University of Alberta

Learn It, Live It, Love It: Creating the Self in the Consumer Culture of Retail Employment

by

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Dedication

Above all, I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Dr. Ann Holroyd, whose thirst for knowledge, perseverance and courage to always take the most difficult path gave me the strength to see this project through to completion.

To my father, Lee Holroyd, who always supported my academic endeavors. Dad, I hope you are proud.

To my brother Sean and sister Leeann, my grandparents Elizabeth and Charles, and my uncles Charles and Allen. Thank you for supporting me, and giving me the confidence and resources to take on such a task. I can never repay you for all your generosity and love.

To my research participants, a group of amazing young women who I am sure will all go on to accomplish great things in life. Your experiences and willingness to share them with me are the backbone of this project. Without you, this project truly would not have been possible. Many thanks to each one of you for your contributions and insights into the complex relationship between the self, work and consumer culture.

Abstract

How do retail service industry employees perform appearance and identity to generate capital? This thesis is data collected through interviews with 5 female retail employees, analyzed in conjunction with relevant readings about performance at work through appearance and identity (Chapter 1 – Erving Goffman), the involvement of the self at work for financial gain of the self and the employer (Chapter 2 – Arlie Russell Hochschild) and the sale of self for the accumulation of forms of capital (Chapter 3 – Pierre Bourdieu, Henri Lefebvre, and other theorists concerned with consumer culture). The thesis begins at the level of the individual, expands to the realm of the retail environment and its associated relationships, and finally moves to examining the circulation of forms of capital. I assert that the research participants, as embodied employees of lifestyle brands, provide a form of capital for their employers. The employees' performances positively reinforce the retailers' brands and images, and thereby reproduce consumer culture by inciting desire.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express gratitude to the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta for their generous funding and continual support of this project. The Department is a gem in an institution committed to world-class academic scholarship. I am grateful for the intellectual engagement of faculty and students that I was fortunate enough to participate in during my time in Edmonton. The Department of Sociology is an invigorating place to be, learn and grow as an academic.

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Introduction: Learn It, Live It, Love It

Shopping and its associated interactions and processes are an integral part of Canadian life. Canadians shop for sustenance through food, protection from the elements through clothing, and transportation through vehicles and alternative means. As a result, academics and other researchers have paid significant attention to the consumer culture of the Western hemisphere, emphasizing the relationships between consumption and identity (Baudrillard 1998; Bourdieu 1984; Clarke 1998; Lefebvre 2000; Lury 1996; Miles 1996; Radner 1995; Urry 2000) and consumption and political economy (Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000; Ehrenreich 2001; Mansvelt 2005; O'Neill 2004). What has only recently come to the fore of scholarly work, however, is the relationship between consumption and the producers of the consumption experience, that is, the employees who sell consumer goods. While a number of researchers have explored and conceptualized the nature of 'service industry' and its impact on employees (Hochschild 1983; Leidner 1993; Tyler and Taylor 1998; Williams 2003; Wolkowitz 2002), few have localized their research in the retail-service industry of the everyday shopping mall and department store.

Paul du Gay is the most prominent among the handful of those who research the interactions between retail employees and their customers, and the impact of these interactions on employee identities (1996). However, du Gay's work (1996), like many of the related ethnographic

studies (Witz et al. 2003), stems from fieldwork conducted in Britain – I have yet to find any studies located in Canada or pertaining to the experiences of North American retail-service industry employees. This represents a significant gap in the literature, given the growing economic significance of the service industry.

The relationship between the identity of the self and our productive lives is complex and multifaceted. Some may construe work as a fact-of-life activity necessary to pay the bills and make a life; essentially, a work to live attitude. However, this thesis aims to explore the flip side of identity in relation to productive activities – is such limited engagement with 'work' possible, when one spends an overwhelming proportion of their most vibrant days immersed in the sphere of work? Is there a significant amount of personal satisfaction and extraneous value created through the intimate engagement of self with the task at hand, even if the task might be considered rudimentary or even mindless?

However, this thesis is not limited to a study of the sociology of work. Rather, I was primarily inspired by the sociology of consumer culture, particularly the realm of women's clothing and accessories. Combining the sociology of work and consumer culture, this thesis examines how the symbolic aspects of consumer culture become dynamic to retail service industry employees' perceptions of self in relation to their external appearances and more internal identities through the relationships created with coworkers and customers. Overarching these

concepts of self and identity in the productive sphere are the concepts of brand, lifestyle, and image. What image of self do employees project, and how does their employment provide them with the assets necessary to put forth the appearance and identity they desire? The three chapters that constitute this thesis aim to begin probing these questions – the first chapter explores research participants' perceptions of their appearances and identities in relation to their work in the retail sphere, while the second chapter examines the work of customer service and interactions in retail space. The second chapter mediates the first and third chapters, in that the third chapter intends to discuss the larger implications of consumer culture in relation to the retail employee as a consuming and desiring social agent. Just as the various chapters mediate the thesis as a whole, the thesis acts to mediate the variety of relationships that make up the complex realms of production and consumption, which are both distinct and interwoven.

An investigation into retail interactions and how they impact retail service industry employees seems imperative, given the economic and social significance of the retail service industry and the lack of North American academic attention it has thus far received. Using a case study method, my research probes the experiences of retail industry employees in order to examine the relationship between work and identity as it is influenced by a drive to consume. This research project aims to gain perspective on how retail service industry employees produce experiences

of lifestyles and their associated fashions not only for customers, but also for themselves[1]. This seems an important question given that consumer culture studies have tended to focus on the impact of consumption on customers rather its impact on employees (see citations above regarding consumption and identity studies), as if employees exist *only* as facilitators of consumption.

I examine the retail service industry employees' 'sale of self', and how this work contributes to the production of consumer subjectivity for both retail employees and, in turn, their customers or clients. That is, I examine the extent to which retail service industry employees sell not only discrete physical products during employee-customer interactions, but also how they create and sell their own selves as products available for purchase. This conception of retail service industry employees appreciates how the employee is a manifestation of both *emotional* and *aesthetic* labour (Hochschild 1983; Witz et al. 2003; see Literature Review below). The primary research question of this Master's thesis, then, is: *How do retail service industry employees conceptualize (learn), generate (live) and manage (love) their identities within consumption sites, where, as Rob Shields describes, media images can be purchased as ready-to-wear masks (1992: 1)? Moreover, what is the impact, if any, of this occupational environment on retail employee identities and styles?*

[1] The movement towards experiential selling reflects the retail industry's recognition of the symbolic economy. Also known as "lifestyle branding" (Klein 2000), experiential selling relies upon the delivery of something more relational and emotive than the simple physical commodity.

I derived this question from my knowledge of the retail industry as a space where consumers can purchase new identities and images with each change of season, and the existing literature, to which I will now turn.

A Brief Review of the Literature

In discussing the civic body politic, John O'Neill explicates how modern society no longer emphasizes the "productive body" or the "active creative worker" whose focus is the "material and social reproduction of life," but the "libidinal body," or individual "desire that fulfills the order of personality insofar as it transcends the goods of family and economy and aspires to […] happiness" (2004: 45-46). O'Neill goes on to state that "modern corporate culture" panders to "the libidinal body, titillating and ravishing its sensibilities, while at the same it standardizes and packages libidinal responses to its products" (2004: 47). What is being sold, then, is not only a product for the body, but also the body itself and its associated sensations.

O'Neill's assertion that society's character has shifted from the productive body to the libidinal body indicates that Canadian postindustrial society is no longer organized by production in the traditional sense of the primary industries of manufacturing, but increasingly by consumer practices. This is a theme Fred Block and Larry Hirschhorn pick up when they posit that "new productive forces" have reorganized capitalism. Block and Hirschhorn explain that these forces include "the capacity of people to learn" (1979: 367) that developed in the 1920s with "the growing

importance of such ‘background’ factors as information, new modes of management, technological advances, and the expansions of services, such as education, welfare and medical care” (1979: 369). The result of these changes has been a shift in the existing patterns of social life and the development of a non-linear life course by way of a simultaneous “decay [or] gradual dissolution of the patterns of organizing work, labour markets, and social life that developed out of accumulationist capitalism” (Block and Hirschhorn 1979: 371). According to this logic, the postindustrial setting and its new productive forces “break down the distinctions between work and learning, *between work and non-work*” (Block and Hirschhorn 1979: 372, emphasis mine).

Recognizing that the distinctions between work and non-work are slipping away seems crucial to understanding the organization of the retail industry in the era of postindustrial capitalism. Mary Godwyn describes how the employees she studied at high-end consumption sites provide “cultural competence through a relational process that increases the symbolic capital of their customers” (2006: 504), thereby providing friend-like advice that goes beyond the simple selling a product. Rather, contemporary retail service industry employees of a certain position must negotiate a level of personal involvement in their customers’ decisions, acting more like friends than paid service labourers.

“Emotional labour” and “aesthetic labour” are two of the relevant concepts from the literature that explain how service industry employees

achieve personal involvement with clients and with the brand and image they are remunerated to represent and sell. Arlie Hochschild derived the pioneering concept of “emotional labour” during her study of airline flight attendants (1983). Using Erving Goffman’s symbolic interaction paradigm (1959; 1967), Hochschild defined “emotional labour” as occurring or being present in situations where employers try or are able to manage employee emotions and prescribe how employees should interact with customers and clients in exchange for a wage (1983: 7). Hochschild asserts that employees act “deeply” when their emotional machinery is in commercial hands, because companies “try as a matter of policy to fuse a sense of [employee] personal satisfaction with a sense company well-being and identity” (1983: 132).

The work of retail service industry employees fits Hochschild’s definition of emotion management and deep acting. Retail employees are continually reminded of the importance of customer service, a concept that lends itself to a form of selling best described by Godwyn as “relationship sales,” where the employee focuses on the needs of the customer (2006: 489). This interest in the customer’s needs and desires serves as a form of “emotional labour,” and retail workers meet the three criteria Hochschild outlines: first, “face to face contact with the public;” second, “the production of an emotional state in the customer;” and third, “the ability for the employer to exercise some control over the emotional activities of the employees” (Hochschild 1983: 147). Hochschild’s work established a

foundation for looking at relational interactions as value-producing labour that affects both the customer and the employee, thereby blurring the distinctions between producer and consumer, and work and leisure. The emotional effects of the service industry on the employee are of particular pertinence to my project, in that these internalized feelings in the worker are crucial to creating the feelings of desire in the customer, which in turn lead to successful selling.

Other researchers, however, assert that emotional labour is an inadequate concept for understanding the multifaceted role of the retail employee because it limits itself to the realm of feelings (Witz et al. 2003). More recently, researchers have posited the concept of "aesthetic labour," which is intended to complement and expand Hochschild's concept. Aesthetic labour is novel in that it adds the aspect of labourer embodiment[2] (Witz et al. 2003: 38). Anne Witz et al. argue that although "the concept of emotional labour foregrounds the worker as a mindful, feeling self" this paradigm "loses a secure conceptual grip of the worker as an embodied self" (2003: 36). By limiting its focus to feelings and employee personality, emotional labour is an insufficient tool for understanding how the work of retail employees goes beyond performance and acting and enters into the realm of physical practice.

[2] Hochschild does point to elements of embodiment in her discussion of emotion work, mentioning the importance of sexual attractiveness, a youthful appearance and the adoption of mandated facial expressions (1983). An extended discussion of worker aesthetics, however, is lacking.

Instead, what is required is an understanding of the impact of "regimes of the body" (such as the requirement to wear make-up or to dress in a certain fashion), and how these are "equally as likely to lead to the development of a different relation to what the aesthetic labourer comes to think of as himself or herself" (Witz et al. 2003: 38). Witz et al. assert that aesthetic labour is an important concept because it accounts for the commodification of retail service industry employees' embodiment, thereby removing aesthetic labour from the "gift exchange," (Mauss 1967), or labourer action outside of contract (Witz et al. 2003: 38). The lack of explicit instructions regarding appropriate gestures and appearances creates a situation wherein regimes of the body are expected but uncompensated and unacknowledged unless one fails to comply with the implied standard. Acknowledging the required physical and mental labour performed outside of occupational space helps rebuild these distinctions between work and non-work that have become blurred, according to Block and Hirschhorn (1979: 372).

The labour required to become physically presentable for work is so invisible that even service industry employees in previous studies failed to seriously recognize it. While Witz et al. note that management is increasingly "intentionally mobilizing and develop[ing] aesthetic labour," it still seems as if this required embodiment is so "valorized" that it remains outside the realm of financial remuneration (2003: 34). Essentially, the labour of embodiment is performed outside scheduled labour time, and

therefore is not seen as time for which employees should be paid a wage. Moreover, the labour involved in producing emotions and aesthetics might not be measurable in terms of paid or unpaid labour time, in that this work concerns itself more with intensity rather than duration – it does not take more time to be happy, for instance, but it is more difficult in that it requires more of an investment of the self.

Research Questions

The sociological field and literature of consumer culture is the basis of this research project. This thesis explores primary research question, each one focusing on a particular sociological theme and theoretical niche.

1. Exploring the employee and industry

How do retail service industry employees conceptualize, generate and manage their identities within consumption sites, where, as Rob Shields describes, media images can be purchased as ready-to-wear masks (1992: 1)?

The first and overarching research question pertains to the retail service industry as a whole, and its impact on retail service industry employees working in high-end consumption sites. The broad scope of such a question reflects the exploratory nature of this project, which I justify based on the lack of research pertaining to the Canadian retail industry. The notion of identity management is a crucial concept underlying the research project as a whole; that is, do employees shape

their appearances to fit with their respective sites of employment, and, if so, how? Phenomenologically-oriented, this research question posits the retail service industry employee as an agent who actively makes decisions related to his or her personal presentation at work that "tend[s] towards social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and variation" (Simmel 1997: 189). Media influences and brand communities (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001: 412) provide indicators and instruction on appropriate appearances and behaviors. Such influences could include, but are not limited to, training manuals and videos, corporate materials, fashion magazines, films and television programs.

2. Work and identity

What impact, if any, do emotional and aesthetic labour have on subjectivity and style?

This question extends the non-committal terms of 'conceptualize' and 'manage' to see if retail service industry employees' actions of physical and mental self-presentation extend beyond the workday and into their everyday lives and conceptions of selfhood. Looking at the impact of emotional and aesthetic labour on subjectivity and style implies that these forms of identity management at work have a more lasting effect than simply being 'masks' that employees wear to perform their jobs. This point goes back to the notion of emotional and aesthetic labour as requiring more of an investment of the self in the task at hand, which in turn may

lead to significant changes in how retail service industry employees carry and conduct themselves outside and beyond the realm of employment.

3. Forms of Capital and Economy

What are the political economic aspects and impacts, if any, of emotional and aesthetic labour?

As mentioned earlier, the labour that retail service industry employees perform in preparing for work is generally unpaid and unrecognized (Witz et al. 2003: 38). Moreover, there is a level of knowledge that retail service employees in middle to high-end consumption sites are expected to possess in order to provide pertinent fashion advice to customers. The accumulation of this knowledge rarely receives formal acknowledgment as an important aspect of the job, and instead tends to be seen as a testament to the employee's passion for fashion. Regardless of its status as the former or the latter, this labour commonly goes unrecognized, and is therefore uncompensated as part of the employee's wage.

The unpaid labour performed by retail service industry employees is a gender issue in that most of these employees are women. Hochschild argues that men and women experience emotional labour unequally, that is, "for each gender a different portion of the managed heart is enlisted for commercial use" (1983: 163-164). Hochschild explains the gender difference by stating, "Women more often react to subordination by making defensive use of sexual beauty, charm and relational skills. For

them, it is these capacities that become most vulnerable to commercial exploitation" (1983: 164). Insightfully unpacking the impact of "the emotion work of enhancing the status and well-being of others" (1983: 167), Hochschild points to women's cultural roles as seducers, mothers and "conversational cheerleaders," and cautions that to redefine these as "a form of shadow labour" is to point at "a hidden cost for which some recompense is due" (1983: 168, 170). This research question underlies the thesis project as a whole, and each chapter weaves together the uncompensated aspects of the retail service industry's employee role, and how the industry capitalizes on the non-traditional aspects of the role as involving appearance (Chapter I), relational sales (Chapter II) and the self as a whole (Chapter III).

