter or preppy consumer generally to someone who has enough wealth or:

liquid capital in the sense that they have enough money to pay for it without compromising their own lifestyle. It could be a young person who just got their first job and they'll spend every rent check ... uh .I mean their paycheck. I meant every paycheck after paying the rent. I would say a 'seeking to fit in' or a propensity to fit into a certain lifestyle is also important. Very important - that's what they're paying for really.

Conflating pay check with rent check might have just been an honest mistake, but I remember Britt's face reddening when he realized his misstatement. I left the interview wondering how much financial strain "fitting into a certain lifestyle" brought about for these consumers.

Island Outfitters has tapped into this desire and produces tools for class ascension, homogenization, and reinforcement. Another interviewee, Dean, reflected on goals of class ascension that Island Outfitters facilitates:

I think people who might even by trying to enter a new class or trying to climb the social ladder or something would be attracted to this even though they're not quite part of it. They might start dressing that way as a way of trying to break in. It would make them fit in more with the crowd even if they're like complete strangers. Someone's more likely to talk to you if you're dressed the same or whatever.

Dean echoes George's anxiety about being associated with PLU (people like us). These concerns, along with the earlier retelling of bottle service excess, introduce an acknowledged element of class performance into this discussion. Within this pool of

respondents, it seems that as the potentiality of financial reward is married with a sense of achievement, then their fears about misclassification increase and the importance of correct classification increases. Mary, who dismisses these fears, is reflective and cynical in her assessment of these performances:

You're always projecting an image of what you believe or who you want to be or what type of people you want to attract. I definitely think there's something to it. It's like, you know, my brothers who are definitely not preppy would never wear Island Outfitters clothes. It makes sense, they live on the Jersey Shore, they're not in the finance community, they didn't go to college - they're just not part of the desired demographic.

Sarah, a marketing student at an elite business school, disagrees. Instead she derives a sense of calm from this homogenization though she acknowledges its synthetic feel:

I like the focus. I like to know who my peers are. It's just like all of the models in the catalogue are fans. There's something to that. I know that all of those people can't be rich, I mean, I just know it. But there is something soothing about seeing them all matching as families and looking healthy and successful. It lets me forget about the reality and believe that the American dream is ... well not a dream. I know it sounds stupid, but it is almost like wearing a 1950s sitcom around. Even though you know its created, there's something just... something nice about wrapping yourself up in that creation walking around in it and sending that "happy days are here again" message back out there into the world.

Sarah's reminiscence on the fantasy of the American dream Island Outfitters allows her to act out is not unique to her story. It is, in fact, the exact goal that Dirk and Deb

envisioned for the brand. Ryan, one of Sarah's classmates and a former investment banker, related the pride he felt when he and his mother were featured in one of the "fan photos" Sarah mentioned. Beaming and self-amused he confessed "I've had my photo show up in the catalogue. It was last fall - I was with my brother." Britt also had been featured in the catalogue wearing Island Outfitter's gear "in Bermuda. It was great. So classic. My mom framed it." While "money was never a concern" for Britt's family, Ryan later told me that this photographic inclusion in the Island Outfitters was a source of great pride for his brother who "doesn't do as well" as he does. Ryan mentioned that the two were posed on "someone else's yacht" while walking around Battery Park City in New York. Embarrassed, Ryan said "I almost couldn't believe he sent it in ... because ... it was sort of like a spectator shot ... like posing with the Lincoln Monument." In the end, he said he understood and identified with his younger brother's desire to be associated with the "yuppies of his frat." To Ryan, who comes from an upper middle class family, tells me his father passed away when he was young and since then "showing we were still fine has been really important." Though successful he doesn't think he fits into the ideal type as well as others might guess:

To me, "preppy" is more of a background or demographic than a set of personality traits. It's my understanding that "preppy" was originally used to refer to boarding school students and expanded to include all private schools, and then to refer to the style and dress common among such students. The typical "preppy" background is white, affluent, and well-educated in a private high school or a top tier college; equated with "country club" attire later in life.

The feeling that his father's passing forces his family into continual performances of

being "fine" is important to highlight as it suggests the existence of a more conflicted emotional existence hidden under the surface.

