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Communicating Through Clothing: The Meaning of Clothing Among Hispanic Women of Different Levels of Acculturation

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COMMUNICATING THROUGH CLOTHING:
THE MEANING OF CLOTHING AMONG HISPANIC WOMEN OF DIFFERENT
LEVELS OF ACCULTURATION

By

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I dedicate this work to my grandfather and the two of my grandmothers—the greatest dressmakers.
And…. to Uncle.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an exploration of how Hispanic women of different levels of acculturation communicate their individual, social and cultural identities through clothing and appearance. The purpose of this study is to help understand the way in which clothes, as objects, embody deeper cultural values, and how the meanings assigned to them are socially constructed and diffused in a bicultural context. This dissertation employs a cross-disciplinary theoretical perspective, bringing together concepts from social-psychology, symbolic interactionism, symbolic consumption, diffusion of innovation, and acculturation theories. Following the exploratory nature of this study, in-depth interviews and observations were employed to systematically examine the experiences of ten Hispanic women living in the United States.

The study demonstrates that, when it comes to clothing and appearance, Hispanic women have more commonalities than differences. Hispanic women—regardless of the level of acculturation—retain over time a set of values and beliefs characteristic of the Hispanic culture. These values and beliefs are learned early on from their mothers and maintained through constant interaction with the Hispanic culture through friends and family. Hispanic cultural values drive the way Hispanic women communicate gender, attractiveness, age, ethnicity, and social class. Another important part of this work explains the competency that Hispanic women have in communicating the different roles of their identities through clothing and appearance. This competency allows them to balance the need to make a positive impression on others with the need for self-expression. Finally, this study illustrates the interconnection between the different aspects of the adoption of clothes by pointing out sensorial experience, fit, and interpersonal influence as the major drivers of adoption among Hispanic women.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION. THE MEANING OF CLOTHING

“Fashion adoption is a fundamental part of human behavior” is the answer Sproles and Burns give to the question “Why is fashion important?” (1994, p. 22). The authors argue that fashion has a primary role in our lifestyles, is an essential element of our identity, and a reflection of the culture and society in which we live. Clothing fashions represent the *zeitgeist* of our times. Clothing fashions are reflections of cultural drivers and approaching social changes. This can be clearly seen in the introduction of casual wear and career apparel for women, which signified the approach of the independent, professional woman in the 1950s. The way fashion comes to life in clothing is one of the many material manifestations of social processes. Furthermore, fashion is considered a benchmark for understanding changes in society because of the interest it draws from opinion leaders and influentials (Goldsmith & Stith, 1992; Vernette, 2004).

This study deals with the meaning of clothing for Hispanic women of different levels of acculturation. Additionally, the research explores how that meaning is learned, created, and communicated.

The idea of meaning explored in this research refers to the signifying system by which we understand and communicate our experience of the world. Dress and personal appearance are visible components we use to differentiate and identify ourselves and others. For this reason, the study of values, attitudes and beliefs related to clothing is a powerful instrument for understanding human behavior. Further, clothing and fashion are manifestations of individual, social, and cultural processes. Clothing conveys the meaning of these processes through symbolic communication. However, the language of clothing varies according to different cultural and social norms. These values and norms are typically constructed, learned, and diffused through social interaction.

Despite the globalization of the fashion industry, clothing and appearance may have different connotations for women in Latin America and the United States. This is largely due to historical, geographic, and cultural factors. Other differences may occur among Hispanic women depending on their level of acculturation. The underlying assumption is that as Hispanic women acculturate into American culture, the symbolic meaning and function that clothing has for them also changes.
The theory of acculturation holds that an immigrant feels the influence of both her culture of origin as well as that of the new culture. In the acculturation process, as individuals learn new codes, roles, and behaviors, their general cultural values may also change. Clothing is one of the observable salient aspects of culture that stands for the less visible values of a culture. For Latina women, a symbol of acculturation to the American culture may be the adoption of certain dress codes. Similarly, the retention of certain dressing patterns can communicate cultural maintenance, ethnic identity, and/or retro-acculturation.

Acculturation is affected by individual psychological factors, but various institutional and individual sources of information also impact the process of acculturation. The roles of family, friends, peers, religious organizations, media, and other institutions are crucial in helping the individual learn about the behaviors and values of the new culture, but also in maintaining the traditional values of the original culture even in later generations. As Latina women participate in social interactions, new meanings attached to objects are adopted while old meanings are maintained. This research explains the process of creating meaning through the use of clothing as cultural objects.

**Scope of the study**

This study explores perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors as aspects influencing the construction and diffusion of the symbolic meaning of clothing for Latina women of different levels of acculturation. This research will expand on the limited existing knowledge by examining and explaining the phenomenon at the individual, group, and cultural levels. This study examines Latina women’s own accounts of the following aspects of clothing and its elements: the learning of norms and values related to clothing; the communication of individual and social meanings; the basic functions of clothing; the role of brands; the aspects of fashion that facilitate adoption; communication channels involved; and the decision-making process.

The exploratory and interpretative nature of this inquiry, which emphasizes Latina women’s insights, demands the use of in-depth interviews and observations. In addition, analysis and interpretative tools in the tradition of qualitative research offer systematic and powerful means to explain the phenomenon, bringing to light connections
that are difficult to obtain otherwise. The in-depth interview as a qualitative research technique has been crucial in the social sciences and in marketing in order to better understand human behavior. The findings of this study result in new insights about the construction and diffusion of meaning through clothing. These insights represent a contribution to existing knowledge in numerous areas relevant to the social and consumer sciences.

**Significance of the study**

The exploration of the construction and communication of meaning through clothing will contribute to the existing knowledge base of human behavior theory by integrating aspects of symbolic interaction, consumer behavior, diffusion of innovations, and acculturation. The qualitative research framework of this investigation offers a fresh, rigorous, and in-depth understanding of this topic, as well as the development of new hypotheses valuable for future studies. Furthermore, it fills a gap in existing literature regarding what clothing and fashion mean to Latina women. Also, as this research examines various aspects of clothing, issues about beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors related to appearance will be elucidated.