However, since employees manifest aspects of themselves that they consider valuable, there is a possibility that work is not always exploitative but may provide the retail service industry employee with a certain amount of power and satisfaction. As such, this research question looks at the reciprocal quality of the employer-employee relationship and how each party both benefits and recoups the costs of employment.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The methodology of this research project draws heavily from a theoretical framework informed by social constructionism. Michael Crotty defines social constructionism as the perspective that "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human

practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (1998: 42). This position therefore asserts that meaning is continually coming into being and dissolving as we proceed through our everyday interactions and reflections stemming from such experiences.

Social constructionism is an appealing theory of knowledge because it posits that "there is *no* true or valid interpretation" (Crotty 1998: 47). Rather, as Norman K. Denzin states, "In social life there is only interpretation. That is, everyday life revolves around persons interpreting and making judgments about their own and others' behaviors and experiences" (1989: 11). In turn, these judgments become both the basis for conceiving of our existing realities, and the platform upon which we make future decisions. Interpretivism, then, is a theoretical position that derives from the framework of social constructionism (Crotty 1998). According to Crotty, the interpretivist approach "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (1998: 67). Thus, interpretivism takes into account the context of interactions, thereby adding a dimension that extends beyond interaction itself.

Interpretivism is not critique-free, however. While interpretivism is often traced back to Max Weber's conception of interpretive sociology (*Verstehen*), I, like many others, dismiss Weber's "passion for empirical verification" and "his concern to explain in causal terms" as a result of my

epistemological standpoint that “claims to certitude and objectivity cannot be sustained” (Crotty 1998: 7). Notions of ‘truth’ and ‘objectivity’ have recently sustained serious scrutiny within the sociological discipline; ethnographers, among others, have begun to employ reflexivity to interrogate their research findings and determine whether these speak to wider social phenomena. This questioning is a sign that, as Denzin states, “Sociology today, even more than before, is divided into the camps of those who hang on to its potential as a science and of those who find this hardly something to fight over” (1992: x). I tend to find myself located within the latter category.

In hopes of avoiding deterministic research findings, I have approached my project with a symbolic interactionist methodology that follows the theoretical tenets of social constructionism and interpretivism. Rooted in the thought of George Herbert Mead, symbolic interactionism has three basic doctrines, which Herbert Blumer (Mead’s student) elucidates:

1) “that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that those things have for them
2) that the meanings of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interactions that one has with one’s fellows
3) that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters” (Blumer 1969: 2).

These three statements indicate that interactionists “assume that human beings create the worlds of experience they live in” (Denzin 1992: 25). Thus, interactionism views the elements of “[p]ower, emotionality and force” as “basic features of everyday life” that can be studied at “the intersections of interaction, biography, and social structure in particular historical moments” (Denzin 1992: 20). By taking into account the personal experiences that one brings to the social contexts of interactions, these moments provide researchers with insight into the production of “intersubjectivity” or “the shared knowledge that exists between two persons regarding one another’s conscious mental states” (Denzin 1992: 20). Interactionism recognizes that intersubjectivity is constantly in flux by virtue of our ongoing interaction with the world and its inhabitants.

Symbolic interactionism is an ideal theory and methodology for a case study project that applies ethnographic principles in order to study the interactions that occur in occupational environments. Goffman devised the *dramaturgical approach* while researching the presentation of self in white-collar work environments (1959). Crotty explains that “research done in this vein [using the dramaturgical approach] draws on the familiar analogy between social life and the theater,” where “[a]ctors on a stage form a cast” (1998: 76).

The research methodologies outlined above have been criticized due to their subjective starting point. That is, the researcher is likely to study a topic in which she or he has a vested interest, or to develop such

an interest through the course of their research (see Clifford 1986). Personal interest, however, is only natural when one considers how arduous research is: it is difficult to imagine how a researcher would motivate her or himself without the element of interest. Michel de Certeau defends the virtue of such studies despite their flaws by describing the purpose of researching the way individuals engage with social phenomena (1984). Thus, while a case study may begin at a subjective starting point, it intends to engage with the everyday experiences of individuals. Such an analysis is precisely my aim: I hope to critically analyze the interactions between retail service industry employees, retail spaces and customers.

Methods: What, Why and How

I began this project with the intention of studying the training, on the floor sales, and experiences of retail service industry employees to examine how retail employees develop subjectivities that respond to the expectations of employers and customers. While the resulting project has been on a smaller scale than I anticipated, it is my hope that the project at hand may open the door to future broader-scope research projects.

The thesis relies on interview data to examines and question the role of retail service industry employees in retail consumption sites. Because this research focuses on interactions between employees and the customers they serve, and how these interactions influence identity, in terms of both employee self-presentation and internal subjectivity, it is important to have some understanding of the employees' position in the

organization before entering the field. The foundation of the interview schedule (see Appendix A) relied on personal observations and textual data collected by British researchers (Du Gay 1992, 1996; Godwyn 2006; Witz et al. 2003).

The information and research interests presented above classify this study as best-suited to a purposeful sampling strategy to gain access to a cultural group (retail service industry employees), which John W. Creswell defines as "select[ing] individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (2007: 125).

Following the theoretical framework and methodology presented above, I sought research ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta (see Appendix B for the Letter of Consent signed by all participants), and interviewed five female retail employees. I supplemented this data with observations gleaned on personal shopping trips and existing sociological literature. I solicited potential participants using a double-blind recruitment strategy through discussions with other sociologists and members of my social network concerning the topic and nature of my Master's project. I asked these colleagues and contacts to provide my contact information to anyone they thought might be interested in participating in the study. From this method, I recruited three participants to the study: Melanie[3], Audrey and Brielle. I also posted a

[3] I have assigned a pseudonym to each of the research participants to assure anonymity. The following section discusses ethical issues within the project.

note on Facebook, the social networking website, explaining the study and asking anyone interested in participating to contact me. While not double-blind in the traditional sense, such postings are a form of pressure-free solicitation, and participants volunteered themselves as interviewees. From this method I recruited two participants: Kelly and Jess.

Ethical Issues

Ethical concerns are always present when the proposed research involves human subjects. The research conducted for this thesis meets the ethical standards set by the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* and the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Subjects. Prior to beginning the interview and obtaining free and informed consent, I discussed the research project, how I intended to use the data, and notified participants that they had the option of leaving the study at any point prior to the submission of my thesis. By guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality through pseudonyms and the protection of raw data, interview participants should not experience any negative repercussions as a result of contributing to this research.

I did not create pseudonyms for the mass-market retailers that employed several of the participants – Gap, Smart Set and American Eagle – in that none of the participants were currently employed in these outlets at the time of the research, and I felt it was fruitful for readers to have this contextualization as they read research participants' interview

excerpts, thereby enabling readers to reflect on them with their own experiences in mind. I did, however, create pseudonyms or avoid naming the small boutiques where Kelly, Brielle and Melanie were employed.

A more ethically suspect aspect of the research is the collection of personal observations of interactions in consumption sites, which constituted a minimal part of the research project. As retail spaces, consumption sites are an interesting combination of public and private space (Shields 1992). These areas are public in the sense that business depends on customers entering and exiting the premises, but private in the sense that commercial interests monitor and patrol just who enters these spaces. As private spaces, the researcher's act of observing suggests the need to seek voluntary informed consent from those observed. Such a procedure, however, is not practically possible given the brevity of these interactions and the randomness at which they occur. Yet, despite the hit and miss nature of 'observing,' the situatedness of consumption led me to believe that I could not reconstruct or contrive the richness of this observational data in an interview or any other situation removed from the context of the interaction (Mason 2002: 85).

I feel that I can adequately justify my use of observation to assist in developing the interview schedule on two premises. First, my observational research did not "involve the development of close relationships in the field" (Mason 2002: 100). Furthermore, I was not exposed to any intimate encounters, in that data arose from brief

interactions between the retail worker and the customer, and sometimes not even interactions between two social agents at all, such as those between the retail worker and the space or commodity-objects. Thus, the data from the observational stage was largely interpretive, and its analysis relied on reading the data in conjunction with textual materials "for what [I] think they mean, or possibly for what [I] think I can infer about something outside of the [observational] interaction itself" (Mason 2002: 78).

Second, the data collected in the observational setting did not inform the majority of my research; rather, that was the purpose of the interviews. The observational setting is meant to provide an understanding of what generally occurs in the field of consumption, and to get a sense of the atmosphere, in order to facilitate productive interviews.

How the Research Unfolded

I completed the thesis proposal defense in September 2007. I spent the remainder of Fall 2007 and Winter 2008 conducting a literature review and familiarizing myself with the procedures involved in collected research data. I recruited research participants to the study in Spring 2008, and conducted the interviews during Summer 2008. I began transcribing the interviews during the summer, and completed transcriptions by Fall 2008. I conducted the data analysis during Fall and Winter 2009, and began writing the thesis in Spring 2009.

All five of the research participants were from different walks of life, but were generally privileged young women, in that they each had

opportunities to pursue higher education, lived comfortably and were able to work at relatively low-paying jobs while they accumulated experience and made plans for future career directions. I will provide a brief description of each below:

Brielle

Brielle is the sister of a friend who I spoke with about my project. The only non-Caucasian of my research participants, Brielle is of South Asian descent, and has a strong interest in the fashion industry. Brielle received a post-secondary certificate in fashion merchandising, and at the time of the interview was employed at a high-end women's retailer. Brielle was very conscious of what does and does not make a retailer successful, as she plans on opening her own boutique and intends on using her experience in her current position to inform how she will operate and manage her store. At 22, Brielle seemed wise beyond her years and provided excellent insights into the world of high-end retail. Brielle is a firm believer in the products and lifestyle she sells at the high-end women's boutique and is grateful for the employment opportunity. Brielle is fortunate, in that her family financially and socially supports her dreams of opening a boutique in Spring 2010.

Kelly

A tiny 4'11" ball of energy with blonde-bobbed hair, Kelly was an enthusiastic research participant. Recruited from my social network via Facebook, Kelly was about to enter her final year of her Bachelor of

Business Administration degree, and had been working at a local skate and surf shop for several years, and Gap during the previous winter. While she was still employed at the skate and surf shop at the time of our interview, the comparison between her experiences working in mass retail and in a niche boutique made her contributions to the project invaluable. She claimed to be employed at both retailers to gain experience in the world of fashion, the industry where she hoped to take her career path. Kelly lived in the familial residence during her employment in retail, and thereby received financial support for her endeavors from her family and kinship relations. Kelly specifically stated that her retail employment was more for the experience and discount on merchandise than for the money (personal communication).

Audrey

Audrey is Kelly's friend, who is also a research participant. At the time of our interview, Audrey was 23 and she spoke of her employment experience at American Eagle during her university years. Unsurprisingly, American Eagle is a retailer whose target demographic is university students. Audrey studied Child and Youth Care at university, and sought a part-time job so that she could afford to buy Christmas presents (personal communication), thereby indicating that she was paying for basic necessities otherwise. Audrey had been employed in the retail industry at a larger, more department store-style retailer prior to working at American

Eagle, and she brought those experiences to our interview as a point of comparison.

Jess

Jess was 25 at the time of our interview and employed as a server at a restaurant notorious for hiring based on appearances. Jess had completed her undergraduate degree in English Literature at a well-respected Canadian university, and during our interview she discussed her previous employment experiences at Smart Set, a Canadian chain retailer. Jess had been employed at Smart Set the year prior to our interview, while she was completing a post-graduate certificate in publishing and working at an internship. Her desire for a hefty discount, and a fitting of her perceived taste and identity with the products offered at Smart Set are what led Jess to seek employment at the retailer, where she worked for approximately ten months. Jess described the target demographic of the Smart Set brand as a university-educated career girl who enjoyed socializing on weekends – a description she identified with (personal communication). Jess lived in the familial residence during her period of employment at Smart Set, and seemed to receive financial and social support from her kinship relations.

Melanie

Melanie is the partner of a colleague who I spoke with about my research project. After completing her undergraduate degree in sociology at a well-respected Canadian university, Melanie moved to Vancouver to

live with her partner and sought employment close to their home at a high-end children's retailer, where she sold $300 sweaters designed for 4 year-olds. This form of employment did not sit well with Melanie's interest in social justice; however, the proximity to home and need to earn an income led her to retain employment there for more than four months (personal communication). Melanie's retelling of her experiences negotiating her position within high-end retail with her personal politics made for interesting research data. Her admiration for designer jeans and nice clothing also demonstrate how she was enticed, or at least encouraged, by her retail position to develop an appreciation for high-end garments. Melanie was 23 at the time of our interview, and has since gone on to work with street youth and teach internationally at underprivileged elementary schools.

How the Research Contributes to Existing Knowledge

As previously mentioned, there has been little, if any, research performed on the topic of the Canadian retail service industry despite its relative importance to the nation's economy as it becomes increasingly service-based. Rather, current research on the retail service industry focuses largely on the retail sector of the United Kingdom.

Moreover, a great deal of the existing research on the retail service industry focuses on the exploitation that emotional labour and aesthetic labour inflict upon retail service industry employees (c.f. Marx 1906). Following Pettinger, I would like to explore how workers may enjoy the

performance they put on and how they might find these interactions a source of satisfaction and power (2005: 475). Because the work performed by retail service industry employees involves human interactions with customers and material interactions with products, these workers have the power to exert agency within the system, either to work against mandates to undermine the structure, or to work in line with the goals of the company through strategies other than those demanded by the retailer's head office.

As outlined at the beginning of the introduction, the thesis follows a three-part structure, with the first chapter examining research participants' perceived appearance and identities in relation to the employment opportunities that they seek, and how these factors play a large role in their employment situation. The second chapter examines the actual work performed by retail employees, and what it demands of them in terms of emotional energy. This chapter mediates the thesis, connecting the first and third chapter, which examines how employees come to be a part of the aesthetics and emotions of the brand and image they represent, and how their belief in what they are selling in turn adds value to it. The third and final chapter looks at the forms of capital that are bestowed and transferred through retail employment, and how these serve the larger mandates of consumer culture.

I. Learn It: Retail Employees, Appearance and Identity

"Aesthetics shows rather than tells, delights rather than instructs. The effects are immediate, perceptual, and emotional" (Postrel 2003: 6).

It's Friday night at 8:30 pm, and the mall closes in a half-hour. You dodge through its doors, rushing to pick up a few things for the weekend. You swivel your head, and see a fiery-red curly head of hair counting the cash at Lush, to your other side is a Sport Chek, with two twenty-something men standing at the entrance in their striped shirts, khaki pants and cropped hair. Finally you reach the tea store and are greeted by a kind South Asian woman offering you a sample of today's blend. You quickly grab 100 grams of the Q10 Motivation tea, before rushing to the Bay to check out the sales your friend told you about. Snapping up a pair of dress pants, and without trying them on, you head over to the sales desk hemming in the two teenage employees pacing about waiting to announce closing time.

It is likely that the reader's imagination did not require a gender specific identity of the Bay employees by the end of the previous paragraph. Reflecting on the image created the previous description, it is probable that most readers had in mind two *female* teenage Bay employees, even though the description did not make this explicit. Western experience with the shopping mall, and retail outlets in general, has created an expectation of how employees of a certain outlet or genre should appear and behave. How then, does appearance and identity

influence the decision-making and opportunities available to those individuals seeking employment in the retail industry?