Others express similar assumptions about "people who are dressed like that."

Respondents seemed to want to believe that Island Outfitters consumers were "well educated ... organized, and probably accomplished or on their way or becoming accomplished" equating clean hemlines with "someone with a life plan ... who has a job ... who knows what they want to do ... who wouldn't quit their job without having another one."

Dean, a young analyst who often clocks more than 80 hours at work each week, elaborated on the importance of the style for class ascension as he ordered a black eye (a coffee with two extra shots of espresso) while we spoke before returning to the office.

I think being a preppie is more than just the way one dresses; I think that it is more of an expression of a certain outlook on life. With that outlook come certain personality traits. Anyone can dress like a prep, but I have found that the term is most personified in the male WASP. The clothing is indicative of a certain lifestyle that the wearer either lives, or envisions himself living. As a result there is a level of arrogance that accompanies this look, that if demonstrated by any other would come across as a jerk. The guy in the white polo shirt and the pale blue embroidered whale pants may be a jerk.... but that jerk could walk into any country club... and ultimately that is what the prep wants.

Others noted that arrogance is often a necessary accessory to this "look" as well. Claire, a private equity associate who is critical of what she sees as the "posturing" of her male

colleagues notes " there's something to them all dressing and acting the same ... they heighten each other's purchases and practices ... its gross." She also sees a gendered pattern of dress within the industry that differentiates men from women. She theorized that women might be more likely to choose flattering styles to accentuate their figures, reasoning that "guys really don't care as much about that." Instead, she hypothesized that "they're wondering 'What will people think of me?' ... not... 'I look good in this.'" This focus on homogenization and intelligibility of class facilitates cohesive group identity. She concludes that, often "you're accepted because you're not unique, because you are wearing the uniform." Britt, who also works in private equity seems to confirm Claire's theory, reflecting:

I think the "old boy's network" type firms still rule. The closer you can copy what you think they might want in an employee, the better. I don't view myself as alter egos between the two different people in and outside work. It's more that I take certain responsibilities with certain attitudes. I still remember who I am and view myself a fun loving kid hopping around on my parent's boat.

Others also combined this desire to be acknowledged and respected as "a dedicated player" by senior players in their firms while still retaining youthful levity:

You know, no matter what someone wears it is a reflection on how they perceive to be the brand of what they perceive themselves to be. And what they want others to think of themselves as and some sort of combination to all three of them.

When I challenged him, Britt elaborated on the importance of the marriage between professional and prepubescent for surviving the hours and demands of surviving Wall Street:

I get excited to see my friends and have a few too many beers and give them jump high-fives when we're all in the middle of a restaurant. I see that there's this bifurcation between 'serious' Britt and Britt. I think all of our jobs [I assume he's talking about people working in finance] force us to really act out when we're outside the office. My internal monologue is two - Island Outfitters is kind of like a marriage between the two. I mean I am not the hipster. I am always going to wear the most conservative outfits - a gingham shirt and a simple navy tie.

Wearing a tie with a martini glass and fish printed all over it - I have this one - I take to mean drinking like fish. No one out of our age range, I think, really picks up on that. At the end of the day you can smile a little to yourself - like, sort of, I'm pulling a fast one on everyone. That's kind of why I enjoyed the brand. It's always been for the most part ... it's always been very conservative things that you can wear out the bar all the way up to [with a] suit at work. The brand has always been CONSERVATIVE, like in all "caps," but with a little asterisk (CONSERVATIVE*) at the end of the word that showed a little bit of the left over "kid" personality.