In terms of marketing and pragmatic functions, Hispanic market research is crucial because of the increasing size and cultural influence of the Hispanic population on U.S. life and culture. By 2004, the U.S. Hispanic population was estimated to be more than forty three million people, accounting for more than 14% of the U.S. population. Synovate (2004) projects that by 2050 there will be more than 154 million Hispanics, comprising almost 30% of the total U.S. population. This enormous growth represents tremendous opportunities for marketers. The estimated purchasing power of the U.S. Hispanic population in 2004 was more than $575 billion. Market research on Hispanic women is important because they compose 48.9% of the U.S. Hispanic population (Synovate, 2004).

Thus, in addition to contributions to theory, this study offers significant implications for marketers. A better understanding of the meaning of clothing and appearance among Latina women will result in insights into product development, the creation or evaluation of marketing strategies, the creation of relevant marketing segments, and the elucidation of important questions for future research. Furthermore, a
better understanding of the social interactions during which the meaning of clothing is created allows marketers to identify crucial individual and group dynamics. This translates into more effective message diffusion through interpersonal influence.

Moreover, many of the marketing implications in this research can be applied not only to the apparel and cosmetic industries but also to health and wellness and other social marketing areas. Thus, this investigation may contribute to the enhancement of Latina women’s self-esteem, body acceptance, and health habits.

**Organization of the study**

This dissertation is divided into eight chapters. Chapter One comprises the introduction and overview of the study. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature in three main conceptual areas: clothing as communication, diffusion of fashion, and culture, clothing and acculturation.

Based on my research interests and the gaps in the literature, Chapter Two also includes the research questions this study intends to answer. RQ1: What are the norms and values learned through social interaction as related to clothing and fashion? RQ2: How do Hispanic women use clothing to communicate individual and social identity in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and prestige? RQ3: How do Hispanic women in this study perceive the functions of clothing in terms of protection, modesty, immodesty and adornment? RQ4: What are the characteristics of the communication channels and social networks in which meaning is created and diffused? RQ5: Which aspects of new styles facilitate adoption? RQ6: What is the role of brands in adoption of clothing? RQ7: What is the adoption decision-making process like? RQ8: How do all these above aspects change according to the level of acculturation?

Chapter Three explains the methodology and research design of this investigation. I explain the selection of the multiple case study approach through in-depth interviews and observations based on the exploratory purpose of the study. Also, sampling strategies are discussed and the data collection, analysis, and interpretation are described. Finally, a short narration of each interview serves as a presentation of each of the women I interviewed. With these snapshots I intend to bring these women to life and transmit to the reader the feeling and the dynamic of each interview. Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven recount the findings and discussions. Chapter Eight presents the conclusions,
contributions, and limitations of the study as well as directions for future studies. I also include a section of implications and recommendations for marketers in Appendix F.

Chapter Four focuses on the social experiences that have formed the way Hispanic women understand the world through clothing. This section deals with the norms and values learned in childhood and in other situations in which they socialize in new contexts.

Chapter Five explains how Hispanic women in this study communicated identity in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and prestige. In this chapter the function of modesty/immodesty and adornment is also discussed. Chapter Six explains how women in this study decided what to wear. An extension of the previous chapter that deals with the communication of different aspects of identity, this chapter describes the practical strategies used by women to convey the different facets of their individual selves. A dramaturgical approach explains how these women managed their appearance considering the role they were going to play and the audience they were going to encounter. Finally, I expose the different strategies participants used to decide what to wear influenced by the clothes they already have and by the mood they are in.

Chapter Seven deals with the shopping behavior and the purchase decision-making process. The role of media and interpersonal relations as sources of influence are analyzed. Women in this study claimed to have low media consumption in general and particularly low consumption of media related to fashion and clothes. There was a low awareness of media targeting Hispanic women. As expected, less acculturated women consumed more Spanish-language media than the more acculturated ones. This latter group also consumed some Spanish-language media for language maintenance and in general had negative attitudes toward the content in these media.

In Chapter Eight I point out the importance of the mother as an agent in the enculturation and acculturation process, the commonalities due to cultural similarities and the globalization of clothes and styles, the traditional views of gender roles, the communication of ethnic identity by separation from the Anglo style, the different perceptions of status according to the level of acculturation, the importance of self-monitoring and self-expression, and the basic aspects of clothing adoption.

In this chapter I also emphasize the contributions this study brings to the areas of acculturation, particularly to the study of biculturalism and the bidimensional model of
acculturation. I also argue that this study demonstrates the prevalence of a network of Hispanic cultural values, and how they manifest themselves in material objects, such as clothing. Moreover, I reflect on the contributions to the social psychology, symbolic interactionism and symbolic consumption approaches by validating how meaning is socially constructed through clothes. I explain how this study demonstrates the connection between various aspects of the diffusion of innovation framework. Moreover, I discuss the importance of in-depth, semi-structured interviews in participants’ homes. Finally, I discuss the limitations of the study and directions for future research.

Because this study is exploratory, I selected a qualitative research approach in the form of in-depth interviews and observations with multiple case studies. It is important to acknowledge that the results of this qualitative research are not generalizable to the larger population of Hispanic women in the U.S. Instead of generalizability, the value of this research lies in providing themes and insights that help understand human behavior in closeness to the reality of the topic under investigation. The findings of this study may serve as groundwork for the development of hypotheses in future research.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Fashion is not only clothing, but also habits, arts, ideas, living and morals, because it is essentially symbolism (Sapir, 1931).

The overall purpose of this research is to understand how clothes communicate different individual, social, and cultural meanings among the Hispanic women. Meaning in this study refers to the underlying signifying system by which we understand and communicate our experience. Also, this study aims to understand the process by which new clothing styles are adopted.

Fashion and clothes have been studied from many contrasting perspectives. According to the discipline that explains the phenomenon, fashion is seen as a way of seeking individuality (psychology), an art (aesthetic), a language (semiotic), and so on. What most approaches have in common is that they recognize the interplay between the individual and group dimensions in fashion. Also, most of the disciplines that analyze fashion explain it as a process-oriented phenomenon (Sproles, 1985).