Among the five retail industry employees who participated in this project, one commented that she was hired because management at both her jobs noted that, “she has really good style” (Kelly, personal communication), another stated that she thought she “just looked the part” (Audrey, personal communication), and a third stated that she “felt like the people who worked there and the clothes and stuff like that were a little bit more my style” (Jess, personal communication). Melanie noted that her employer explicitly stated that “she hired me because of what I was wearing, what I looked like, and that I would fit the image of what the store was” and that she was aware of this need to fit in, so she “went to fit a certain kind of role” when dropping off her resume (personal communication). What then, links these women as individuals with their own senses of self to big and small retail outlets? How does a retail outlet with the ultimate aim of generating capital for its owners or shareholders appeal to the innermost being of individual employees, and what purposes does this emphasis on appearance and identity serve?

In this chapter, I aim to examine how the superficial and generic nature of appearance works in conjunction with the intimacy of identity to produce a retail experience that satisfies the needs of employees, management and customers, and perpetuates the consumer culture of the West. To begin, I will investigate the linguistic histories of the words

‘appearance’ and ‘identity’, in order to mobilize these meanings in the discussion at-hand. Second, I will reflect on what my research participants are identifying with in their places of employment, and how they are being identified (Althusser 1970), sharing how and why identity and appearance matter. Third, I will look at research participants’ experiences of appearance and identity, and the symbiotic relationship between these concepts.

Appearance, the more nonspecific concept, was used as early as 1384 in the English language. The Oxford English Dictionary quotes the earliest recorded usage of the word as occurring in Chaucer’s *House of Fame* poem: “Allis what harme doth Apparence Whan hit is fals in existence” (“appearance, *n.*”). The first recorded usage of appearance as to mean “The state or form in which a person or things appears; apparent form, look, aspect” is in 1385, again by Chaucer (“appearance, *n.*” 1989). In 1400, appearance as subjective in meaning, that is, “Perception, idea, notion of what a thing appears to be,” comes into usage (“appearance, *n.*” 1989). A common thread between these definitions and usages is the way in which appearance is used a concept to denote how something *seems*, rather than what it *is.* In the first quote, Chaucer seems to indicate that the only harm from appearance occurs when it fails in existence. Appearance is used as a concept for evaluation or comparison – something resembles, seems, or has a “look” (“appearance, *n.*” 1989). The verb ‘to appear’ stems from the Latin word *apparere*, which in addition to the definitions of

'visible' and 'evident', also means 'to acquire' or 'gain in addition' ("appearance, *n*." 1989). Going further into the etymology, the Latin word *parer* means 'obey,' 'be subject' and 'obedient to,' in addition to its meanings regarding visibility ("appearance, *n.*" 1989).

The Latin and English definitions of the word 'appearance' indicate that the term concerns phenomena who are obedient subjects who gain or acquire something, and resemble some form, look or aspect. In other words, appearance concerns the external, either in its derivation or display. Among other things, the retail industry of children and women's clothing sells appearance as something to be obeyed, acquired and perceived; thus, it is unsurprising that certain appearances are required of retail employees.

Identity, however, is a term with a much more nuanced history and definition. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, various suggestions have been offered about the origins of the word ("identity, *n*." 1989). From the Latin *idem*, "need was evidently felt of a noun of condition or quality […] to express the notion of 'sameness', side by side those of 'likeness' and 'oneness'" ("identity, *n.*" 1989). Following this movement, identity is defined as "The quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness" ("identity, *n*." 1989). Personal identity, as it relates to an individual's psychological constitution is defined as "The sameness of a person or thing at all times

or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality" ("identity, *n*." 1989). In both definitions, identity points to something intrinsic to a thing or person. Identity relates to substance rather than semblance, to properties rather than perceptions. In the *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, Gordon Marshall states that sociologists sometimes assume that "identity comes from the expectations attached to the social roles that we occupy, and which we then internalize, so [identity forms] through the process of socialization" (1998: 296). "Alternatively," Marshall summarizes, "it is elsewhere assumed that we construct our identities more actively out of the materials presented to us during socialization, or in our various roles" (1998: 296). Identity thus signifies something internal that can be expressed externally.

However, a distinction between the external nature of appearance versus the internal existence of identity is arguable: rather than being mutually exclusive categories, each relies on the other for its composition. Following Karl Marx's base and superstructure representation of society (1904), wherein the base is constituted by the "'unity' of the productive forces and the relations of production," and the superstructure of the "politico-legal (law and the State) and ideology (the different ideologies, religious, ethical, legal, political, etc.)," Louis Althusser points out that "the upper floors [of the superstructure] could not 'stay up' (in the air) alone, if they did not rest precisely on their base" (1971: 134-135). Plainly speaking, the existence of individuals with internal identities and external

appearances relies on a relationship between the self and society. Individuals internalize their social roles or construct identity out of the materials presented to them, and a sum of individual identities comes to construct the social structure of society. The implication for employment in the retail sphere and, more broadly, consumer culture, is that individuals internalize ideas and expand their identities through their exposure to the superstructure, and the superstructure processes and integrates aspects of individuals in order to produce trends that come to dominate external appearances.

Research participants demonstrated an awareness of the relationship between the self, the conditions of production and the ideologies that dominate Western consumer culture. With regards to the job application process, Audrey stated that she was hired on the spot when she dropped off her resume because “at the time I was wearing a lot of American Eagle so I think I just looked the part, and so yeah, I got the job that way” (personal communication, 2008). As noted in the introduction to the chapter, this alignment is a common theme that ran through the interviews; participants sought employment in retail outlets that they identified with, whose conditions of production they could accept and support, all in keeping with the overarching laws of the state and society’s ruling order, or ideologies.

Virginia Postrel offers one explanation for this alignment, stating that aesthetic personalities such as those found in lifestyle-branded retail

outlets, “give individuals the ingredients with which to create or affirm our own aesthetic personas, to experience or express something about who we are” (2003: 106). Postrel commonly uses the expression “I like that. I’m like that” to describe the relationship between aesthetics, both with regards to appearance and belongings, and identity (2003: 107). Finding a relationship between the store, the employees and the customers is beneficial for all involved parties; for the employee, work becomes a pleasurable expression of self, and customers are comfortable interacting with employees who look the way they feel, or wish to feel. The store benefits from increased sales as a result of this relational connection. As Brielle stated, “when you’re hiring somebody, hire them according to the clothing. Like you wouldn’t put a 50 year-old lady at [the women’s boutique]. Just cause, you know, she can’t relate to the clothing, she’s not that size, she can’t wear any of it” (personal communication). Kelly was frustrated by her job at the Gap because she couldn’t wear the pants, and noted how important it is to experience wearing the merchandise,

> because you can relate and be like, oh yeah, I know this fits, you have to try this on with this because this fits really nice and looks really good with this, you know. If you can’t wear the clothes, you have no idea how it fits […] like, o-k” (personal communication).

How though, did the research participants come to identify with “a certain look” (Melanie), and how do they “become the store, pretty much” (Brielle)? According to Virginia Postrel, the “importance of ‘aesthetic skills’

has grown along with lifestyle-oriented service businesses, in which aesthetic environments attract customers and good-looking employees function as 'human hardware,' enhancing the company image" (2003: 24). Evidence of the existence of aesthetic skills among employees and aesthetic discrimination among employers can be found in the 2003 case against Abercrombie & Fitch. According to the court-approved Consent Decree, the complaint against Abercrombie & Fitch

> was brought on behalf of a putative class of minority individuals who alleged that Defendants discriminate against minorities on the basis of race, color, and/or national origin, with respect to hiring, firing, job assignment, compensation and other terms and conditions of employment, by enforcing a nationwide corporate policy of preferring white employees for sales positions, desirable job assignments, and favorable work schedules in its stores throughout the United States (Gonzalez vs. Abercrombie & Fitch Stores, Inc. 2005: 4).

While pleading not guilty to the charges, Abercrombie & Fitch signed the Decree and agreed to set benchmarks[4] for hiring and promoting women and racial minorities, a prohibition on targeting fraternities and sororities for recruitment parties, and other initiatives promoting diversity among its employees ("Abercrombie & Fitch Discrimination Racism Lawsuit" 2007).

The Abercrombie & Fitch lawsuit is notable in that it deals specifically with inequity based on appearance. However, the lawsuit only became a

[4] The Decree explicitly states that benchmarks are different than goals.

legal situation because it involved race and ethnicity; legally, employers are permitted to discriminate based on appearance (as the restaurant Hooters exemplifies). However, the Abercrombie case is interesting because it challenges the conception of all-American as all-white: according to one plaintiff, Jennifer Lu, the Abercrombie look is dominated by “Caucasian, football-looking, blonde-hair, blue-eyed males; skinny, tall […] You don't see any African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and that's the image that they're portraying and that they're looking for [in their staff]" (qtd. in Leung 2004: n.p.). This brand’s racial preference is what the plaintiffs are contesting.

Lu, however, is not arguing that Abercrombie & Fitch should be legally bound to hire unattractive people, but that the “All-American, their all-American image, does not mean all-white. That's not right. That's not legal” (qtd. in Leung 2004: n.p.). Instead, Lu and the other plaintiffs are fighting for continuity between the appearance and identities of Abercrombie & Fitch staff, and the brand’s customers. It is notable that the staff made the effort of contesting Abercrombie & Fitch’s hiring and promoting policies, rather than simply abandoning the brand in favor of one that offers a more diverse and inclusive image. The decision to pursue the matter legally indicates that the plaintiffs are essentially saying ‘we want to be part of your image, so give us the jobs you discourage us from applying for, in order to demonstrate that you consider us to be as important to you as you are to us’. Under what circumstances does such

acceptance become commonplace? How do individuals accumulate the skills to negotiate the employment situation in such a manner?

Althusser states that Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), such as churches, schools, the familial structure, the legal system and mass communications (1971: 143), squeeze children "between the family State apparatus and the educational State apparatus [and] drums into them, whether it uses new or old methods, a certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology" (1971: 155). Depending on perceived ability, some youth are ejected at sixteen to join the productive forces, while others continue on academically before taking mid-level posts as "white-collar workers, small and middle executives, pretty bourgeoisie of all kinds" (Althusser 1971: 155). The last portion of the group "reaches the summit, either to fall into intellectual semi-employment," or a variety of other socially commanding roles (Althusser 1971: 155).

All research participants stated that they were either in the process of obtaining bachelor's degrees (Kelly and Audrey), had obtained bachelor's degrees shortly prior to employment (Jess and Melanie), or had some level of post-secondary education (Brielle). All participants viewed their time in retail employment as a bridge to more satisfying employment, be it in the retail industry (Kelly and Brielle), or in an entirely unrelated field (Audrey, Jess and Melanie). As a result of their exposure to various ISAs, all research participants had accumulated the know-how to act as productive forces, and had the potential to hold socially commanding

roles. Participants were well versed in how to obtain employment through the negotiation of their appearance and identity, and in turn were able to make choices that suited their needs and desires within the social spheres of their existence. According to Althusser, "[e]ach mass" of these three basic levels of education and training "is practically provided with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfill in class society" (1971: 155). Thus, these women were provided with the ideology necessary to negotiate work in the retail and customer service industry, and became capable of balancing its costs and benefits to their senses of self.

Althusser's theory of socialization through ISAs (1971) is complemented by Witz et al.'s theory of service sector employees as "software" that complements organizational "hardware" (2003: 41). Describing the "aesthetics *of* organization" as the "hardware of organization" that includes the product design and the physical environment, Witz et al. conceptualize employees as "aesthetics *in* organization," the "software" that can be moulded and marketed for both "getting in" and gaining employment, and for "getting on," meaning promoted (2003: 42, emphasis in original).

Witz et al. state that the emphasis on the "physicality" of employees and their self-presentation through their mannerisms and use of bodily space as capital-generating has been common in popular business literature and self-help material perused by the employees themselves (2003: 42). Some service-sector organizations, however, have begun

recognizing the “corporate potential of aesthetics *in* organization” and are attempting to “commodify individual employees as physical capital, converting them to hardware […] with these employees now functioning as an embodiment of the style of the organization” (Witz et al. 2003: 43). The expenditure required to convert employees from software to organizational hardware is well-worth the effort, in that they become “part of the surplus-producing process of the organization” as an “embodiment of the organization’s identity” (Witz et al. 2003: 43).

In describing their decision-making to seek and accept employment in various retail locations, each participant related her decision to her own being and the employment environment. All decision-making involved a process of interaction between self and other, and recognition – participants saw themselves as fitting within the frame of what was being sold to customers, and saw themselves being accepted by the management responsible for hiring decisions. To varying degrees, all research participants perceived themselves as embodying the organizational identity of their employer prior to hiring.

For instance, I asked Audrey how she saw the clothes at American Eagle fitting in with her lifestyle at the time, being that she was a student and she responded: “Yeah, I was a student, definitely. Oh yeah, I was American Eagle 101, for sure” (personal communication). Moments earlier in our interview, Audrey had listed the steep discount as the primary motivating factor in her job seeking effort – which was limited to dropping

a resume off at American Eagle and getting the job on the spot. Many participants listed the discount as the primary reason for seeking employment at specific retail locations, in that the discount allowed them to wear a certain style and project a particular image that would otherwise be outside their affordability.

The discount allows employees to access the image they visualize themselves embodying. Most participants saw the merchandise as reflecting their style prior to their employment; however, the 50% average off the retail price allowed them to integrate the brand more fully into the wardrobe and self-presentation. For Audrey, the “work uniform is just American Eagle from head to toe, you’re not allowed to wear any other brands, or have it show anywhere, like logos or anything” (personal communication). Kelly reported a similar discount, in conjunction with seasonal promotions that offered steep discounts on featured items. Sweaters would be reduced from sixty-eight to twelve dollars so that all staff members would be enticed purchase and wear them to work as a method of piquing customer’s attention towards the particular item. Pettinger’s study of retail workers confirms that wearing current stock is a common standard, stating “all workers in stores I studied wore at least some garments from current stock as part of their uniform and many had to wear only current stock” (2005: 469).

Discounts are required to maintain minimum wage employees’ image of fitting a niche lifestyle image founded on the embodiment of the

brand to which they report. Surviving on a close to minimum wage job is nearly impossible, never mind affording what could be considered 'luxury items', such as seasonal clothing. Regardless, these participants were expected to maintain an appearance that reflected the newest merchandise available to customers, and Kelly's manager even called a staff meeting and sternly told employees that they had to start wearing the Spring 2008 collection despite their distaste for the style – according to Kelly, it did not fit well and the staff did not like how floral it was (personal communication). Kelly stated "like, she can't fire us over it. But she gave us a couple of warnings" (personal communication).

Employers entice retail employees to purchase the store's merchandise by offering steep discounts – from Kelly's account of the Gap discounts ranging between severely reduced prices on select items of clothing to Brielle's account of 30% off high-end brands and merchandise, reduced prices are a common perk. However, the incentive of offering discounts extends beyond employer goodwill; speaking of her job at the skateboarding and surf shop, Kelly states, "So say, if you saw someone wearing a Volcom t-shirt – you know they snowboard or surf or skateboard because only people in those industries wear that brand, so it's associated with it" (personal communication). The skate and surf culture that Kelly describes makes explicit the link between employee identity and the product, in order to mirror or attract mirroring on the part of the consumer and their identity.

Particularly at the more specialized stores, including Brielle's high-end women's wear, Melanie's high-end children's wear and Kelly's skate and surf shop, the image and identity of the employees is meant to reflect the desires of the demographic that management is trying to target. Being that these are niche markets offering expensive products, the imperative exists to close the gap between the consumer and employee. Yet, there is a considerable socio-economic divide between the mother who can afford to purchase $300 sweaters for their 4 year old child in a store that is open limited hours, and the sales employee in the store working for $13 an hour in an expensive Vancouver neighborhood (personal communication). Melanie's $12.50/hour income at a full-time workweek provides a pre-tax income of $500, which is only $200 dollars more than the child's sweater cost pre-tax. Melanie stated that $10,000 dollar shopping sprees at the beginning of the spring and fall season are common, since "let's say you have someone come in who has two kids. They buy everything in, like every piece they have, in each one of their child's sizes. And it's all at full price, and it's extremely expensive stuff." (personal communication).