Though this type of CONSERVATIVE* image may be adapted as subtle joke to those embedded enough in the community to recognize it, the homogenized aesthetic and behavior necessitated by occupational and, thus, peer group norms constrains in other ways. When I asked what would happen if someone arrived at work dressed as "a hipster" George replied that this might be acceptable if as long it wasn't "like some cheap thing from a thrift store ... [to be] weird." Guessing that something second-hand or threadbare "would definitely stand out a lot I think and that's not really what [the firm is]

trying to" encourage in its employees. Another was quick to clarify that he "wouldn't care" about breaking this peer group norm but that this kind of deviance might "catch a few glances if someone was acting out like a hipster or being gay or something." After five years on Wall Street, Christopher is able to reflect on the potential dangers lurking for "younger analysts and interns [who are] definitely clueless when it comes to professional dress" remembering with visible disgust that he has "seen some terrible suits and awkward looking square toe shoes." Many other participants agreed that Britt and Christopher's concerns about being ostracized were "all the more reason [to keep doing things] right down the middle" to avoid "ruffling any feathers" so, ultimately each is able to "skate on by and keep getting *paid*."⁵

Ryan, a young Ivy-League graduate, connects vocational fluency with cultural fluency and eventual financial gain on Wall Street:

I think how you appear is important in every aspect of your life and, in particular, at this kind of work. With experience come benefits and those benefits come in dollars. Whether you are learning how to "man up" and dress suitably for your place of work or you are learning the ins and outs to analyzing financial statements ...the quicker you learn, the more successful you will be.

Gaming analogies, including Ryan's call to "man up," Sarah's stress on "hustling" or Britt's desire to "be a player" were prevalent. Most referenced a normative masculine ideal that privileged maximization of personal benefit above all other concerns.

⁵ Whenever my respondents talked about "getting paid" it was clear to me that they weren't referring to making enough money to get by. "Getting paid" was a slang term used in the industry that referred to the amount, typically measured in tens of thousands of dollars, each employee is awarded during annual performance-based bonuses.

Certainly, the group of "finance guys" I spent time with might have appeared overtly competitive and gender normative because they self-selected themselves into a profession that rewards both practices. However, moments of self-contradiction and doubt sometimes crept into my interviews that puzzled me and forced the question; to what extent is the production of this specific type of consumer identity occupationally obligatory?

Conclusion

It was in these moments, balanced on the edges of our talks, when participants related stories designed to signal to me that they too were a bit uncomfortable with the superficiality of the status game. However, none mentioned decelerating what Veblen would identify as "defensive" status purchasing. It was challenging for my participants to re-read anything they said that did not fit within the impossibly narrow, idealized consumer image crafted with their imagined set of preferences in mind by Island Outfitter's *consumption intermediaries* and then reified through their status performances within occupational and social networks (insofar as those social networks could be leveraged for professional gain). Tellingly, both participants who shared stories of struggle and fears of hypocrisy later asked that I redact those portions of their interviews. This censorship should not be left unconsidered. The bankers and traders I spoke with who "bought in" to the lifestyle materialized by Island Outfitters' creative workers saw their loyalty as both cause and consequence of their distinction. Though they attributed

affluence to personal worth and identified Island Outfitters as a quick and easy way to confirm that worth, they sometimes appeared wholly unconvinced by the stories they shared.

It was through the emailed review I provided to participants that I received their most thoughtful feedback. Many of the quotes presented in the consumer results section of this paper have gone through two levels of censorship – that performed as *facework* during initial interviews and, later, textually through emailed transcripts. I received transcripts filled with track-changes at all hours of the night, though 6 of the edited documents arrived between 1:30-3:00 a.m. and originated from their professional email accounts suggesting that, despite the hour, many of my participants were still at work. The returned transcripts were often accompanied by short emails riddled with quips like “still killing it in the office” that read like voluntary validity checks aimed to back up the claims of hard work they stressed when speaking with me. I imagined my participants reading their words in the same conference rooms and cubicles I had met them in after business hours weeks before. Though expensive, their clothing was often stale. Many times, they looked relieved to take a break to talk with me about the potential spoils of their profession. As they described what “the good life” meant to them it was almost nice to see their faces illuminated by something other than open excel workbooks shining grimly from multiple computer monitors. Most participants took pride in the consumption-based identity that affiliation with Island Outfitters provided because of its explicit links to career success and personal fulfillment. Rarely did my participants’ descriptions of “the good life” map onto the hyper-consumptive practices they described

and I witnessed. Instead, family, authenticity, and freedom dominated their goals. It is worth reiterating that one of Island Outfitters' mottos is that "men should wear ties to work that remind them of what they're working for." The ties these workers wore during 12-hour days at the office display symmetrically aligned palm trees or beach balls among many other similarly whimsical patterns. The message is clear; the consumer's goal is a life of leisure.