The literature review for this investigation encompasses the conceptual areas of the function of clothing, clothing as communication, the diffusion of fashion, and the relationship between culture, clothing, and acculturation. The literature covers research conducted in the areas of social-psychological and symbolic interaction, symbolic consumption, diffusion of innovations, the Hispanic culture, and acculturation. Weimann (1994) states that the symbolic communication and diffusion approaches, together with the social network approach, are complementary rather than mutually exclusive models in the study of fashion. This review focuses on both the symbolic and the diffusion aspects of fashion. The social network aspect is addressed mostly as related to the diffusion of innovations model and in the research design, in the methodology section. Related to the cultural aspect of fashion, constructs that characterize the Hispanic culture are reviewed. This multidisciplinary approach offers a pertinent theoretical perspective to study the phenomenon in its individual, social, and cultural dimensions.

The concepts that come out in the review of these theoretical frameworks are used as “sensitizing concepts” in order to guide the interview and analysis process. Sensitizing
concepts are “loosely operationalized notions” that give an initial direction to the researcher, who then inquires about the meaning of the concept in the particular set of circumstances of her research (Patton, 2002 p. 278).

**Basic functions of clothing**

Some of the needs fulfilled by fashion adoption are intrinsically related to the functions of clothing (Sproles & Burns, 1994). The early studies in the area of psychology of clothing distinguish four intrinsic functions of clothing: protection, modesty, immodesty and adornment (Dunlap, 1928; Flügel, 1930; Hurlock, 1929).

**Protection**

The basic function of clothing is its protective function, which refers to the intrinsic characteristic of covering the body (Barnard, 1996; Flügel, 1930; Lurie, 1981; Sproles & Burns, 1994). The protection clothing offers is not only material —protecting the body from the heat, cold, accidents—but also immaterial, in the sense that it protects the soul and the mind from evil. For example, just as umbrellas, visors, gloves protect against the sun or the cold, amulets and other magical adornments protect from magical and spiritual agencies as well as from sin and obscenity (Flügel, 1930).

It is not accurate to say that clothing is the cultural response to a basic human need. On one hand, cultures have different responses to basic needs. There are numerous illustrations of how the relationship between clothing and the need of protection varies across cultures. For example, the native people of Tierra del Fuego wearing light clothing in the snow (Flügel, 1930), or the use of miniskirts during winter in our contemporary societies are evidence that the relation between clothing and protection from merciless weather is not an absolute link.

**Modesty/immodesty**

Other intrinsic and interrelated functions of clothing are modesty and immodesty (Barnard, 1996; Flügel, 1930; Hurlock, 1929; Sproles & Burns, 1994). Modesty refers to the concepts of decency, properness, and appropriateness and to the idea that certain body parts are shameful and should therefore be covered. Implicit to the idea of modesty is the Judeo-Christian tradition which stresses the soul as opposed to the body (Barnard, 1996). Covering the body may imply the desire to avoid sin and shamefulness.
Immodesty, on the other hand, refers to using clothes to draw attention to one’s body and body parts (Barnard, 1996; Rouse, 1989; Sproles & Burns, 1994). It is argued that clothing can both cover the body and draw attention to it at the same time, the way tight jeans or certain brassieres do (Davis, 1992; Sproles & Burns, 1994). Similar to the protection function, the modesty/immodesty function of clothes is defined by cultural values and social notions of decency and morality. Moreover, notions of decency change over time within a single culture or society (Sproles & Burns, 1994). Related to these changes, which happen over time, are the shifts in the focus on different areas of the body deemed attractive or sexually appealing. This is known as the “theory of the shifting erogenous zone” (Barnard, 1996; Flügel, 1930; Sproles & Burns, 1994). Finally, what is considered modest/immodest might vary according to the situation. For example, what might be considered modest in a vacation setting would likely be immodest in a business setting. Fashion may have an important role in facilitating the social acceptance of clothing items once considered immodest.

Adornment

Another function of clothing is adornment. Personal decoration can be used to increase attractiveness, symbolize status and identity or raise the individual’s self-esteem. (Sproles & Burns, 1994). Furthermore, there is an aesthetic pleasure in the act of creating and displaying adornment (Roach & Eicher, 1979). External adornments added to basic clothes can be used to increase the relative height or width of a person, emphasize the movement of the body, etc. Again, this function of clothing and fashion is defined within each culture.

There are some aspects of the basic functions of clothing that particularly affect Hispanic women in their relationship with clothing. For example, because the Catholic tradition has profoundly shaped the Hispanic culture, one can expect that the function of modesty is highly valued among Latina women. On the other hand, the weather conditions in most of Latin America allow and demand the use of light clothing. This may have helped to shape the popular assumption that Hispanic women tend to dress in a more immodest way, showing more skin than their Anglo counterparts. Also, the influence of African and indigenous religions on Hispanic culture may affect beliefs about the protective function of objects, including those of using clothing to guard against spiritual evils.
Social-psychological and cultural functions of fashion

Differentiation and individuality

Other reasons for adopting fashion serve to satisfy social, psychological, and cultural needs. Fashion also satisfies the need for differentiation and individuality. Fashion provides a way for individuals to differentiate themselves from others (Roach & Eicher, 1979; Sproles & Burns, 1994); to express their egos (Sapir, 1931); to feel narcissistic pleasure in their own bodies (Flügel, 1930); to proclaim their uniqueness (Kawamura, 2005); to create ‘self-symbols’ (Anspach, 1967); to express personal creativity and aesthetic talent (Dichter, 1985; Sproles, 1979); and to hide feelings and manage their moods (Roach & Eicher, 1979).

Social affiliation

An important need satisfied by fashion is the need for social affiliation. Sometimes members of social groups adopt a clothing style that becomes a means of group identification. Individuals who want to achieve or maintain social approval, acceptance, and a sense of belonging conform to the group dressing norms (Sproles, 1979; Sproles & Burns, 1994). For example, compliments about one’s dress become a tangible component of group acceptance (Kaiser, 1997).