Melanie's interactions with shoppers spending incredible amounts of money on children's clothing made her "hyperaware" of her own appearance (personal communication). Melanie states,

> I did learn a lot about certain lines and certain labels, and like, what was really nice and what was whatever, and just by looking at our customers and seeing how the other half lives, basically, I would, if

> something was on sale in a certain store like Hill's, the grown up version of our kid's store, I um, I would buy it, having in mind that I can wear this to work (personal communication).

Being that Melanie's boss explicitly told her she fit the store's image and that this was one of the key reasons why she was hired, Melanie was not interested in buying "high end" or "higher quality" clothing because she liked it, but because she felt as though she would be treated better if she appeared more like the customers than not, stating "I probably [wore $300 dollar jeans] so I would have more of those days where someone was identifying you with you rather than treating you like crap, you know?" (personal communication). Describing the lifestyles and experiences of the children's store customers as a "subculture," Melanie realized that the "[s]uper wealthy [have] completely different experiences than I would have in real life. And, that was, that was not just even me, that was like the people that I worked with too" (personal communication).

Melanie sought recognition from her customers, realizing that her experiences interacting with them would be more bearable if she were able to align herself with their values and experiences. Drawing on an example of the new Vancouver Holt Renfrew, Melanie recalled a situation where a female customer asked if she had been to check out the new store. Melanie responded, "'No, I haven't been yet,' almost just like trying to play the part, like 'oh not yet, but I will be going,' as if I can afford to buy anything from Holt Renfrew, like come on, I make $12.50 an hour here"

(personal communication). Rather than blurting the statement about lack of affordability to the customer, however, Melanie quietly shoved her sociological education in the back pocket of her True Religion jeans, smiled and braved the situation as if she could relate to the customer's perspective.

Looking at Melanie's situation from the Hegelian perspective of the master-slave dialectic (Hegel 1967), the relationship between the members of the lavish lifestyle demographic and Melanie's demographic are played out. As a student, Melanie protested the subculture's general lifestyle, in that her

> whole degree was based on critical thought and like whatever, being like […] Like being hyper critical of everything, and then going into this environment where my critical sensors were completely overwhelmed because you can critique everything in that environment, like sociologically (personal communication).

Melanie felt that she "was kind of asked, not asked, but being in that environment you are inherently asked to turn your critical thinking off for a bit" (personal communication). Being in this situation was difficult for Melanie, and she describes it as "a moral and critical crisis dilemma" that left her feeling "choked at the end of the day, I would get home and be pissed off for like an hour, because I didn't know how to channel what I was feeling" (personal communication). However, once Melanie accepted that she would not be able to eradicate the Other that existed in the form

of the customers she dealt with everyday, who had never “been hurting” because they “come from money” (personal communication), she was better able to accept the part of herself that appreciated fashion, Citizen Jeans and other high-end brands. Moreover, she took her knowledge and final paycheque and moved into a field that was more suited to her academic knowledge and personal values.

While other participants discussed the merits of mirroring customers’ appearances or desired images through the embodiment of the fashion and ambiance of the retail environment, Melanie took this analysis further and commented that appearing more in sync with her customers led not only to better rapport, but also to more humane treatment on their behalf (personal communication). Melanie commented that buying and wearing three-hundred dollar jeans gave customers the impression that she was more like them than unlike them, and that she probably made these purchases “so that [she] would have more of those days where someone was identifying with [her] rather than treating [her] like crap” (personal communication). For Melanie, the reasoning is simple: “what’s the lesser of these two situations that can happen, what’s more pleasant is this one, so I am going to go and do everything I can to make it happen” (personal communication).

How can retail workers afford to pursue this appearance-based recognition by the master who is present in the form of the customer and management? Spending large portions of their already meager

paycheques on clothing diminishes the amount they have for life necessities, thereby indicating that someone else must be responsible for purchasing and maintaining the quality of life that these participants enjoy (see Chapter 3). The conditions of production for the employees, and conditions of consumption for the management and customers of the participants' retail locations, are subsidized through familial and close social relations that allow participants to pursue these forms of employment and image. The pursuit of employment in these locations is thus removed from necessity, living up to the idea that employees work for fun, rather than money.

This argument diminishes the traditional Marxian theory concerning the struggles of wage-labourers and instead transforms work into something sought for pleasure, because employees enjoy the milieu of the retail environment. While this passage underscores social relations, customer relations and the symbolic production that are all taking place in the retail environment, the primary motivation to engage in such employment stems from the employee's desire to pursue employment in a milieu that suits their preconceived images of what they consider to be their 'self,' or what they desire their 'self' to be.

II. Live It: The Sale of the Self to Negotiate Multiple Relationships in Customer Service

"The child plays with his body in order to explore it, to take inventory of it; the waiter in the café plays with his condition in order to *realize* it. This obligation is not different from that which is imposed on all tradesmen. The public demands of them that they realize it as a ceremony; there is the dance of the grocer, of the tailor, of the auctioneer, by which they endeavor to persuade their clientele that they are nothing but a grocer, an auctioneer, a tailor. A grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer, because such a grocer is not wholly a grocer" (Sartre 1943: 59).

As the opening remarks of the previous chapter demonstrated, walking through a mall or a group of retail stores and observing the employees offers insight into the types of items being offered in each: Gap employees are youthful, scrubbed clean and beaming, while the Bay hires kind-looking middle-aged women and a smattering of teenagers, in addition to the bronzed and hair-sprayed cosmetics ladies. A quick peak inside Aldo reveals twenty-somethings decked out for nightclubs, while West 49 reeks of pubescent hormones and 16-year old boys with long hair selling skateboards. Buying khakis from the Gap or the Bay offers two distinct experiences, as does buying shoes from Aldo or West 49. The distinctions between these four outlets are the result of demographic targeting, marketing strategies and purposeful hiring decisions regarding the kind of employee that constitutes an ambassador of the brand or

lifestyle image. These careful selections of brand representatives ultimately influence employee-customer interactions.

In the preceding chapter, I explored the data to see if and how participants' perception of their appearances and identities led them to seek employment opportunities at retail outlets of specific genres. As Goffman notes, observers "can […] assume from past experience that only individuals of a particular kind are likely to be found in a given social setting" (1959: 1). Thus, it is not surprising to observe certain genres of employees in specific settings. This chapter seeks to extend the concept of embodied alignment between self and organization to examine how retail employees manage interactions and relationships with managers, co-workers and customers, and the outcomes of these negotiations. Relationship building begins the moment a potential employee hands in a resume, and continues as the employee takes to the retail floor and begins acting as a face of the company and product (Goffman 1959). Successful relationship building relies on a conscious negotiation of the situation, as Brielle states: "[customers] look at you and they want feedback. They want somebody in there knowing their stuff, knowing they [the sales associate] can put together an outfit and help them out and tell them the truth" (personal communication). This chapter aims to examine how this sales associate comes to be through internal and external training, the importance of this training in the formation of the employee's

self as an individual, and the relation of this fusion to the larger organizational identity to which they belong.

Being an exceptional retail service industry employee requires more than a routinized attitude towards work. The research participants of this study fall under Cameron Lynne Macdonald and Carmen Sirianni's definition of "the emotional proletariat" (1996: 3) as non-professional frontline service workers who "often must cope with their own emotions' being managed while they try to manage the emotional responses of others" (Leidner 1999: 83). The numerous interactions and tasks that employees must negotiate and accomplish during the course of a workday or even in a single interaction point to the inherent complexity of the retail service industry employee's position: they must present an attitude that matches the ambiance of the retail location; act in the interests of their employer by behaving in a manner that represents the organizational culture; forge a relationship with the customer that seems in the customer's best interest; and, simultaneously, convince them to buy. The lack of academic attention to the emotional and aesthetic labour required of retail workers is being increasingly challenged. As Pettinger states, "Examinations of […] retailing and consumption have neglected the changing nature of work for those responsible for selling and serving, and the consumption spaces they describe appear curiously empty of workers" (2004: 166).

The relationship between the self of the employee and the space of consumption offers insight into the concepts of work, consumption and consumer culture as a whole (Pettinger 2004: 166). The data I gathered indicates that participants internalized a great deal of their work life into their personal lives and understandings of self, even if they did not readily admit it. Although Audrey described her decision-making process of applying at American Eagle as reflecting her desire for a discount, her comfort in the environment, her enjoyment of the store, and the alignment of her attitude towards life with the laid-back attitude of the brand, she did not believe that it had any impact on her psyche or self (personal communication). Kelly was the most forthright about the impact of Alternative Groove on her personal life, declaring that the staff felt like "family" because they were so close, and that she very much enjoyed her job because "it is way easier to sell something that you love and, if you love it, then it is really easy to sell" (personal communication). Jess stated that she choose the job at Smart Set over another retail job because she enjoyed the Smart Set brand image more, and saw herself as more representative of that brand versus the other. Regardless of whether or not they explicitly declared an alignment between themselves and their employment, all participants stated that their jobs required them to physically and mentally present themselves in manner that reflected the ideals and values of their employers (personal communication) – a feat

that extends beyond simply folding clothes, placing them in a bag, and operating a till.

Melanie, who sold high-end children's clothing after graduating from a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, felt the most conflicted about her employment, calling it a "moral and critical crisis dilemma" (personal communication). However, she managed to spend more than three months successfully embodying the role of a high-end sales associate, stating she "was easily able to negotiate almost a fake persona in that environment," acknowledging that there were some customers she not only enjoyed but looked forward to assisting, and that she now has "some knowledge about why certain things are as expensive as they are, and if you are going to spend money on jeans, for example, [she] now [does] buy, like, better jeans" (personal communication).

Thus, all research participants did take something away from their employment and experiences in the retail industry. The development of experience relies on interaction: with other agents, with social and physical environments and with the self. This chapter will examine research participants' interactions in the context of three theorists, with each extending and building on the work of the previous: Goffman's "dramaturgical approach" of impression management through surface acting (1959); Hochschild's concept of "emotional labour," or the "commercialization of human feeling" (1983); and a brief discussion of

Robin Leidner's theory of the implications of organizational efforts on service workers (1993).

Goffman's pioneering study of human behavior in everyday situations introduced sociology to the notion that interactions involve impression management through interpretation and action (1959). Inspired by symbolic interactionism, Goffman asserted that each individual in an interaction aims to gather information about the other individual, generally for practical purposes, and in turn interprets this information to formulate an appropriate response (1959: 1).

Goffman utilizes theatrical performances as a framework for conceptualizing the "dramaturgical perspective" of interactions, defined as "the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's actions when in one another's immediate physical presence" (1959: 15). Interactions consist of individual performances, or "the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (1959: 15). Thus, Goffman's definition of an "interaction" has a defined scope, termed an "interaction order" – interactions must be face-to-face encounters between two or more participants; participants present a "line," or desired image of self; counterparts to the interaction perceive a "face" based on their interpretation and definition of the participant's "line;" and reactions are negotiated according to the "face" (Goffman 1967).

According to Goffman, "once the person initially presents a line, he [sic] and the others tend to build their later responses upon it, and in a

sense become stuck with it" (1967: 12). Several research participants reported significant amounts of training that would indicate a development of this line and face – Brielle stated that she underwent two weeks of intensive training, where

> she [the manager] watched how we would interact with the customers, and then she would make us pretend that she was a customer, and then we would ring in the purchase, like how to do it, how to make conversation, you know, so when you're standing there wrapping up the papers and there is no silence, so the customer doesn't feel like 'what do I do,' right. So yeah, she trained us on that (personal communication).

Acting-out potential customer interactions from the initial greeting to wrapping up the purchases prepares retail workers for the real-life "line" and "face" (Goffman 1967) that they will be expected to present on behalf of the employer and the brand they represent.

Instruction regarding the retailer's values and brand is commonplace, as it is necessary component of understanding how the sales staff should present the retailer's image on the sales floor. Furthermore, role-playing provides sales staff with practical experience delivering the line and face that will be required of them. All research participants described some level of brand training. For Jess, the training involved a daylong seminar in another town where attendees watched videos and participated in group activities that involved examining

magazines and making collages (personal communication). As Jess recalls:

> We had to watch this video that was like, cause I guess they did some surveys and stuff like that, and the 'Smart Set girl' is between 25 and 27 and she is like, career-driven, and likes iPods […] And they were like, 'She's fun, and she likes to go to work and dress up, but then likes to be casual for weekends, or likes to dress up for night and go have fun!' […] And then we had to come up with these outfits and show like what the Smart Set girl is, and stuff like, totally brainwashing! (personal communication).

Jess has a vivid recollection of the seminar, indicating that the materials were effective in providing her with a sense of the brand's target customer, and in aligning that vision with her consciousness of herself as facilitating the customer's satisfaction. Curiously enough, Jess herself almost perfectly fit the description of the "Smart Set girl," given her educational background, interest in technology and lifestyle habits (personal communication). Jess was then a perfect "face" for the brand, in that she was able to present a "line" that would resonate with the target consumer (Goffman 1967).

However, Jess did not seem to be overly attached to her employment at Smart Set. Although she reported spending significant amounts of time preparing for work, and making several friends at work, she stated that her co-workers varied in age from 16 years to 40 years old,

and that there was not much to talk about with customers or employees beyond the merchandise and the day's generic events. Moreover, selling strategies were highly routinized and employees were assigned to specific locations in the store with instructions to inform customers of certain items. As Jess describes,

> they would put somebody in the front and your job would be 'look at our 2 for 25 tees,' and there's a person in the middle who would be like 'look at our 2 for 20 tanks,' and a person in the back like 'look at our sale rack.' So that would be your job to push that, and you had to like, tell every customer that went through the store about the sales in your section (personal communication).

The lack of autonomy did not allow Jess to invest much of her self into her assigned tasks, which created a disconnect between her potential as an employee and what she actually delivered on the job. Kelly's reported experience at the Gap echoed Jess's description. Working at mass retail chains requires employees to present themselves in such a manner that customers can relate to the salespeople on a general, if not almost anonymous, level. Both Jess and Kelly described very superficial encounters with customers and their co-workers, stating that most conversations were kept at a predictable level that required little energy from either party – such as discussing the weather, seasonal events such as Back to School and Christmas, or the customer's planned activities for the day (personal communication). Thus, all players in these interactions

were aware of what was required of them to allow the encounter to proceed as required for each party to meet their ultimate objectives (Goffman 1959) – buying and selling clothing and accessories in exchange for an hourly wage and an employee discount.

Kelly's experience negotiating the environments of two very different retail environments provides a source of comparison between Goffman's theory, which Hochschild classifies as "surface acting" (1983: 35), and more recent theories concerning work and identity including Leidner (1993), Witz et al. (2003) and Pettinger (2004; 2005). Goffman's approach to human interaction as a process of self-presentation, reflection and reaction (1959) set forth a framework for further study into the intertwining of identity, work, and consumer culture. Symbolic interactionism has made use of Goffman's preliminary investigation to delve into "deep acting," which involves the management of emotions in the self and in others (Hochschild 1983: 216). Hochschild distinguishes the progression of theory from Goffman to more recent theorists in stating, "Goffman's actors actively manage outer impressions, but they do not actively manage inner emotion," being that they are "more exquisitely attuned to outward appearance," and that their "glances inward at subjective feeling are fleeting and blurred" (Hochschild 2001: 142). In order words, Goffman offers rules that govern interaction, but generally "rules apply only to what the individual thinks and displays, and the link to emotion is left unspecified" (Hochschild 1983: 216).