Pecuniary symbolism, stylistic innovation, and closed social networks collude to create new phantom meaning for the producer and consumer of the lifestyle brand alike (Veblen, Simmel, & Warner). The distance separating the *cultural intermediaries* shadowed in this work from the site of production and from organic participation in the social groups that make up their target sales demographic is troubling on two levels. First, it obscures the conditions of production almost entirely and, through this obfuscation, renders any potential exploitation inconsequential. Second, it distorts the site of consumption into a caricature of itself in which status practices are legitimate currency. Sometimes cynical and always unconcerned by consumer's practical needs, lifestyle brand producers instead focus on the products that can be leveraged to provide the greatest status distinctions. Not dupes, consumers recognize these tools and utilize them to participate in the performance of security and ease. None of my participants saw this performance as optional on Wall Street. The financial professionals I spoke with told me that the clarity with which they signaled to their superiors their potential for distinction and propensity to "get the job done" in the office was supremely important. They distanced themselves from behavior that would "cause questions" or "ruffle any

feathers” by adopting the style of those whose wealth and privilege was largely inherited. Using the sporting metaphors suggested during many interviews, in donning the Island Outfitters “uniform” they signaled their respect for the rules of ascension within the finance community. Of course, adopting this consumer identity also clarified their readiness to “play” if put in the game. The accelerated rate and importance of status consumption among the hugely wealthy young people I spoke with may be unsurprising. However, the explicit connections to Wall Street’s culture of attitudinal consensus, behavior homogenization, and artificial distance from the ground level effects of its practices is unsettling given the ascension of Island Outfitter’s status.

References

- Aaker, Daniel. *Building Strong Brands*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.
- Aldrich, Howard. *Organizations and Environments*. Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1979.
- Axelrod, Robert and Michael Cohen. *Harnessing Complexity: Organizational Implications of a Scientific Frontier*. New York: Free Press 2000.
- Belk, Russell. "Possessions and the Extended Self." *Journal of Consumer Culture*. 15. no. 2 (1988): 139-168.
- Belk, Russell, Melanie Wallendorf, and John Sherry. "The Sacred and the Profane in Consumer Behavior: Theodicy on the Odyssey." *Journal of Consumer Research*. no. 16 (1989): 1-37.
- Birnback, Lisa. *The Official Preppy Handbook*. New York: Workman Publishing, 1980.
- Blaszczuk, Regina. *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Burawoy, Michael. *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Crane, Diana, and Laura Bovone. "Approaches to Material Culture: The Sociology of Fashion and Clothing." *Poetics*. 34. (2006): 319-333.
- Dittmar, Helga. *The Social Psychology of Material Possessions*. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1992.
- Du Gay, Paul. *The Production of Culture, Cultures of Production: Culture, Media, and Identity*. London: Sage Publishing, 1997.
- Featherstone, Michael. *Consumer Culture and Postmodern*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, 1991.
- Felson, Marcus. "The Differentiation of Material Life Styles: 1925-1976." *Social Indicators Research*. no. 3 (1976): 397-421.
- Felson, Marcus. "Invidious Distinctions Among Cars, Clothes, and Suburbs." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 42. no. Spring (1978): 397-421.
- Firat, Fuat and Alladi Venkatesh, "Liberatory Postmodernism and the Re-enchantment of Consumption," *Journal of Consumer Research*, no. 22 (1995) 239-267.

- Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
- Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Cambridge: Anchor Books, 1959.
- Goffman, Erving. *Gender Advertisements*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976.
- Griswold, Wendy. "A Methodological Frame for the Sociology of Culture work." *Sociological Methodology*. 17. (1987): 1-35.
- Gros, Jochen, "Progress through Product Language," *Innovation, The Journal of the Industrial Design Society of America: The Semantics of Form*, 1984.
- Halle, David. *Inside Culture: Art and Class in the American Home*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Hanser, Amy. *Service Encounters: Class, Gender, and the Market for Social Distinction in Urban China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism as a Site of Discourse on the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no.3 (1988): 575-99.
- Hesse-Biber, Sharlene and Patricia Leavy. *The Practice of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005.
- Hitlin, Steven and Jane Allyn Piliavin. "Values: Reviving a Dormant Concept," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004): 359-393.
- Holt, Douglas. "Why Do Brands Cause Trouble?." *Journal of Consumer Research*. no. 29 (2002): 70-90.
- Holt, Douglas. *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review, 2004.
- Holt, Douglas. "Poststructuralist Lifestyle Analysis: Conceptualizing the Social Patterning of Consumption in Postmodernity." *Journal of Consumer Research*. 23. no. 4 (1997): 326-350.
- Holt, Douglas. "Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption?." *Journal of Consumer Research*. 25. no. 1 (1998): 1-30.
- Horowitz, Daniel. *Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939-1979*. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004.

- Jameson, Federic. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review*. 146. (1984): 59-92.
- Jung, Kacie Lynn and Matthew Merlin. "Lifestyle Branding: As More Companies Embrace it, Consumer Opposition Grows." *Journal of Integrated Marketing Communications*. (2003): 40-45.
- Lamont, Michele and Annette Lareau. "Cultural Capital: Allusions, Gaps, and Glissandos in Recent Theoretical Developments." *Sociological Theory*. 6. no. 2 (1988): 153-168.
- Maguire, Jennifer Smith and Julian Matthews. "Cultural Intermediaries and the Media." *Sociology Compass*. 4 no. 7 (2010): 405-416.
- Mears, Ashley. "Size Zero High-End Ethnic: Cultural Production and the Reproduction of Culture in Fashion Modeling." *Poetics* 38 (2010): 21-46.
- Mick, David Glen and Claus Buhl "A Meaning-Based Model of Advertising Experiences," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19, (1992): 317-338.
- Negrin, Llewellyn. "The Self as Image: A Critical Appraisal of Postmodern Theories of Fashion." *Theory Culture & Society*. 16. no. 3 (1999): 99-118.
- Nixon, Sean and Ben Crewe. "Pleasure at Work? Gender, Consumption and Work-based Identities in Creative Industries." *Consumption, Markets, and Culture*. 7 no. 2 (2004): 129-147.
- Rafferty, Katherine. "Class-Based Emotions and the Allure of Fashion Consumption." *Journal of Consumer Culture*. 11. no. 2 (2011): 239-260.
- Rauscher, Michael. "Demand for Social Status and the Dynamics of Consumer Behavior." *Journal of Socio-Economics*. 22. no. 2 (1993): 105-113.
- Ritson, Mark and Richard Elliot. "Advertising Literacy and the Social Signification of Cultural Meaning." *European Advances in Consumer Research*. 2 (1995): 113-117.
- Ruggerone, L. (Ed.) *Beyond Fashion: Objects, Stories and Meanings*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2001.
- Salzinger, Leslie. *Genders in Production: Making Workers in Mexico's Global Factories*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003.
- Schnurnberger, Lynn. *Let There Be Clothes: 40000 Years of Fashion*. New York: Workman Publishing Company, 1991.

- Schor, Juliet. "In Defense of Consumer Critique: Re-visiting the Consumption Debates of the 20th Century," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 16 no.1 16-30.
- Sherman, Rachel. *Class Acts: Service and Inequality in Luxury Hotels*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007.
- Sherman, Rachel. "The Productions of Distinctions: Class, Gender, and Taste Work in the Lifestyle Management Industry." *Qualitative Sociology*. 34 no. 1 (2011): 201-219.
- Simmel, Georg. "On Fashion." *American Journal of Sociology*. 62. no. 1 (1957 [1904]): 54-58.
- Slater, Stanley and John Narver. "Market Oriented is more than Being Customer-Led." *Journal of Strategic Management*. 20 no. 12 (1999): 1165-1169.
- Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York, Penguin Books, 1967 (Originally printed in 1899).
- Williams, Christine. *Inside Toyland: Working, Shopping, and Social Inequality*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006.