Individuals may also identify with a reference group to which they do not belong, and their clothing behavior might be strongly influenced by this group. This includes maintaining conformity within the group and emulation of taste of admired members within the group (Anspach, 1967; Kaiser, 1997).

Social status

Fashion and clothing are also used to indicate social status, power distance, and prestige (Anspach, 1967). People frequently judge others’ social worth and status according to what they are wearing (Kawamura, 2005). Clothing can indicate the status an individual has in the production or economic system of a given society by reflecting his or her occupational role. For example, white uniforms are associated with nurses, and white-collar outfits with office work (Roach & Eicher, 1979). In societies with large divisions of caste or class, exclusive clothing and adornment can be used to indicate, for example, the social worth of the elite (Roach & Eicher, 1979).
The use of clothing can also indicate status in other dimensions such as gender and age (Barnard, 1996). In general, cultures use clothing to differentiate males from females, and younger from older people. For example, the use of trousers, heavy materials and facial hair has been traditionally associated with masculinity, whereas the use of high heels, skirts, and delicate materials has being associated with femininity (Sproles & Burns, 1994). On the other hand, there has also been a tendency towards androgynous elements in dress at least since the early nineteenth century (Davis, 1992).

Fashion also satisfies the need of recreation (Barnard, 1996), the need to be modern and up to date, showing the individual’s awareness of what is going on in his or her environment (Blumer, 1968; Dichter, 1985; Sproles & Burns, 1994) or battling the feelings of aging and being left behind (Dichter, 1985). Finally, there is the need to escape boredom, particularly in more sophisticated societies in which the abundance of leisure time leads to curiosity (Sapir, 1931; Sproles & Burns, 1994).

**Clothing as communication**

**The clothing code**

As illustrated in the section above, fashion communicates meanings that go beyond material characteristics. This communication is possible because clothes are symbols. A symbol is an entity that represents some other entity (Morris, 1955).

According to the semiotic approach, fashion is a language and is therefore systematically organized like one. This perspective emphasizes the visual language of fashion with grammar, syntax, and vocabulary (Barthes, 1983; Floch, 2005; Lurie, 1981). Similar to the linguistic code, clothing and fashion have denotative (literal) meaning, and connotative (implied, symbolic) meaning (Barnard, 1996).

Other authors argue that the type of coding contained in clothing can only be compared with the linguistic code in a metaphorical way because the fixed rules that control language have no parallel in the clothing code system (Davis, 1992; McCracken, 1988). McCracken (1988) argues that the difference is basically that clothing is a closed code and does not possess the combinatorial freedom that language has to express for example, sarcasm or irony. This is because material culture (clothing being a part of it) is limited in its expressive range. Finally, clothing styles and elements are subject to
undercoding, meaning that they do not offer a dependable interpretative system of rules for interpretation.

Regardless of the complications of the language metaphor and the differences between the clothing code and the linguistic code, it is clear that clothing exhibits a great deal of sign conventionalization. Elements of clothing can be linked to elements of meaning. For example, elements such as angular or curvilinear design can be related to masculinity or femininity respectively, and dark colors are linked to formal occasions while light colors are usually linked to informal or casual occasions (Davis, 1992). However, only customs or uniforms convey unequivocal interpretation (Calefato, 2004; Hoffmann, 1984).

An important aspect of the clothing code is that it is context dependent. Thus, the combination of elements or the use of a particular style will have meaning depending upon the wearer, the occasion, and the location (Davis, 1992; Tseelon, 2001). Some authors suggest that the perception and interpretation of appearance take place in a holistic way, as a gestalt, composed of the cues of the physical message and the context or background (Damhorst, 1990). For this reason, it is necessary to take into account the physical surroundings of the wearer and the cultural environment (Delong, 1987).

Also, the meanings given to various styles, appearances or trends vary between social groups. Different clothing items or styles evoke different associations for diverse groups. Social identity, tastes, and people’s familiarity of the symbolic objects of a society influence the meaning attached to clothing and fashion. In semiotic terms, the fashion code shows high social variability in the signifier-signified relationship (Davis, 1992). Even if a fashion trend in the material sense (signifier) might be the same for everyone, the connoted or evoked meaning (signified) is different for different social groups (Barnard, 1996; Davis, 1992).

Davis (1992) explains that in Western societies, some identity polarities tend to produce social changes that are a constant inspiration for fashion. Examples of these identity polarities are the tensions between: youth/old age, masculinity/femininity, work/play, domesticity/worldliness, and conformity/rebellion.

McCracken (1988) adds that meaning is also affected by cultural principles. Cultural principles refer to the values according to which cultural categories are organized and evaluated in each society. For example, clothing may show a distinction
between male and female cultural categories. Clothing may also show the cultural principles or properties according to which these categories are created, such as the supposed “delicacy” of women or the “strength” of men (p.76).

Social status is another identity tension that symbolically acquires substance in clothing and fashion (Davis, 1992). The assumption is that individuals constantly attempt to resolve the tension between asserting and rejecting a claim to social superiority. This tension can be exemplified by the way in which the modesty encouraged by the Judeo-Christian Weltanschauung is ironically a sign of superior social status whereas the extravagant exhibition of wealth stands for status posturing. This tension finds an outlet in clothes. Social superiority does not need to be proclaimed, this is why the “poor look” was made elegant (Davis, 1992, p. 64), and why ostentation is a mark of those who need to “flaunt it” (p.63).

In addition to the variation of meaning at the social level, there is also variation in interpretation at the individual level. Fashion symbols have a great deal of variation in the meaning attributed to them because individuals have their own frame of interpretation. Individuals’ frames of interpretation are forms of cultural and social norms that reflect the values that they have personally adopted (Hoffmann, 1984; Noesjirwan & Crawford, 1982; Sproles & Burns, 1994).

Nonetheless, how do the creation and interpretation of meaning take place?

**Making meaning of symbols**

**Symbolic interaction.** The area of sociology called symbolic interactionism explains that individuals attempt to understand the world they live in by developing a frame of interpretation based on the norms and values learned through human interaction.