Kelly's description of her experiences at the Gap as a place where the employee turnover rate was high, the staff was discouraged from forming relationships with one another, and customers generally headed to the sale rack rather than the carefully merchandised displays, all indicate that this environment required the minimum investment from its employees. Employees were not shown high levels of loyalty – Kelly states that new employees were consistently given more hours and shifts than more senior employees – and so, in turn, employees did not show the company much loyalty. The routinization of this work, similar to Jess's experience, demonstrates an expected low-level of engagement from employees. Kelly did not appreciate this routinization and the company's seeming lack of interest in her potential; however, this situation might be ideal for employees who are more concerned with completing the required tasks at hand and leaving their shift satisfied at meeting these basic expectations. That said, none of the research participants listed lack of engagement as a desired job descriptor – rather, all wanted to contribute something meaningful to their work environment (personal communication).

Kelly's experience at the Gap is markedly different than her experience at Alternative Groove, where, as stated earlier, she describes the staff and customers as being much like "family," with customers reportedly delivering cookies at Christmas and demonstrating interest in employees' activities outside the sphere of work (personal

communication). As a niche retail environment focused on selling and renting skateboarding, surfing and snowboarding clothing and gear, employees and customers have similar interests and desires, and therefore have more of an investment in their relationships with one another. Kelly reports turnover here to be low, and public interest in attaining employment in the shop to be high (personal communication). This situation is dramatically different than her description of the work-life and customer service at the mass retailer.

Jess and Kelly both reported frustration with their experiences at the larger retailers. Jess recalls “a really cheesy video [we] had to watch about how we were the most important people in um, in the business but I was like, well if I am so important than why do I get paid the least?!” (personal communication). Being told that she was the most important component of the business did not sit well with Jess when she was routinely receiving three-hour shifts and being forced to contain her individuality in order to promote ‘2 for $25’ t-shirts and camisoles for slightly more than minimum wage (personal communication). The incongruence between what employees are told and how they are treated causes frustration, disappointment, and, ultimately, disengagement on mental level. For these research participants, the aforemention emotions were followed with resignation notices.

The experience of self in the sphere of labour receives greater attention from Hochschild (1983) than from Goffman (1959). While

Goffman considered himself a theorist of moments and their men, not men and their moments (1967: 2-3), Hochschild asks "Where is the self as subject of emotive experience? What is the relation of *act* to *self*?" (1983: 217, emphasis in original). The frustration that Jess and Kelly experienced was a result of mixed messages concerning their role as facilitators of the consumption experience. Were they to relate to customers as themselves, or as themselves only as the brand wished them to be? Kelly states that she feels "allowed to be more yourself at the Groove – you don't have to wear a nametag […] at the Gap you have to help so many people at once, it's just like, in and out, and it's not as friendly and not as personable" (personal communication). Moreover, they were not provided with any recourse for acknowledging their lack of satisfaction with the experience they were participating in, and no route to bridge the experience with their understanding of self. Neither Jess nor Kelly lasted more than nine months with Smart Set or Gap.

Hochschild's study of Delta airline attendants examined emotional labour and emotion work[5] and how attendants "do emotion work to enhance the status of the customer and entice further sales by their friendliness" (1983: 16). Hochschild's research of airline attendant training and work experience provides "fuller appreciation of the costs of what [the flight attendant] does" on the job, and insight into how corporate entities

[5] Hochschild defines emotional labour as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*" (1983: 7). Hochschild uses "the synonymous terms *emotion work* or *emotion management* to refer to these same acts done in a private context where they have *use value*" (1983: 7).

balance their needs with those of their employees (1983: 17). These emotional costs are similar to those experienced by retail employees, who must devise methods of coping. For airline attendants, these methods of coping are more prescriptive: attendants must participate in annual sessions that include “anger-desensitization” training, since attendants regularly encounter obnoxious and angry passengers (Hochschild 1983: 25). These sessions provide the employees with strategies to manage their personal emotions and in turn, manage the emotions of their passengers (Hochschild 1983: 25).

The strategies taught are sophisticated, what Hochschild describes as “techniques of deep acting joined to principles of social engineering” (1983: 33). Because a flight attendant qualifies for the job through her “demonstrably friendly disposition,” it is easy to successfully teach her how to “suppress her anger at a passenger that insults her” (1983: 33). Anger suppression techniques encourage the attendant to think about her irate passenger and to imagine why they might be lashing out – examples of explanations offered by the trainers included a fear of flying or the recent death of a family member (Hochschild 1983: 25). These techniques are effective in changing the thought patterns of employees – to the degree that an employee could legitimately ask “is this me or the company talking?” (Hochschild 1983: 34). While the techniques are useful because they allow employees to exercise their own mind in relation to the customer, they do influence thought patterns outside the scope of work.

One attendant noted: “Sometimes I come off a long trip in a state of utter exhaustion, but I find I can’t relax. I giggle a lot, I chatter, I call friends. It’s as if I can’t release myself from an artificially created elation that kept me ‘up’ on the trip” (qtd. in Hochschild 1983: 4).

While none of the participants I interviewed described such a sense of artificiality, it was present in their descriptions to a lesser degree. Melanie described masking her critical thinking and discomfort with high-end children’s retail by being “pretty moldable” and stating that “you’re fake” because you cannot relate to your customers, but you have to try to the best of your ability in order to create the ambiance to make the sale (personal communication). Melanie also described coming home from work and having to debrief with her partner on an almost daily basis about the attitude expected of her at work. Audrey described American Eagle as:

> a tough environment to be in, standing on your feet, on concrete, for 4 to 8 hours at a time, that is really draining. Plus, in that store you’ve got bright lights, the music is always cranked, everybody’s really perky, you know, um… it’s exhausting and I think, you know, some people kind of just have that personality and are able to put up with it and enjoy that environment and thrive on it, and some people aren’t (personal communication).

Jess, Kelly and Audrey expressed that it was not difficult to sell clothes, with Kelly stating that “anybody could sell clothes,” and Audrey describing her job as “pretty easy, [since] it’s a fairly mindless thing to be doing”

(personal communication). Yet, Audrey used the descriptors “exhausting” and “draining” multiple times over the course of our conversation. What seems exhausting then, is not the job of selling clothes themselves, but of being in the ambiance of buoyant consumer ecstasy, with its loud music, perky personalities, and specifically in the case of American Eagle and its “intense walls […] so colorful […] you feel overwhelmed every time you go in there […] it’s too stimulating” (Audrey, describing her former work environment, personal communication).

Retail employees perform on the intense, overwhelming and stimulating stage every time they step into their workplace. At the front of the house, the retail floor, they must anticipate, listen and respond to the chatter, comments and requests of customers and colleagues. At the back of the house, the stockroom or break room, they must negotiate their interactions and relationships with management and co-workers to reflect the expected attitudes that relate to the sphere of work, but that somehow seem less phony than those put on in the front of the house. Although all research participants are women who I selected because they work in women’s clothing retail, or children’s clothing retail aimed at female consumers, the relationship between gender and emotion as a form of capital is more than coincidental.

According to Hochschild, “women tend to manage feeling more because in general they depend on men for money, and one of the various ways of repaying their debt is to do extra emotion work” (1983:

165). Hochschild further defines emotion work as a form of capital, especially “emotional work that affirms, enhances and celebrates the well-being and status of others” through “niceness,” (1983: 167) and showing deference by “being adaptive, cooperative, and helpful” (1983: 168). The discourse of “mothering” (Chodorow 1999) offers an explanation for women’s unequal contribution to emotion work: as a sex, the majority of females are biologically capable of becoming pregnant, carrying fetuses to term, and giving birth. Therefore, as a gender, women tend to spend more time and energy nurturing, managing and befriending children, and because society views women “as members of the category from which mothers come” they are more expected to care for the “psychological needs” of others (Hochschild 1983: 170).

Research participants echoed descriptions of talk centered on encouragement, support, nurturing and deference in retail sphere. Because “anybody could sell clothes,” (Audrey, personal communication) it is the relational aspect of the role that makes it challenging and exhausting. Management and customers expect that sales associates will cheerfully combine encouragement with expertise to sell a product – as Kelly describes, the day to day interactions involve endless enthusiasm and “being like, oh yeah, I know how this fits, oh you have to try this on with this because this fits really nice and looks really good with this, you know” (personal communication). The role of a cheerleader with product knowledge expertise can be fulfilling, as Brielle reports, but it requires

more than simply being present and performing tasks in a mechanistic manner (personal communication). For thirteen dollars an hour, Brielle states that she “and Josie [the other staff member] run her [the owner’s] business, seven days a week. Like, [the owner] is maybe there once or twice a week. She can go out of town and rely on us and know that everything is going to be ok” (personal communication).

While Brielle’s manager, the storeowner, is supportive and acknowledges the passion and devotion that she and Josie bring to the job (personal communication), thirteen dollars an hour does not seem to compensate for the amount of time and self invested in the role. Brielle attended a program specializing in fashion, business and arts, interned during Los Angeles fashion week and has experience designing wedding dresses and prom gowns (personal communication). In addition, she adores interacting with customers at the 1100-square foot boutique where she works, stating “you see a lot of regular customers and you start to form a relationship with them and that’s what I really enjoy […] anyone who walks in that door, I remember them, I remember what they bought, I know their name” (personal communication).

Although Brielle’s drive and dedication to her employer and employment exceeds that of most of the other research participants, the amount of attention and care that she brought to the workplace was relatively commonplace: All participants reported trying to accommodate the desires of management to understand and represent the product and

image being sold by the retailer or brand, and most felt they accomplished these tasks (personal communication). Brielle's level of knowledge and responsibility in the day to day operations of her boutique perhaps exceeded the average, with her manager seeking her input on what lines and select items should be carried in the store (personal communication). Kelly assisted with purchasing decision at the surf and skate shop, but this level of involvement was not a common among the other three participants (personal communication). Melanie described her training at the high-end children's store to involve mostly product knowledge about the various brands carried by the retailer, more than training about how to actually perform the tasks – although she did comment that her manager would offer her clear instruction about what *not* to do if she observed Melanie interacting in a way that did not fit with the manager's preferred style (personal communication).

Just as airline attendants show "demonstrably friendly dispositions," all research participants reported a reasonably strong interest in clothing, fashion and the brands where they sought employment, thereby bringing a certain amount of expertise with them to their roles that employers were able to capitalize upon. Research participants largely came to the experience with a baseline of knowledge about fashion, trends, and the basics of coordinating an outfit in the style of the retailer where they were employed. Additional engagement, training and exposure enhanced employees' knowledge, furthering their ability to influence customers in

their employers favor. Kelly, who reported a high level of job satisfaction at the skate and surf shop, discussed product training nights, where the staff was treated to pizza and beer while learning about seasonal lines or new merchandise (personal communication). A weeklong snowboarding trip paid for by a snowboard brand that wanted the staff to try the new line of snowboarding equipment was her most extreme example of product knowledge training, while receiving free merchandise, including tee-shirts, reusable bags, hooded sweatshirts and expensive sunglasses, seemed commonplace (personal communication).

Kelly's industry is the exception, in that some of the items she sells are high-end and technical products, including thousand-dollar surfboards and snowboards; thus, it is imperative that the employees have a decent understanding of their features. However, week-long ski trips sponsored by snowboard companies take product knowledge to the extreme, and could be interpreted as almost bribing sales associates to primarily sell the promoted product – which Kelly reports doing, because she felt a stronger affinity to that brand than to any other as a result of her experience with the company. In her words, "I would rather sell [promoted brands] because I got to try them out and I know about it, and they were nicer to me" (Kelly, personal communication). The ethics of 'product knowledge' training have been examined in relation to the pharmaceutical industry (Wazana 2000; Sigworth, Nettleman & Cohen 2001). Ashley Wazana's study revealed that most physicians "deny that gifts could influence their behavior" (2000:

375). However, Wazana's quantitive analysis showed that interactions with pharmaceutical representatives did influence residents' and physicians' prescribing practices, "in terms of prescribing cost, nonrational prescribing, awareness, preference and rapidness of prescribing new drugs, and decreased prescribing of generic drugs" (2000: 375). These same principles of brand exposure and gifting are relevant to the experiences of the research participants employed in retail. Being treated with a sense of importance encourages employee engagement through a sense of reciprocity – as Kelly states, "you are more willing to sell [Brand A] over any other brand cause you get something out of it" (personal communication).

The alignment of self with the store or brand creates value for the retailer's owner or corporation, in that the employee internalizes the rhetoric necessary to make sales, and becomes a living manifestation of possibilities created by consumption. Becoming a piece of hardware for the image offered for sale extends customers' conception regarding what can be bought – are they buying an item, such as sunglasses or a t-shirt, or are they buying a relationship, a slice of an identity, an entire lifestyle?

The emotional labour that retail sales employees perform creates that intangible experience of lifestyle-branded consumption (Klein 2000). Even in the high-end outlets where research participants were facilitators of the most exclusive retail experiences, all merchandise came in at least one size run (i.e. extra-small, small, medium, large, extra-large, or 0, 2, 4,

6, 8, 10, 12), and therefore was not ‘exclusive’ in the strict sense of the term because at least five other people of various sizes could purchase the same item. Melanie described the frantic behavior of parents who would rush into the children’s store as soon as the bi-annual fall and spring shipments were put out, and who would snap up one of each item in their children’s sizes, dropping tens of thousands of dollars on items their children would quickly outgrow or destroy (personal communication). Yet, despite this inability to offer a truly exclusive experiences, retail employees across all segments of the retail market are somewhat expected to create a personalized interaction with the merchandise, shop and service staff that is unique as possible for the customer.

In essence, a white v-neck t-shirt purchased at American Eagle is as functional as a similar tee-shirt purchased at Smart Set. The difference that sets these items apart can be found in the etymology of the words “custom,” “customer,” and “customize” (1989). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the primary definition of the noun “custom” means a “habitual or usual practice; a common way of acting; usage, fashion, habit” (“custom, *n*.” 1989). The fifth definition of the word “custom” is the “practice of customarily resorting to a particular shop, place of entertainment, etc. to make purchases or give orders; business patronage or support” (“custom, *n*.” 1989). The latter definition of “custom” listed above relates more to the meaning of the word “customer,” whose most common usage represents “one who frequents any place of sale for the

sake of purchasing; one who customarily purchases from a particular tradesman, a buyer, or purchaser" ("customer, *n.*" 1989). What is most outstanding about these definitions is their listing of a habitual, common practice – there is nothing unique or individual about a custom or a customer; rather, both terms refer to reoccurring tasks, or people that perform the similar actions on a regular basis.

The meanings of custom and customer become interesting in relation to the word "customize" and its meaning: "To make to order or to measure; to model or alter according to individual requirements" ("customize, *v.*" 1989). The Oxford English Dictionary lists the United States of America as the place of origin for the word, deriving from the definition of the word "custom" in the fifth definition of the term listed above, with the suffix –ize added to the end to give the meaning "to make" ("customize, *v.*" 1989). The rise in the usage of the word is associated with the customization of motor vehicles ("customize, *v.*" 1989).

Similar to clothing, motor vehicles are mass-produced on assembly lines and are shipped to dealerships in large quantities, where Western consumers are able to test drive, compare and ultimately purchase a vehicle that is different, but not significantly different, than the other ten or so vehicles available in a brand's product line. Vehicles are customizable in the number of doors they have (two, four or five), leather or fabric seats, automatic or manual locks and windows, two-wheel or four-wheel drive, tires or rims, and so on, so that they may project a consumer's sense of

self out to the world (Holroyd 2002: 62). Describing the impact of electronic technology, McLuhan states that with its arrival, “man extended, or set outside himself, a live model of the central nervous system itself” (1964: 53), in that vehicles replace an individual’s human mobility with mechanical mobility, and thus are intended reflect what is obscured by the all-encapsulating metal and glass – the driver’s identity (Holroyd 2002: 68). The result of the outward projection of inner understanding is evident in how Westerners select and consume mass-produced *but* customized vehicles, and white v-neck tee-shirts from one store rather than another, when they are otherwise interchangeable. Like most other items or “commodity-goods” that Westerners routinely consume, it makes emotional sense to choose one brand or label over another because “consumption is primarily related to these signs [what the brand represents] and not to the goods themselves” (Lefebvre 2000: 91).