The term symbolic interactionism was invented by Herbert Blumer (1969). The theory is based mainly on the philosophy of George Mead (1934), but it was also influenced by the work of other American figures, such as John Dewey and William James, among others. The basic idea behind this approach is that meaning is created and maintained through social interaction (Blumer, 1969b). The foundational question of symbolic interaction is: “What common set of symbols and understandings has emerged to give meaning to people interactions?” (Patton, 2002, p. 112).

There are three basic premises central to symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969).
The first premise is that “human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them” (p.2). By things, Blumer refers to everything that people may perceive in their daily life. This includes physical objects, other human beings, situations, and institutions. It can be said that we act toward other people on the basis of what their appearances hold for us (Kaiser, 1997). As people have different experiences, their interpretation of fashion might differ from one another. For example, if individuals are exposed to fashion through advertising in a high fashion magazine, they might perceive it as high fashion. Instead, if they have never seen a particular fashion before, they might interpret it as strange or old-fashioned (Sproles & Burns, 1994).

The second premise of symbolic interaction is that “the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows” (Blumer, 1969, p.2). This implies that the “source of meaning” in not intrinsic to the thing that holds it, neither is it a congregation of psychological elements in the person. Instead, meaning arises as a process of interaction between individuals. Meaning is a social product. Kaiser (1997) adds to this idea that meanings are not just passively received, but that people must learn and discover them. For example, children learn to differentiate people who would wear a certain kind of clothing from those who would not. The role of clothing becomes apparent only after understanding the elements of its symbolic system (Kaiser, 1997).

The third premise is that meanings are modified by a continuous interpretative process in which the actor interacts with himself (Blumer, 1969). As applied to clothing, it means that individuals discover a certain meaning of a clothing symbol, yet they may reinterpret or alter the meaning according to a process of inner conversation along with posterior interactions. This means that individuals are not only influenced by images of others with whom they interact, but that they also make meaning through an internal dialogue.

**Symbolic consumption.** Symbolic consumption, a discipline that merges symbolic interactionism and consumer behavior, studies how products serve as symbols and how they are consumed based on their symbolic meaning (Hirschman, 1980; Solomon, 1983). The assumption is that one of the most powerful influences in purchase decision-making and product adoption is the symbolic meaning that products may have. Thus, many times, individuals select fashion products because they are symbolic of “who
they are” or “who they would like to be” (Sproles & Burns, 1994, p. 237), rather than because of their design, color or fabric, or product performance (Hirschman, 1980). No research was found in this area which would be specifically related to the Hispanic population.

From the symbolic consumption perspective, the individual and social aspects of consumption are inseparable. The development of an individual self-identity is intimately linked to the development of the collective social identity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). In this way the function of the symbolic meaning of products is double: a self-symbolic function that is internal and helps in the project of constructing self-identity, and a social-symbolic function that is external and helps to construct the social world (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

Another aspect to this indivisible link between individual and social identity is the idea that people have a hierarchical organization of levels of the self. Belk (1998) suggests that levels of the self are: individual, family, community, and group. Different products are crucial in the definition of each level of identity (p.152). The dialectic between individual/social or internal/external identification is based on the idea that it is through social interaction that self-identity is validated (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Jenkins, 1996). The social environment people live in is rich in symbols. It is through the socialization process that individuals learn the meanings of symbols in products (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

The self-symbolic role of material goods is based on the idea that individuals are what they own because their possessions are perceived as a part of their extended selves (Belk, 1988). That “we are what we have” (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992; Sartre, 1998) becomes apparent through anthropological research examining the way people ritually treat possessions and the use of possessions by others after someone’s death. So, for example, Belk (1988) argues that the loss of possessions through theft or casualty may signify a lessening of self.

Yet another facet in the study of individual and product symbolism comes from the postmodern concept of the self. Fundamental to postmodernism is the idea that the self is not a fixed matter but rather a changing entity that individuals create in part by using products (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Schenk & Holman, 1980). An important premise is that the individual has a sort of repertoire of self-images from which he or she
chooses one to express at a given time, according to the social situation (Goffman, 1959; Sirgy, 1982). Products and brands are some of the instruments used to achieve the expression of self-image. In this sense, McCracken (1988) sees the consumer as a “cultural project” whose purpose is to complete the self. The consumer system provides the individual with cultural materials to bring to life their ideas of what it is to be a man or a woman, or a professional because all the cultural notions are embodied in consumer goods (p. 88).

Seen from a different perspective, creating the self might also involve choosing not to have certain products (Wattanasuwan, 2005). Wattanasuwan (2005) explains that consumption resistance is also a way to create a particular lifestyle. For example, for the creation of a new identity, people might abandon possessions that are associated with the old self. Also, consumers in transition rely on possessions that are symbols of the past at the same time that they rely on those that represent the new self. The new symbols help them establish the new identity (Noble & Walker, 1997). These last aspects of the creation of the self may be useful in explaining changes in the appearance and fashion choices in the group of interest for this research, Hispanic women in the process of acculturation.

If from the individual perspective “to be is to have,” then from the social perspective “to have is to belong” (Wattanasuwan, 2005). Symbolic consumption is a tool used to construct the social self. Thus, acquiring and displaying certain possessions also expresses a sense of group identity. Wattanasuwan (2005) notes that nowadays the creation of a group self is not limited to the social circles with which individuals literally interact. The idea here is that symbolic consumption allows the creation of a sense of membership also with “imagined communities” (p. 182). This idea is in alignment with the need for social affiliation explained above in the social-psychological perspective.

The collaboration between symbolic interaction and consumer behavior has generated a set of propositions that explain the symbolic meaning of products (Leigh & Gabel, 1992; Solomon, 1983).

The first proposition is that the possession and exhibition of certain products are considered cues of the characteristics of individuals and they help to predict their behavior (Solomon, 1983). The second assumption is the idea that the symbolic properties of a product can be considered the cause of consumer behavior, increasing or
decreasing the likelihood of purchase. This proposition differs from the common assumption that the consumer’s mood or deliberate strategies for need satisfaction are the ones that determine product choice (Leigh & Gabel, 1992; Solomon, 1983). The third assumption is that symbolic features attached to products influence the individual’s self-evaluation and the way individuals view how others evaluate them based upon the products with which they surround themselves (Leigh & Gabel, 1992; Solomon, 1983).

Yet another idea suggests that the consumption of symbolic products is more likely to take place when the individual lacks knowledge about how to perform the required role or about how the scripts for certain unknown events go (Leigh & Gabel, 1992; Solomon, 1983). In other words, symbolic products act as a compensatory mechanism when there is a discrepancy between the required or desired role/script and the individual’s ability to perform accordingly.

Although this is not explicitly stated in the symbolic consumption literature, one could assume that these last two assumptions are particularly relevant for the study of individuals undergoing the acculturation process. Acculturation involves a learning process in which individuals learn new scripts, roles and symbolic cues attached to products. There is very scarce research on the consumer socialization and learning process among Hispanics (Peñaloza, 1990).

**The symbolism of brands**

An additional layer related to the issue of symbolic consumption is the one concerning brands. Brands are considered important factors in creating individual identity, self-expression, and sense of achievement. Also, buying and displaying brands that are considered to be high status help the individual gain social prestige. Thus, brands offer hedonistic and social benefits (O’Cass & Frost, 2002).

The use of high status brands is related to the display of wealth, which is in turn supposed to reward the individual with preferential treatment by others in their social group (O’Cass & Frost, 2002). Additionally, from the individual/internal perspective, consumers are known to relate themselves to the personality of the brand (Aaker, 1997). Consumers and advertisers infuse brands with enduring and distinct human personality traits. As a consequence, individuals relate to brands the same way they might relate to other people, celebrities or historical figures (Aaker, 1997).
Research has shown the importance of social influence in brand preferences. Hogg, Bruce and Hill (1998) conducted a study with young consumers on the impact of social influences in their evaluation of branded fashion products. The findings showed an awareness of the symbolic and emblematic meaning of the branded products and the influence of peers and significant others in the adoption of these products. This study use the clothing product category based on the reasoning that the influence of the reference group is weak for the product category itself (it is a public necessity), but, in contrast, the reference group influence on brand choice is strong.

From a cultural perspective, little research exists as to how brand personality works across cultures. However, studies have shown that in cultures with an individualistic orientation, consumers are more likely to choose brands to convey how they are different from members of their in-group. On the other hand, in collectivistic cultures, consumers are more likely to choose brands to convey how they are similar to members of their in-group (Aaker, 1998). Because the Hispanic culture is a collectivistic culture (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005) one could expect Hispanic consumers to be more likely to use brands that express their similarity to the group they belong to. This would be a way of conveying the interdependence of and conformity to the group that characterize collectivistic cultures.

The issue of the consumption of status related brands is particularly interesting when studying Hispanic consumer behavior. One of the most common assumptions in the Hispanic marketing industry is that Hispanics have a preference for brands that convey prestige. However, only a couple of academic studies have shown that Hispanics tend to consume products that highlight and maintain the symbols of their economic success (Valdez, Korzenny & McGavock, 2005; Wallendorf & Nelson, 1986).

The diffusion of fashion

Fashion diffusion models

The diffusion of fashion is extremely complicated because of the decentralization of fashion production and the enormous variety of choices in products. New symbolic meaning is created continuously by designers, media and by users through social interaction. New styles and trends are created by the fashion industry but also by creative
consumers. In this way, fashion leadership can be located in different segments of the population (Sproles & Burns 1994; Crane, 1999).

Whereas some authors suggest that fashion is a mark of modern western civilization (Blumer, 1969; Flügel, 1930), others argue that fashion is not exclusive to these type of societies. The argument here is that fashion is universal because of systematic style creation and change; emulation and differentiation also take place in smaller-scale societies, only not with the same frequency and blatancy as in industrial societies (Cannon, 1998; Craik, 1994; Kawamura, 2005).

There are three predominant theories that explain fashion diffusion in society. Each of them implies a different direction in the relations among groups in a society.

The top-down model, based on George Simmel’s theory of 1957, suggests that new styles are adopted mainly by the upper classes and then diffused to the middle and working classes. According to this, the lower classes strive to be like the upper class and thus imitate their styles. As soon as a particular fashion reaches the lower classes, upper classes respond by adopting new fashions to differentiate themselves. The social processes behind this model are differentiation, imitation, and social contagion. These processes have a successive character that creates a self-perpetuating cycle of change (McCracken, 1985). This model is no longer suitable for modern society because style differentiation is no longer in alignment with social classes (McCracken, 1985).

Also in the fifties, there emerged the horizontal-flow model as an alternative to the top-down theory. According to this perspective, the top-down process is not suitable because the system of mass production together with the mass communication of fashion information makes new fashions available to all socioeconomic classes at the same time. The focus of this approach is on the influence of opinion leadership in groups of a similar social class; especially peer groups (Sproles & Burns, 1994). One of the most important studies providing support to this theory is the Katz and Lazarsfeld study (1955/2006).

In addition to this research, other studies have supported the claim that opinion leaders are dispersed across social classes and not concentrated in the upper class (King, 1963). One of the reasons for this is that the same fashion is available to all classes during the same time period (Grindereng, 1967).

Blumer (1969b) developed the collective selection theory also based on the idea that opinion leaders are not uniquely present in the upper class. Blumer argues that
fashion is a process of collective selection, in which the styles that better represent the general trend in consumers’ tastes are the only ones that become fashionable.

An alternative to the top-down and horizontal flow models is the bottom-up model developed by Field (1970). Clearly, this perspective suggests that the orientation of fashion diffusion goes from lower-status groups to the larger population including the higher status groups. This model, however, substitutes social status for age or subgroup cultures as the variables that bring status to the fashion leader. Adolescents, ethnic minorities, and blue-collar workers who belong to urban subcultures in the lower classes are the ones that generate innovations (fashion, music, etc) that, with time, are adopted by the higher-status groups (Crane, 1999; Sproles & Burns, 1994).