A contributing factor to brand differentiation are the brand’s employees, who by virtue of their style of appearance and attitude bring different flavors to the marketplace. Research participants mentioned being the “most important people in the company” in large retailers (Jess, personal communication), and being capable of running the smaller boutiques and making the day to day decisions, including purchasing and merchandising (Brielle and Kelly, personal communication). Thus, while corporate decisions are made in boardrooms, or business decisions in the mind of creative entrepreneurs, the actualization of these ideas relies on

making the right hiring decisions – employees who will embrace and internalize the desired image, be it fashionably professional, beachy-casual, snow and surf cool, trendy and fresh, or couture for kids, and who will relay their zest for the merchandise to the customers in a way that customizes a mass-produced item to their specific needs. Hiring decisions that accurately reflect the projected lifestyle values of the brand determine whether the gap between the inanimate object and the imagination of the consumer can be bridged.

The loosely routinized but partly spontaneous dialogue between the retail employee and the customer is the moment where customization can occur, and it is this interactive experience that can make the moment pleasurable for both individuals. “Customer service” is the common term used in pre-sales floor training to instruct employees on how to effectively provide management’s preferred style of interaction, in order to create the desired outcome in customers – a purchase. According to Leidner, “some organizations try to standardize the workers’ characters, personalities, and habits of thought so that they will make the sorts of decisions the organizations prefer” (1993: 31). Employers attempt to “transform their trainees in a deeper way than is usually associated with job training, […] not by further reducing the autonomy workers have on the job, but by trying to standardize more and more aspects of the workers’ lives” (Leidner 1993: 31). Leidner terms this method of training “routinization by transformation” (1993: 36), where training is “not merely a matter of

prespecifying workers' attitudes and demeanors on the job, but also of transforming the workers into the *sorts of people who will make the desired decisions*" (1993: 38, emphasis mine).

Under what circumstances are new hires willing to undergo deep transformation to perform a job in the manner that management prefers? In this chapter, I have explored work experiences and the effects of these interactions on employees' understandings of self. While research participants mostly acknowledged that they were hired according to their appearances and demeanor and what these signified about their identities, as discussed in the first chapter, this chapter aimed to explore how their interactions at work, both with themselves and with their customers, influenced their understandings of self and how they projected this understanding outward and into their work environment. The third, and last, chapter seeks to understand how the relationship between the self of the sales associate and the retail environment, poised at the moment of production and consumption, is a mediating relationship for the transformative effects of consumer culture. That is, how do retail employees offer a paradigm for understanding how a culture of consumption based on taste and differentiation (Bourdieu 1984) can take hold?

III. Love It: Retail Employees as a Paradigm of Consumer Culture

paradigm.: A pattern or model, an exemplar; (also) a typical instance of something, an example ("paradigm, *n*." 1989).

"the system of needs is the product of the system of production" (Baudrillard 1998: 74).

The previous two chapters examine and discuss the relationship between the retail employee and sphere of work as a site of producing a particular appearance and identity, negotiated through interactions with specific physical spaces and social discourse. The ultimate intention of this thesis however, is to extend the impact of these interactions and their effects beyond the world of retail and into the broader sphere of consumer relations. As outlined in the introduction, I chose the retail employee as the research participant and the retail store as the research setting to provide insight into the connection between the realms of production and consumption.

By virtue of existing in both spheres and contributing to both production and consumption related activities, the retail setting and its social agents are ideal for examining the interactions and impacts of production on consumption and vice versa. Moreover, such a framework blurs the common perception of production as bound to the materiality of objects, and consumption as limited to notions of desire (Pettinger 2005) – rather, the employees and setting make it evident that material and symbolic properties of objects exist at all levels of circulation,

demonstrating that the boundary between production and consumption is more fluid than fixed.

There are numerous theories that discuss the flow of objects for identity and status-based consumption – outstanding examples include Jean Baudrillard's work on the consumer society, where he outlines a theory of the object and its consumption (1998), and Henri Lefebvre's theory of everyday life in the modern world as the never-ending cycle of consumption is another (2000). While these theories contribute widely to the understanding of consumer culture and its broad relations, a full appreciation of their breadth and depth can only be realized through their application in more micro-level research projects that operationalize and examine the proposed concepts.

The logic of signs pioneered by Baudrillard (1998), Lefebvre (2000) and Roland Barthes (1967) among others, is essentially a system of theorizing what drives social agents' motives of consumption – namely, the system of production. However, if our understanding of these relationships remains largely at the theoretical level, the literature lacks an understanding of how productive and consumptive relations mediate our everyday lives – that is, it is difficult to conceive whether these theories are applicable to everyday life beyond the realm of thought and theorizing. As Angela McRobbie notes, "the interest in the practices of consumption [is] only rarely put to the test in the field of empirical investigation" (1997: 76). This thesis, and namely this chapter, aims to combine the data of the

small study I conducted with the literature pertaining to the social, cultural and symbolic relations that mediate the retail sphere and the scope just beyond that setting. While the previous two chapters have looked at the relations to and within the retail sphere, this chapter intends to have a broader perspective that draws on the wider literature surrounding the social and cultural relations of consumer culture, using the retail employee's experience as an inroad to understanding.

The act of consumption, defined here as the purchase, receipt or exchange of objects (i.e. the exchange of money for a shirt, the receipt of a shirt as a present, or the trading of a shirt for a necklace), is always social. Consumption as social is a concept that academics can trace through the literature, from Marcel Mauss' examination of the gift exchange in "archaic societies" (1967), to Daniel Miller's theorizing of shopping and social relationships on a North London street (1998; 2001). Consumer items are constantly in flux, moving between social agents and through networks as a means of creating, reinforcing or shifting relationships, identifications and identities. This chapter will move from the relations of the employee and the employer's brand or image, to the wider networks that form around these products, emotions and social associations. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* and *field*, and concepts of economic, cultural, symbolic and social capital will be the central theoretical framework for understanding these relations (1998), supported

by Lefebvre's (2000) theory of sub-systems and signs to understand the more contemporary concept of aesthetic labour.

When I asked the retail employees of my study what provoked them to obtain employment at their respective outlets, each responded with some variation of the same theme. Overall, the five reasoned that the identity and image being offered for purchase related to their own perceived identities, and that their employment at these specific brands would provide access to increase their intimacy with the image offered for sale (personal communication). For Jess and Audrey, the economic advantages of receiving a discount would allow them to purchase and wear more of the objects they sought to accumulate (personal communication). For Brielle, Kelly and Melanie, the discount was a major selling feature, but cultural capital and forms of recognition were also accessible through employment at the smaller, more exclusive boutiques that serve more affluent customers (personal communication). Brielle and Kelly especially hoped to launch sustainable careers based on the experiences and networks they accumulated while employed in retail roles (personal communication). Research participants' reasoning and intense exposure to the realm of shopping and retail consumer culture primed them for a research study that seeks to uncover the relations of the self to the objects, images and the wider social sphere.

Steven Miles recommends Bourdieu for the task of unraveling these complex relationships, stating "Bourdieu manages to transcend the

ideology of both individualism and subjectivism by seeing individuals as the clue, as objects of empirical study, to an understanding which lies beyond the individual per se" (1996: 152). Bourdieu's theory of social space as composed of field, habitus, and the four forms of capital – economic, cultural, social and symbolic – measured in terms of "volume" to determine one's habitus in the field, is useful for understanding how individuals are both the outcome of social circumstances, and social agents who employ whatever resources they can access to shift or transform their positions (Bourdieu 1998: 32). Bourdieu's describes the "global social space" as a "*field,*" which he defines as:

> both a field of forces, whose necessity is imposed on agents who are engaged in it, and as a field of struggles within which agents confront each other, with differentiated means and ends according to their position in the structure of field of forces, thus contributing to conserving or transforming its structure (1998: 32).

Within the social space of the field, agents have different standpoints, and each position offers a different perspective on the field. Bourdieu outlines *habitus* as "the practices and goods of a single agent or a class of agents," and more specifically as "this generative and unifying principle which retranslates the intrinsic and relational characteristics of a position into a unitary lifestyle, that is, a unitary set of choices of persons, goods, practices" (1998: 8). On the field of social space, which contains all the standpoints and perspectives, social agents can be classified by habitus,

in that habitus act as “classificatory schemes, principles of classification, principles of vision and division, different tastes” (Bourdieu 1998: 8).

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu presents a complex diagram that sketches the space of social positions and the space of lifestyles through occupation and employment, hours of work per week, income levels, leisure activities, consumer preferences, and birth rate per family (see Figures 5 & 6, in Bourdieu 1984: 128-129). Bourdieu devises a less complex but still informative version of the diagram in his later work, which offers similar insight into the relationship between field and habitus (see Figure 3-1, Bourdieu 1998: 5).

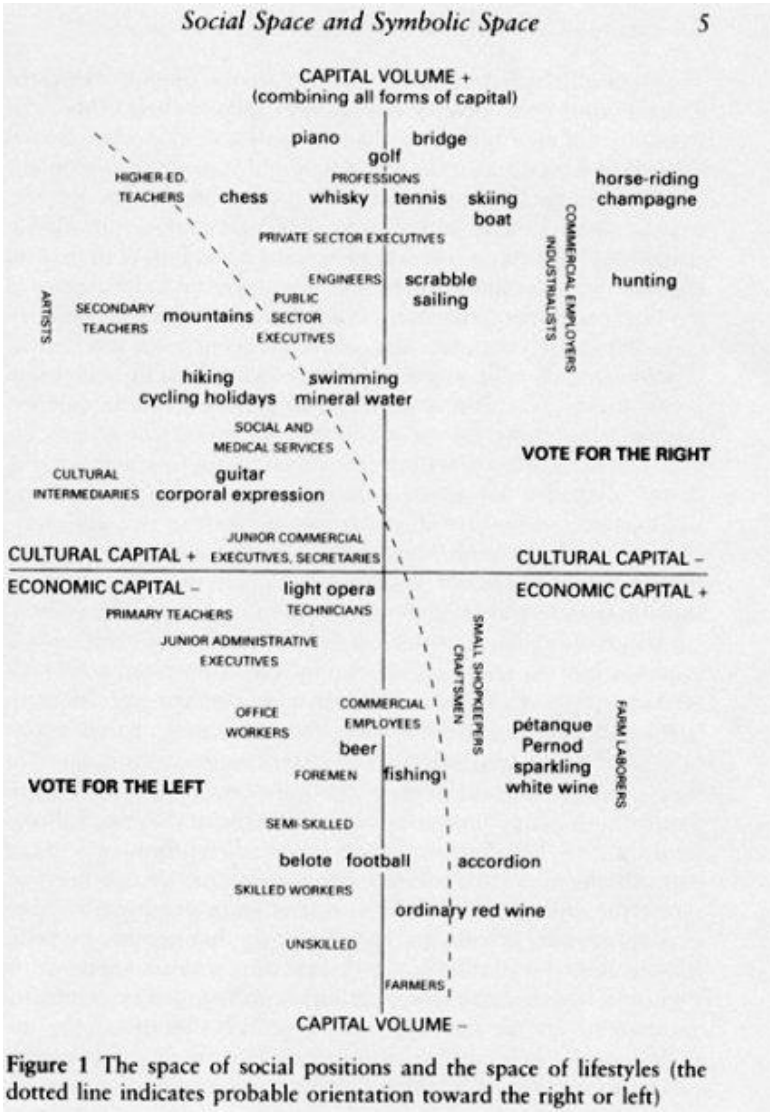

Figure 3-1: Bourdieu’s diagram of Social Space and Symbolic Space.

The diagram above *vertically* presents practices according to the total amount of all forms of capital, and *horizontally* maps practices according to relative volumes of Bourdieu's two principle forms of capital: economic and cultural capital (see Figure 1, 1998: 5). Bourdieu states that "agents are distributed in the first dimension according to the overall volume of the different kinds of capital they possess, and in the second dimension according to the structure of their capital," or, "the relative weight of the different kinds of capital, economic and cultural, in the total volume of their capital" (1998: 7). As mentioned throughout the explanation of the diagram, the practices mapped are not absolute indications of volumes of capital, and a certain ratio of capital does not mean that agents will unquestioningly embrace specific practices (Bourdieu 1998: 6). Rather, these are relative generalizations based on Bourdieu's ethnography conducted in France – hence, these practices pertain particularly to that milieu at the time of his study (Bourdieu 1984).

Bourdieu's field-habitus theory of the relationship between the various forms of capital contributes to an understanding of the interconnectedness of consumer practices. Rather than looking upon research participants' accounts of brand image fascination as a one-off interest or fascination of a singular social agent, the field-habitus theory provides a framework for examining how these beliefs and practices fit into a wider set of lifestyle relations that underlie and mediate the

organization of society, and, for the purposes of this chapter, mediate the relations of production, consumption and retail culture.

Bourdieu's theory captures the contextual nature of all practices (1998). However, this theory emerges from a history of thought and philosophy surrounding the relations of production and consumption. In *Fetishism of Commodities*, Karl Marx argues that production is social, making a commodity a "mysterious thing," because

> in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon that product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses (1906: 83).

Marx's passage explains how the products of labour acquire "uniform social status" through the act of exchange (1906: 84). Until the moment of exchange, an object exists solely for its use-value, that is, the purpose it serves. At the moment of exchange, however, "it is changed into something transcendent" (1906: 82), and once stamped as a commodity, it has "absolutely no connection with its physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom" (1906: 83). Marx compares the fetishism of commodities to the religious world, stating that similarly "in

that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relations both with one another and the human race" (1906: 83).

Returning to the example of the white v-neck t-shirt described in the previous chapter, the t-shirt appears as a product of human labour, but also as an example of an independent signifier of a brand or image value that transcends these relations of production. In essence, the white v-neck t-shirt enters into a social relationship with other commodities of similar character, distinct from its material relations of production. Employing Marx's theory (1906), a link can be made to the retail service sector employee, who both connects the t-shirt to the relations of production as the performer of the last step in the production process. The retail employee as a brand image representative positioned in the retail store, the space of exchange and consumption, enhances the transcendental status of the t-shirt as a component of a particular lifestyle.

Thus, the retail employee exists on the fringe of both universes of circulation – standing at the crux, both enhancing the material relations of production and the social relations of consumption. As most research participants stated, wearing the store's products made them easier to sell – except for Melanie, who sold children's clothes and for whom being an image ambassador was more about appearing in the adult version of high-end clothing in order to gain the respect and trust of customers (personal communication). Performing the brand through appearance was

consciously present in the mind of all research participants, and its significance extends beyond the appearance and identity of the self (see Chapter I), and into the wider set of relations that constitute the productive/consumptive relationship. In terms of status, participants do not believe it takes much skill to sell clothing, but rather the exhaustion comes from negotiating their role as facilitators and admiring consumers of their employers' brands.

Following on the heels of wishing to gain employment in order to receive a discount on store merchandise, as Brielle, Jess, Audrey and Kelly explicitly remarked as a factor in their decision-making process during their pursuit of employment (personal communication), raises questions about the requirements of retail employees as brand and image facilitators. Melanie states:

> I don't want to use the word superficial, because that's super judgmental, but that's sort of the vibe of the place, like that high-end world, where they are definitely looking for a certain type of person on first sight. And that's what she [the store owner] ended up actually telling me later on. That basically, like, she hired me because of what I was wearing, what I looked like, and that I would fit what the image of the store was. And I kind of knew that about that kind of retail before going in, so I went to fit a certain kind of role, cause that's kind of not who I am. But whatever, it got me the job in the end (personal communication).

While Melanie recounts discussing how her manager told her that she had the look of the store's image, and that was one of the main reasons she was hired, several other research participants discussed how they felt they already presented the brand's image in their regular day-to-day style. Kelly did not submit an application for her job at the boutique store; rather, through social networking the manager asked her if she would like to join the staff. Kelly describes the hiring process in stating "I shopped there all the time, so they kind of knew me, and they're like, 'Oh yeah, she has really good style, um, I'd really like her to help out with the buying'" (personal communication).