Scholars in the sociology of fashion suggest that the models that emphasize class differentiation and diffusion direction no longer seem to be relevant to the study of fashion diffusion. Crane (1999) states that the characteristics of the present situation redefine the way fashion is diffused. According to Crane, the decentralization of fashion, the fragmentation of the public, and the proliferation of segmented mass media characterize modern society. Under these circumstances, diffusion consists of “many relatively short trajectories, in which a particular style diffuses up and down to certain segments of the population but not others” (p. 23).

Despite the differences in perspectives, there are common elements underlying these models. The most influential theoretical approach to explain the transfer of meaning in society is the diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 2003). This diffusion model has already been applied to the study of fashion diffusion and fashion opinion leadership (Grindereng, 1967; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955/2006). Even if this model has not been applied to the study of symbolism in fashion, there are several aspects of this theoretical approach that explain how new symbolism is created, communicated, and diffused in society. Some constructs of the diffusion of innovation approach offer complementary explanations to the symbolic interactionism and symbolic consumption approach. Moreover, other aspects of these theoretical approaches coincide, the most important of these being that “the meaning of an innovation is thus gradually worked out through a process of social construction” (Rogers, 2003, p. xxi). The following section reviews the aspects of the diffusion of innovations approach as they apply to fashion.
Fashion as an innovation

Rogers (2003) defines diffusion as “a process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system.” In this perspective, communication is a “process in which participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding” (p. 5).

An innovation is an idea, object or practice that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption (Rogers, 2003). Some examples of fashion innovation could be new styles, colors, details, or fabrics. The innovation does not need to be new in the absolute sense, but it must be perceived as new by the individual. Therefore, in the case of fashion, a style could be from a previous season but may be perceived as new by the individual in comparison to his/her current wardrobe (Sproles & Burns, 1994).

There are five aspects of an innovation that individuals consider before adopting (or not adopting). The first aspect is the innovation’s relative advantage. This refers to the degree to which the innovation is perceived as superior to the previous alternatives. For example, a fashion innovation could be considered superior because it is more economical, or it could be that it has greater utility because it can be worn year-round. From the symbolic point of view, one reason for adopting a new style may be that the innovation increases social prestige, another possible relative advantage.

The second aspect of the innovation is compatibility (Rogers, 2003). This refers to the degree to which the new fashion is consistent with the existing norms and values of the potential adopters. In fashion, like in other innovation areas, the more consistent the idea is with current values, the more likely it is to become popular. One classic example of an innovation that failed in the 1960s because of its incompatibility with the local norms of public decency was the introduction of the topless swimsuit (monokini) in the U.S. (Sproles & Burns, 1994). This aspect is relevant to the study of U.S. Hispanics. The assumption is that some norms and values that characterize this culture differ from the norms and values of the general U.S. population. Thus, some innovations may be resisted.

A third aspect of the innovation is complexity. This refers to the degree of difficulty that the individual may have in learning and understanding the use of the innovation. In the case of fashion, most of the products are low in complexity.
**Observability** is the fourth aspect considered in an innovation. Innovations that are easily observable are more likely to be spread because more potential adopters are likely to become aware of them. New fashions are inherently visible not only because of media and advertising but also because consumers wear them in public (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). However, the problem with this is that the number of fashion innovations is so high that they have to compete for attention.

The last aspect to consider about an innovation is its *trialibility*. This refers to the degree to which the innovation may be tested on a limited basis. In general, fashion innovations can be tried in a preliminary manner at stores. The social approval or disapproval for the decision is the real test of its trialibility (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004).

**Steps in the innovation decision**

The aspects just described help to form favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward the innovation. Attitude formation is actually the second step in the innovation decision model (Rogers, 2003). In making a decision about whether to adopt or reject an innovation, individuals pass from gaining knowledge about it (*knowledge stage*), to forming an attitude toward it (*persuasion stage*), to actually making the decision to adopt or reject (*adoptions itself*), to the implementation of the innovation (*implementation stage*), and finally to the confirmation of the decision (*confirmation stage*). This description of the decision-making process has some similarities with the symbolic interaction perspective. The cognitive process of awareness and the attitude formation towards the innovation are somewhat comparable to the internal processes with which individuals interpret the meaning of things described by the symbolic interactionist perspective (Blumer, 1969b).

**Adopter categories**

The diffusion of innovation model suggests five adopter categories that are defined on the basis of their innovativeness or how early or late individuals adopt new ideas in comparison to other members of a system.

*Innovators* are those that adopt information first. They are the most active information seekers, have a higher degree of media exposure, a wide interpersonal network, more formal education, and high socioeconomic status (Rogers, 2003). In fashion, innovators are also original consumers that create new styles by mixing and matching styles already in the market (Sproles & Burns, 1994). *Early adopters* are
second in innovativeness. These are individuals that people turn to for advice and information; therefore, they influence adoption and diffusion through interpersonal communication (Rogers, 2003). **Late adopters** adopt ideas after the average member of the system, and are more skeptical individuals, with relatively limited resources. **Laggards** are those individuals who last adopt the innovation. They are the most traditional members of the system, very cautious and resistant to innovations. In addition, their communication network is local and isolated from other networks (Rogers, 2003). In the field of fashion diffusion, the adopter’s category normal frequency has been compared to other diffusion curves such as the fashion life cycle, the diffusion of fashion, fad and classics, and the fashion marketing cycle (Sproles & Burns, 1994).

**Communication channels**

Communication channels are the means by which messages get from the source to the receiver such as, for instance, the individual who is considering the adoption. Rogers (2003) categorizes communication channels as interpersonal versus mass media, and localite versus cosmopolite. Different channels play different roles in the decision-making process. They are also different for early and for late adopters. Mass media channels are generally the most effective channels to create awareness and increase knowledge about the innovation. They reach audiences rapidly. Furthermore, they are important to trigger curiosity and interest in innovators and early adopters. On the other hand, interpersonal channels are more effective in persuading the individual to accept a new idea. They offer a two-way exchange of information allowing for clarification and probing. Because they can change strongly held attitudes, interpersonal channels are more effective when dealing with late adopters or laggards. It is important to remember that social interaction is what creates meaning, according to the symbolic interactionist perspective (Blumer, 1969b).