The appearance that employees bring to the brand extends beyond how they are dressed, and more into sets of practices – habitus (Bourdieu 1984; 1998) – that shape their outward style and appearance through a process of internalization and ownership. Georg Simmel defines style as "a principle of generality which either mixes with the principle of individuality, displaces it or represents it" (1997: 212). Therefore, style refers to something beyond the tangible items that employees can purchase at discounted prices by virtue of being employed at the retailer, and enters into the realm of the self as she relates, and is related to, networks of social agents and sets of practices. This self is constituted of elements of race, gender, sexuality, physical ability and appearance, attitude, and a multitude of other factors that are difficult, if not impossible,

to objectively evaluate in that the meaning of each component comprising the whole is constantly in flux.

The most applicable method of measuring "style" in the limitations of this study, however, is through the individual's adornment of the body as a looking-glass into wider practices, because "human beings think nature and society with their bodies" (O'Neill 2004: 10). According to John O'Neill, "We love to wear machines – anything from sunglasses to a cigar, from a watch to a car," because "[w]e look good to ourselves in machines: they are the natural extensions of our narcissistic selves" (2004: 1). These machines serve to "magnify us, and the same time amplify the world we have chosen to create for ourselves – the 'man-made' world. There is no escaping our romance with the machine we have created in order to recreate ourselves" (O'Neill 2004: 1). However, not all machines are created equal in their capacity to extend our selves. Daniel Miller describes *most* objects as "highly alienable symbols of the market or state," and the "inalienable" as:

> a rather more fragile property of objects that may hark back to the labour that has produced the money that allows one to possess them, but is increasingly dependent upon the more active labour of consumption that creates a symbolic link to the owner or the relationships involved in their acquisition (1998: 131).

The inalienable object may act as a "machine" worn to magnify and amplify a particular understanding of the world we are aiming to create for

ourselves (O'Neill 2004: 1). Through the process of consumption, possessions become inalienable through "a splitting of expenditure into two elements," with the first being the passing of the "commodity to the individual as in the case of possessions such as items of clothing or jewellery which over time become highly personal symbols of the self" (Miller 1998: 132). In the second "trajectory of consumption," consumption "becomes part of the objectification of larger social units within which the self becomes subsumed" (Miller 1998: 132). Through both, the object comes to be personalized and a symbol of larger social relations beyond the self, acting as a link between the individual and society, thereby signifying a certain set of practices and social position (Barthes 1972: 113). Through the inalienable object, consumers are able to see both an external realm that they wish to identify with, and to externalize some part of themselves that they highly regard. By virtue of being worn, the machine both connects the individual to an external group of consumers with a shared interest, and announces a part of themselves.

McRobbie contextualizes that the relationship between the worker's body and the consumption experience "dates back to the early days of the department store when wealthy customers complained of being put off the products by the unhealthy, poor-looking shop girls who were serving them" (1997: 74). Pettinger supports the ongoing pertinence of the retail employee as an "embodied worker," stating, "the distinctive feature of service work is its relationship to the body, both the body of the

service provider and the service recipient, rather than (disembodied) social interaction" (Pettinger 2004: 177). That is, rather than overemphasizing the relationship between social beings, a service interaction involves a coming together of two embodied beings to accomplish something for the physical and social bodies of both agents in the interaction. An embodied perspective assists in understanding "the complexity of interactions between work and consumption," in that "consumers are workers at different moments, and consumption relies on production, production on consumption" (Pettinger 2004: 168).

Furthering the concept of embodied labour in service interactions, Witz et al. examine the concept of "aesthetic labour" (2001) as an extension of Hochschild's concept of "emotional labour" (1983; see the previous chapter). Witz et al. argue that emotional labour is an insufficient concept in terms of capturing the investment of self in the retail sector of employment, in that Hochschild's critique of Goffman and emphasis on deep acting (Hochschild 1983; see the previous chapter) "loses a secure conceptual purchase on the embodied aspects of interactive service work, consigned as they are to a shadowy conceptual status of surface" (Witz et al. 2003: 38). While Hochschild discusses corporeality, it goes largely without analysis. Aesthetic labour reinserts the body as site upon which social practices manifest as "the mobilization, development and commodification of embodied dispositions" (Witz et al. 2003: 37).

Research participants' descriptions of job-hunting demonstrated that retail employees commonly enter the industry with some of these dispositions, and often aim to establish employment with particular retailers as a result of a prior affinity for the brand or image offered for sale (personal communication). Thus, "embodied praxis" is not something that the retail industry or the larger sphere of capitalism implants into employees solely to serve its purposes (Witz et al. 2003: 40). Rather, retail employees enter the role with bodily schemas that "employers then mobilize, develop and commodify," through "processes of recruitment, selection and training, *transforming* them into 'skills' which are geared towards producing a 'style' of service encounter that appeals to the sense of the customer" (Witz et al. 2003: 37). Take Kelly, for example: as an employee of both a mass-retailer and a niche boutique, she was trained by management and by observing the interactions between other employees and customers to present almost dichotomous sides of herself at each job (the preppy Gap girl versus the skateboard and snowboard 'chick'), and to adopt a different approach to customer service in each environment (personal communication).

While these stores are a stone's throw from each other, they are worlds apart in their approach to employee presentation and customer service, with the mass-retailer opting for a more structured, routinized workplace and a more hands-off approach to customers, and the boutique a more casual and social environment (personal communication). In turn,

this required Kelly to present different dispositions at each job, acting as a piece of “human hardware” that compliments the aesthetics of the organization she is representing (Witz et al. 2003: 43). Following this logic, retail employees become “part of the surplus-producing process of the organization,” as “the embodiment of the organization’s identity” (Witz et al. 2003: 43).

A major component of the retail employee’s habitus that defines her position in the field as an embodiment of the organization’s identity is her consciously ongoing reinvention of her appearance according to seasonal changes in clothing and style trends that parallel the lifestyle image the employer economically and culturally compensates her to represent. Kelly reported a meeting called by her manager when the staff at the Gap did not purchase and wear the spring line because “it was all flowery, and it looked like senior wear” (personal communication). Instead of purchasing their allocated six items at a 50% discount, employees continued to wear all black to work, which led to the manager issuing several warnings about them not wearing current merchandise (personal communication). When asked about the official policy on wearing current merchandise to work, Kelly stated that there is an “understanding” that you are supposed to wear new merchandise, and that:

> everybody wants to wear the new stuff cause it makes it easier to sell it, but when it is all ugly, doesn’t fit properly, then like, how are you supposed to wear it? Like, I’m sorry but I am not going to buy

> something I am never going wear and look gross in to work (personal communication).

Kelly's feelings about the merchandise signal a disjuncture between her conception of self and the brand that she is being compensated to represent. The conflict between the staff members and management concerning the importance of dressing in the current line for work demonstrates how important it is to management that customers see sales staff wearing seasonal items available for purchase.

Brielle's enthusiasm towards her role at the high-end women's boutique and ensuring that she presents a "fresh and young look" that represents the store in all her day-to-day tasks captures the investment of self and energy that goes into adequately representing the brand (personal communication). Jess' account of carefully selecting her clothes for work and investing time in doing her hair and make-up is an example of the care and seriousness with which these women take their roles (personal communication). Melanie's admission that she did a "kind of weird negotiation within [her] own wardrobe," that involved wearing one nice piece of clothing a day showed the lengths to which she went to meet her manager's standards of "looking good and fashion forward" (personal communication). Melanie described how she would evaluate her outfit each day, choosing each item cautiously:

> like I couldn't be head to toe in it because I would use up all my good pieces in one outfit, so I would just try to have something on

me that would allow me to identify, like I would wear, I don't know, something you would look at in a store that you would think is high end… (personal communication).

Paying attention to having the right look, being fashion forward, looking good and presenting the proper image on behalf of an employer raises a multitude of sociological topics, most of which lay outside the constraints of this thesis. For the purposes of this thesis, the sheer amount of time and attention devoted to internalizing and presenting the right "line" (Goffman 1959) to customers and observers is astounding. All the preparation invested in performing the aesthetic labour described above is outside the physical sphere of work, and therefore goes uncompensated. In fact, this labour is acknowledged only when the employee's presentation of self does not meet the standards that have been set forth, either implicitly or explicitly, by management. These standards are a demonstration of the value allocated to the attention and manifestation of the brand tenets that an employee absorbs through their observation and subsequent execution of what they have internalized as appropriate physical and mental ways of being in the sphere of work.

Through an examination of cinema over the twentieth century, Jonathan Beller has devised an "attention theory of value" that examines the act of looking as a value producing activity (2006: 8). "Cinema," as Beller's term, has a usage beyond its popular conception, referring:

> to the manner in which production generally becomes organized in such a way that one of its moments *necessarily* passes through the visual, that is, that it creates an image that (while the tip of the iceberg) is essential to the general management, organization, and movement of the economy (2006: 10).

The visual, therefore, has the ability to organize social agents because cinema is the "changeover to a mode of production in which images, working in concert, form the organizational principles for the production of reality" (Beller 2006: 14). In the attention economy, the act of looking creates surplus-value because "dreamwork turns out to be real work" (2006: 26) through the cinematic mode of production. As Beller explains, the cinematic mode of production extends the workday "while reducing real wages on a global scale. 'Elevating' commodity production to the visual realm, cinema extracts human labour and pays in fun (know-how, anesthesia, acquired stupidity, fashionability, enjoy[n]ment)" (2006: 12-13).

According to the attention theory of value, the surplus-value created for the brand or image of their employer occurs when they study the merchandise, evaluating it and imagining themselves wearing it and enjoying the lifestyle that the marketing material cleverly portrays. Jess, for example, commented that the most important component of effectively selling the Smart Set brand are the people in charge of the marketing, and that sales associates are a close second, in that they are responsible for

accurately portraying the marketers' vision (personal communication). Research participants are aware of their role as part of a larger structure, and they owned their part in shaping the collective brand imagination of their employers.

Employees enjoy the know-how that they accumulate, in that it is pleasurable to have a specialized knowledge that creates value and impact in their interactions with customers. As Melanie reports, many customers treated her like "garbage," and her job and its accompanying customer interactions were far more pleasant when they treated her like an equal, or when they "sort of assume that you have had the same experiences as them" (personal communication). Melanie provided an example of the new Holt Renfrew opening in downtown Vancouver, and a customer asking her if she was going to check it out, and her replying:

> yeah I'll be down there asap. But, and that, it's just funny that they don't catch the fact that there is no bloody that I am going to be able to go and spend any money there (personal communication).

Regardless of Melanie's ability to shop at Holt Renfrew, the attention and effort she dedicates to understanding the high-end world of retail is an example of how her attention creates value and prestige for Holt Renfrew and its brand, and how her knowledge enables her to fit into her own retail environment and provide value for her employer by acting as a piece of the customers' lifestyles.

Beller use the art world to explicate this point, explaining that a Van Gogh painting is not worth $50 million dollars by virtue of its physical merits, but rather the “fifty-million-dollar fetish character is an index of visual accretion, that is, of alienated sensual labor resultant from the mass mediation of the unique work of art. All that looking sticks to the canvas and increases its value” (2006: 23). By acknowledging the beauty and awe of the new Holt Renfrew, Melanie creates value for the brand, which sticks to the brand and increases its cultural and symbolic value.

Just as important, “in viewing the image, we simultaneously and micrologically modify ourselves in relation to the image as we ‘consume’ it – a misnomer if there ever was one, since images equally, or almost entirely consume us” (Beller 2006: 23). The image’s ability to consume social agents is apparent in research participants’ interest and consumption of the objects and associated lifestyles advertised by their employers’ brands. Interpellation of the retail employee through the extension or adoption of a certain aesthetic appearance and set of emotive behaviors, as discussed in the previous two chapters, is crucial for the viral distribution of the brand to the customers with these retail employees interact. Beller describes the expenditure of sensual labor through the act of looking, and the realignment of self in accordance with the image seen as the “production of value [capital] and self” (2006: 23). By aligning themselves with the brand and image offered for sale by their

employers, the retail employees themselves become a spectacle that accumulates value for the retailer.

The ability of the brand image to motivate employees so that they may influence the customers whom they serve is intentional. The production of a community around a set of objects and signs is necessary for the creation of a retail lifestyle brand, which Helman and de Chernatony define as "targeted at a specific market segment defined by lifestyle. The basic retail proposition is augmented with a set of added values that have symbolic value and meaning for the lifestyles of a specific consumer group" (1999: 49). Rob Shields interprets Simmel's concept of 'sociations' to show how these groupings "emerge through the medium of shared symbolic codes of stylized behavior, adornment, taste and *habitus*" (1992: 14). The objects sold by retail employers do not circulate individually, nor do they hire just any individual to act as a sales floor ambassador of their products. Rather, employees are hired to affirm the image of the employer's brand community, or less fixed forms of brand affinity (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001).

The retail employee seeks a form of employment for the attainment of economic capital *and* cultural capital in order to increase and enhance their habitus on the social field. As the previous chapter used automobiles as an example of symbolic vehicles of identity (O'Neill 2004: 58), this chapter asks – what do research participants' vehicles indicate about their constellations of identities and consumption practices? Overall, the

vehicles owned by research participants fit well with the brands and images of their respective retailers. Brielle, the fashionista who is wholly sold on the image of her employer, drives a sporty Acura coupe, the maintenance of which she finds almost unaffordable on her wage (personal communication). Jess drives a 318i BMW, for which she has an adapter to plug-in her iPod in true Smart Set Girl fashion (personal communication). Kelly drives a Volkswagen Beetle in a limited edition powder blue color, of which only one thousand were made – and she has a large sticker representing the skate shop's logo in the rear-hatch window (personal communication). Her snowboard fits in the rear hatch and up between the console separating the driver and passenger seats. Audrey, employed at the laid-back, beach casual American Eagle takes the bus, as does Melanie, who was the most conflicted about her employment situation (personal communication).

The wage earned by research participants is insufficient to support luxury vehicles. At minimum wage, or just above it (personal communication), these women cannot afford to live lifestyles that include new wardrobes on a seasonal basis (as required of them by most of their employers), Brielle's daily stops at Starbucks, and basic living expenses such as rent, car insurance, phone bills, food and utilities – that Jess and Audrey were students at the time is additionally incredible (personal communication). How could a retail income support their expenditures? An examination of Lefebvre's explanation of consumption's seductiveness

(2000) will assist in uncovering both the 'how' and 'why' retail employees live such lifestyles.

In discussing the "bureaucratic society of controlled consumption," Lefebvre states that he aims to prove "that there are only sub-systems separated by irreducible gaps, yet situated on one plane and related to [a system of everyday life]" (2000: 86). The idea of a single plane upon which everyday life occurs revisits Bourdieu's schematic of the field (1984) – however, Lefebvre extends the plane by examining the levels of "social reality," which he refers to as "sub-systems" (2000: 98). The overarching system is that of "images and ideologies," and Lefebvre lists marketing campaigns as a method for delivering these images and ideologies (2000: 87). The "projections" of publicity (advertising) "unobtrusively fill the gap between experience and make-believe and people project their desires on to one group of objects or another […which] invest the object with a double existence, real and imaginary" (Lefebvre 2000: 88). "Make-believe," the next sub-system on the plane (Lefebvre 2000: 87) is social and "it must disguise the predominance of compulsion and our limited capacity to adapt" (Lefebvre 2000: 90). Through make-believe, social agents make consuming "as much an act of the imagination (fictitious) as a real act ('reality' itself being divided into compulsions and adaptations)" (Lefebvre 2000: 90).

Able to imbue consumption with an imaginary component so that "consumer-goods are not only glorified by signs and 'good' in so far as

they are signified; consumption is primarily related to these signs and not to the goods themselves" (Lefebvre 2000: 91), it is not far-fetched to see how retail employees' production of the make-believe in the retail sphere might be similarly satisfying and simultaneously frustrating or disappointing. As human software that represents the image or brand being sold (Witz et al. 2003), retail employees are constitutive of the image and ideology being sold. However, they are also at the forefront of consuming the image and ideology, by virtue of their perpetual mental and physical proximity to the sign. As a result, retail employees receive minimal economic capital, but significant cultural capital by virtue of their representative role on behalf of the brand. Writ upon employees' bodies are the practices admired, imagined and desired by the everyday customers who enter the store, consume and are consumed by the marketing campaigns, and who pay full-price for the clothes and accessories for sale.

That the research participants employed as retail sales associates are able to achieve a constellation of consumer-goods that typically require a significant volume of economic capital, including sports vehicles, designer clothes and customized coffees, is perplexing. Retail employees, as previously discussed, do not receive adequate economic capital to support the lifestyles research participants reported – however, when speaking of minimum-wage levels, O'Neill observes that "the goods upon which this money is spent are not kept separate from the prestige

economy which redefines simple use-values in invidious terms of consumption, style and class position" (2005: 57). However, this group of research participants did have significant amounts of cultural capital, accumulated by virtue of their socio-demographics, or habitus on the social field.

As university students, university graduates or participants in some form of post-secondary education, all research participants had enhanced their cultural capital through formalized learning (Bourdieu 1998). Although Audrey did not discuss her familial situation, all other research participants mentioned familial support for their endeavors, with Kelly stating that her choice to work two retail jobs was not out of financial need, and that her parents supported her education and had given her the Volkswagen in addition to numerous other symbolically-charged consumer goods, including a high-end Macintosh computer (personal communication). Ultimately, Kelly's parents aimed to support her creative interest in the world of fashion, in much the same way as Brielle's family encouraged her to gain experience that will assist her in opening her own boutique (personal communication). Like Kelly, Brielle lived in the family home while she gained experience designing prom and wedding dresses, working at the high-end women's boutique and aiming to open her own clothing store (personal communication). Jess had completed her undergraduate degree and a post-graduate degree in publishing, and was living in her familial residence while working in retail and completing an internship at a

publishing house (personal communication). During her stint at the high-end children's boutique, Melanie was additionally receiving some financial support from her partner, which afforded her the opportunity to live in a high-end Vancouver neighbourhood while she sought more personally satisfying employment (personal communication).

Research participants repeatedly hinted or openly discussed the ways in which they were receiving financial and moral support for their current employment endeavors and future career goals from their families and supporting kinship relations (personal communication). The social and economic support delivered through these kinship relations emphasizes the families' perceived value of the cultural capital being accumulated through research participants' employment in the retail industry. Although Melanie and Audrey both stated that their employment was not directly related to any of their future career goals, Melanie acknowledged that she could have sought employment elsewhere, and Audrey stated that she enjoyed the ability to purchase the type of clothing she preferred and Christmas gifts for friends and family at a discounted rate, and that she more or less enjoyed the hectic environment of American Eagle (personal communication). Moreover, Audrey commented that she had been in American Eagle the weekend prior to our conversation, shopping with her younger sister who had recently taken interest in the American Eagle brand (personal communication) – therefore, an interest in the lifestyle brand and its associated mythologies can be traced through their family

structure, despite Audrey's less than explicit discussion of such. What's the rationale behind supporting these young women's pursuit of social make-believe (Lefebvre 2000) through careers in the retail sphere?

Lefebvre states that the object, in the act of consumption "acquires a dual existence, perceptible and make-believe," through which "all that can be consumed becomes a symbol of consumption and the consumer is fed on symbols, symbols of dexterity and wealth, of happiness and of love; sign and significance replace reality, there is a vast substitution" (Lefebvre 2000: 108). Research participants gobbled up the glamour that largely accompanied their roles in the retail sphere, as experts of a certain look and style, with the know-how and financial discounts to purchase the style of clothing they preferred (personal communication). Although Melanie reported some situations in which she was treated with disrespect, and Jess expressed frustration with unfriendly customers, most experiences recounted by research participants had positive outcomes where customers regarded the employees as having some level of expertise (personal communication). For the retail service industry employee, financial remuneration is not the reward; rather, it is the promise of a better tomorrow by way of their accumulated experience and discounted clothing and accessories (personal communication). After our interview, Kelly obtained employment with a multinational fitness-oriented fashion retailer who encouraged her to deliver her best creative performance in putting together a temporary retail outlet for the holiday season, during

which Kelly routinely put in unpaid overtime, had the store manager over for dinner and voluntarily organized a fundraiser for a local charity on behalf of this retailer, all on the promise that through these actions she might achieve a more permanent, financially lucrative position within the company (personal communication). To the best of my knowledge, Kelly heard nothing further from the retailer after it closed, in spite of her extraordinary output of effort and full investment of her self and social networks in perpetuating the retailer's brand image (personal communication). Kelly's story is an example of how retailers have the ability to harness (and exploit) the desires of retail employees, as well as their social networks, to increase the brand's cultural cachet of value, which in turn creates corporate profitability and furthers opportunities for global expansion.

The employee is a precious commodity for negotiating the connection between the material world of objects and the symbolic world of the brand image and lifestyle value. Through the employee, these spheres collide to create a colourful physical and mental canvas upon which the employee can create herself in accordance with the brand's values, and thereby create value for the brand as she sells herself as a brand representative. As a position with low economic capital, the job still provides a cachet of cultural capital and 'coolness'. However, sociologists must question what the brand demands from the worker, and what level of

self must be given over to the retailer's purposes to attain this cultural knowledge and status.

In this chapter and the previous, I have aimed to explore how a great deal of the labour that retail employees must perform to fulfill their employment expectations, specifically emotional and aesthetic labour, falls outside the realm of what has typically been considered 'labour'. Moreover, the increasing development of the attention economy as a producer of surplus-value has direct implications for retail employees and consumer culture in general, in that employees are now expected to bring a more sophisticated understanding of contemporary trends, the aspirational lifestyle brand being sold and what it encompasses, and a certain level of competence and cultural know-how to the retail sphere in order to accomplish their jobs successfully and satisfactorily for themselves and their employers. As representatives of the consumption patterns being sold by the retail sphere in which they are employed, retail employees are expected to deliver a performance that combines all these elements for the benefit of their employer and the customer, so as to perpetuate the images, ideologies and social make-believe that keeps the "consumption of signs" circulating (Lefebvre 2000: 109).

Conclusion & Implications for Further Research

"The real life of society, provided in experience, could certainly not be constructed from those large objectivized structures that constitute the traditional objects of social science" (Simmel 1997: 110).

Following Simmel's assertion that society is a conglomeration of the mundane activities and interactions that constitute everyday life, this thesis intended to gather and examine the experiences of retail service industry employees using a phenomenological method. While the small and non-representative nature of the sample prohibits any generalizations, the interviews did provide insight into fluidity of the boundary between production and consumption in the realm of retail, thereby creating potential for theory building.

I recruited participants to the study through my extended social networks and word-of-mouth. As a result, the sample is unrepresentative in that the research participants all belong to a similar social stratum of privilege. Thus, the research sampling was purposeful. All research participants had attended or were currently attending some form of post-secondary institution, either to receive technical training in the fashion industry (Brielle), or Bachelor of Arts (Audrey, Melanie, Jess) and Bachelor of Business Administration (Kelly) degrees. Moreover, most if not all, research participants received financial support for their educational and career endeavors from their families and/or partners.

Astonishingly, the first and second chapters revealed that all research participants *chose* to seek employment at their respective retail positions, commenting that they had a choice between several positions in customer service, i.e. as a barista or sales associate, or several retail positions among different clothing brands and companies. Thus, these women understood that they had a certain threshold of options, and decided to pursue the retail of women and children's clothing understanding that it would demand the involvement of their external appearances and personalities. In exchange, they would receive discounts on clothing, experience working for niche and/or mass retailers, and admiration for exhibiting good style and know-how from customers and fellow workers.

The consumption of make-believe and the pinning of ambition on the transfer of cultural capital into economic capital, however, is unpredictable and indirect. As discussed in the third chapter, at least four of the research participants were receiving some form of direct support from their families or partners to pursue and maintain employment in the retail industry. In essence, these kinship relations are the foundations upon which the retail industry is able to collect a good portion of its profits, either by virtue of the employees' discounted purchases from the retailer, and in the employees' ability to present themselves in a manner that is incongruent with their wage but in keeping with the retailer's image, which in turn influences other customers and consumers.

Lefebvre states that “everyday life weighs heaviest on women,” in that they “are the subject of everyday life and its victims or objects and substitutes (beauty, femininity, fashion, etc.) and it is at their cost that substitutes thrive” (2000: 73). Due to the limitations of length, this thesis has inadequately addressed the question of gender as it pertains to retail employment, which is highly feminized. The topic is being explored in other sociological work (Pettinger 2005); however, a snapshot presented here can show how the exploitative nature of retail as a realm of make-believe and dream work (Lefebvre 2000; Beller 2006) fits the current social position of young women in the workforce. The shift from production to consumption means that women’s bodies have become “romanticized and deployed as the instrument of rational and contractual associations,” and that through the birth control pill “young women’s bodies are made mobile for work, high-rise living, and adventure” (2004: 61). The retail sphere is a fitting entry-point for career-driven women who are interested in the traditionally feminine areas that Lefebvre outlines (2000).

In addition, the realm of retail and its deployment of emotional and aesthetic labour capitalizes on the ideal-typical affect of women as being emotionally supportive, guiding and beautiful creatures to be admired and emulated (Hochschild 1983; Witz et al. 2003). However, these attributes set standards that are difficult to measure and financially compensate according to straightforward standards. These standards are most often discussed when a retail employee fails to meet an employer’s

expectations, such as Kelly failing to wear the new seasonal line, or Brielle's manager coaching her on how to interact with customers at the point of sale when she is wrapping up the purchase (personal communication). Akin to the social reproduction of labour that feminists fought to have recognized, retail employees perform tasks during and beyond the workday that essentially commodify the self to sell a lifestyle that marketers have created as an accompaniment to the clothing and accessories for sale.

However, cracks are beginning to show in the North American sign system of consumption. Movie theaters that typically only show Hollywood blockbusters that perpetuate the realm of make-believe are showing Michael Moore's new film, *Capitalism: A Love Story*, which examines the causes of the economic meltdown in 2008 and the consequences for average Americans (Moore 2009). Moore describes the 'American Dream' as a "dangling carrot" that insinuates wealth is something achievable by all members of society if they strive and labour hard and long enough (Moore 2009). Yet the research participants, by virtue of their socio-demographic backgrounds and habitus, demonstrate that they enjoy inherited privilege from kinship relations that enable them to pursue educational and employment opportunities they believe will eventually pay dividends.

While awaiting these dividends, retail employees are part of the dangling carrot as they perform in the retail sphere as representatives of a make-believe brand image. Having bought into the brand and image

themselves, their performances encourage us to enter into debt to achieve the wealthy standard of living they represent, which O'Neill defines as "*class-as-lifestyle*, i.e., individuated performance of options for making something of oneself regarded as a marketable resource in a world where everyone is a 'sales' person" (2005: 62, emphasis in original).

Relying on signs for social and economic survival is unsustainable. As Lefebvre states, the working class is forced to seek satisfaction in signs (2000), since "the mass bears the stigma of second-hand lifestyle and down-sized desire" (O'Neill 2005: 62). As a leaked 2006 Citibank memorandum describes, North America has become a "plutonomy," where 1% of the population holds more wealth than the bottom 95% combined (Citigroup Global Markets Inc. 2006). The memorandum expressed fear that this 95% of the population is able to cast political votes, which could sway the economic waters in a manner that would threaten top-level investors and their wealth (Citigroup Global Markets Inc. 2006). The financial meltdown and current recession demonstrate that the consequences of dream work and the accumulation of debt to look and feel rich are sinking in, and the 1% of the population who continues to profit from the delusion is unsure how the remainder will react and are starting to panic about the potential of revolt (Citigroup Global Markets Inc. 2006).

The interviews and data analysis of my study were complete prior to the Wall Street financial meltdown. However, as people lose their

homes filled with furniture and goods purchased on credit cards to foreclosure and repossession, it seems evident that North American society's worship of a continually shifting plethora of consumer goods must change. In addition to pillaging the resources of other nations, exploiting their workforces to mass-produce branded goods for inhuman wages, and creating immeasurable carbon emissions moving commodities around the globe, employers at home are now forcing employees to race to the financial bottom by giving more of themselves to the means of production for less remuneration (Powers 2009). Further research into the experiences of retail service industry employees, particularly in relation to gender, ethnicity and race, as well as economic privilege must be conducted. It is my hope that this thesis provides preliminary insights into how this economy operates – through seduction and the proliferation of unquenchable desire.

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule

-Tell me about yourself.
-Tell me about your employment history.
-Tell me about your current job.
-Tell me about how you found your current job.
-Tell me about why you work at your current job.
-Tell me about your life outside of your job.
-How do you get ready to go to work?
-Describe a typical day at your job.
-Describe your typical 'day off' or day away from your job.
-How were you trained to do your job?
-What parts of your training do you find most useful in doing your job well?
-What do your employers sell at your job?
-What is your role in selling *x*?
-What is the best way to sell *x*?
-How do you feel about what your employer sells?
-What do your friends think about your job?
-Tell me about your relationships with your co-workers.
-Do you socialize with your co-workers after work?
    If yes: What kinds of activities do you do together?
    If no: Why not?
-Tell me about your relationships with your clients at work.
-What kinds of conversations do you have with your clients?
-Are your conversations with clients smooth and easy?
    If yes: What promotes ease of conversation?
    If no: Why not?
-What do you hope to personally get out of your job?
-How does your current job fit into your vision of your life?
-Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years? Fifteen years?
-Where do you see your career in five years? Ten years? Fifteen years?
-How do your clothes for work differ from the clothes you wear outside of work?
-What influences the clothes and accessories that you wear?
-What influences your hair and make-up?
-What is most important about your clothes for work?
-What is most important about your clothes on days you don't work?
-How do you feel about your general appearance?
-How do you feel about your appearance at work?
-How do you feel about your appearance compared to the appearance of your
co-workers?
-How do you feel about your appearance compared to the appearance of your customers?

Appendix B: Letter of Consent

I am inviting you to participate in a study relating to identity and the retail workplace. Your participation will include an interview discussing your current and past employment experiences. The interview will take place at your convenience and should take forty-five minutes to an hour and a half. Here are some important things to know:

First, there are minimal risks in participating in this study. If you do not want to discuss a particular issue, please say so and we will move to the next topic. If at any time you want to end the interview, we will stop. If you decide when we are done that you would not like to be included in this project anymore, I will not use this interview in my research. You can withdraw your participation up until the preliminary data analysis.

Second, there may be benefit to participating in the interview. You might enjoy reflecting on your appearance, work and leisure, and helping other people learn something about the experience of retail employees.

Third, the interview is confidential. I will change your information when I write my thesis and articles in order to protect your identity.

Fourth, I would like to audio record the interview so I can remember what was said and report it accurately. I will take notes during the interview to enhance these recordings. If you are uncomfortable with audio recording, I will only take notes. Only my committee members in the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta (Dr. Charles Barbour, Dr. Rob Shields, and Dr. Serra Tinic) and I will hear the interviews, and they will be kept in a secure location. Complete audio interviews or interview transcripts will not be published or made public.
I will destroy all visual, audio and written records within five years after the research project is done, unless you agree that I can contact you in future years to do follow-up research.

Please ask me any questions you may have about the research project, the interview, or me. If you have questions or comments later, you can call me at (250) 667-4643 or email me: *holroyd@ualberta.ca*. By signing below you agree that you have read and understand the nature and purpose of the study. Your signature also indicates your willingness to participate in this study.

_____	_____	_____
Interviewee's Name	Interviewee's Signature	Date
_____	_____	
Researcher's Signature	Date	

Permission to audio record: yes ___ no ___
Permission to be contacted for follow-up research: yes ___ no ___