**Opinion leaders.** As suggested above, opinion leaders are the drivers of interpersonal communication, a crucial aspect of the diffusion of fashion. Opinion leaders are individuals who exert informal influence on other individuals’ attitudes and behavior in a desired way with relative frequency (Rogers, 2003). Fashion opinion leaders are more innovative and adopt earlier than their followers. They also tend to have greater exposure to mass media, to be more cosmopolite, to have greater social participation (Summers, 1970), greater contact with change agents, and higher income, although they
are fairly well distributed among all socio-economic groups (Katz & Lazarfeld, 1955/2006; King, 1963). Fashion opinion leaders conform to the social system so that if the system favors change, opinion leaders are more innovative (Schrank & Gilmore, 1973; Simmel, 1957). They are younger (Goldsmith et al., 1991; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955/2006; Summers, 1970), less shy (Summers, 1970) and interested in fashion (Goldsmith et al., 1991; Grindereng, 1967). Because they are more cosmopolite, they become mediators between change and tradition. Marketers often build communication strategies directed toward opinion leaders because they understand their role in the diffusion of their products.

In the study of opinion leadership there is also a distinction between monomorphic and polymorphic opinion leadership (Rogers, 2003). Monomorphic opinion leadership is the degree to which the individuals are influential for a single topic. Polymorphic leadership, on the other hand, is the degree to which individuals influence others on a variety of topics. Moreover, some individuals may influence in multiple spheres of decision for some groups, whereas they exert influence in just a particular sphere for some other group (Merton, 1957).

In marketing, it seems to be the consensus that opinion leadership is product or domain specific (King & Summers, 1970). Various recent studies have revised and modified the first opinion leadership measurement scales in order to develop effective measurements more relevant to consumer theory (Flynn, Goldsmith, & Eastman, 1996).

The distinction between monomorphic and polymorphic opinion leadership is particularly relevant for the study of Hispanic consumer behavior. Korzenny and Korzenny (2005) point out that Hispanics tend to be more polymorphic than monomorphic. These authors explain that traditional societies have a higher number of leaders that exert influence in multiple domains, whereas leaders in modern societies tend to be more specialized. However, there is a lack of research regarding the nature of Hispanic women’s leadership in general and fashion leadership in particular.

**Interpersonal networks**

The diffusion of innovations model (Rogers, 2003) explains the nature of the diffusion networks in which opinion leadership and interpersonal influence operate. Homophily and heterophily are basic principles to understand how communication flows in social networks. Homophily is the degree to which individuals who communicate
share attributes such as values, beliefs, education and so forth. Heterophily, on the other hand, is the degree to which individuals who communicate are dissimilar in these attributes. The assumption is that communication is more effective when the individuals involved are homophilous. However, heterophilous communication has greater informational potential because it serves as a bridge between groups. This is the basis for the theory of “the strength-of-weak-ties” developed by Granovetter (Rogers, 2003). Opinion leaders have a wider communication network which means that they serve as stronger links to connect heterophilous groups.

Consumers often turn to friends, family members or influentials for advice. If this is true for the general market, it is even more essential for the Hispanic consumer. According to Korzenny (2003) traditional and “other oriented” societies—such as the Hispanic society—“rely on interpersonal channels since social integration is one of their key survival mechanisms (…) Interpersonal networks constitute important mechanisms in these societies that strongly influence decision-making processes. Information flows create the synergy by which brands evolve, succeed, and fail” (p. 1). Moreover, the principle of homophily explains further that Hispanics desire to identify themselves with other Hispanics and therefore use them as reference groups and advisors (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005).

The role of interpersonal influence is a common topic in the limited academic literature about Hispanic consumer behavior. Existing research suggests that Hispanics, particularly strong Hispanic identifiers and less acculturated Hispanics, tend to attach more importance to the influence of friends and family than non-Hispanics do (Eastlick & Lotz, 2000; Nicholls, 1997; Singh, Kwon & Pereira, 2003; Webster, 1992). There is a study, however, that contradicts these findings (Bristow & Asquith, 1999).

**Clothing and culture**

**The cultural dimension. Hispanic cultural orientations**

The study of the construction, interpretation and diffusion of symbols should also be placed into the larger framework of culture. The way people create and interpret the meaning of clothing and other tangible objects can vary from culture to culture (Kaiser, 1997). Material objects substantiate cultural categories and intangible values linked to the cultural belief system (Kaiser, 1997; Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005; McCracken, 1986).
For example, cultural categories such as age, sex, social rank, marital status, and occupation can be discerned through the study of clothing (Barthes, 1983; Bogatyrev, 1971; Sahlin, 1976).

With this in mind, the following section revises the fundamental cultural orientations that characterize the Hispanic culture. An understanding of the primary elements of the culture serves as sensitization to the researcher about cultural categories that may become tangible in clothing.

The most recent literature about the Hispanic culture comes from industry and marketing experts who generally agree upon the importance of understanding the cultural categories, values and beliefs of the Hispanic consumer (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005; Valdes, 2000). This awareness has lead to the growth of market research and more sophisticated segmentation approaches that consider psycho-socio-cultural factors or “culturegraphics” (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005, p.14).

Following the dimensions of classic cultural models (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1991; Triandis, 1995) experts have addressed different cultural orientations which characterize the Hispanic culture. The most commonly discussed cultural characteristic used to describe the Hispanic consumer is collectivism. Hispanics rely greatly on each other for emotional and economic support, enhancing the importance of family life and friends (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005; Valdes, 2000). Another dimension which is often discussed is time orientation. Hispanics tend to be more oriented towards the present and the past than towards the future (Tharp, 2001). This partly explains why traditions and celebrations are so important in the Hispanic culture. In addition, Hispanics tend to attribute the cause of their behavior, success and failure to others or to external factors. This external attribution combined with the past time orientation results in a fatalistic perception of life. The assumption is that if Hispanics cannot control the future, they will simply enjoy the present and accept what comes as fate.

In terms of sex roles, marianismo and machismo define the traditional cultural roles for females and males in the Hispanic culture. Marianismo refers to the obedient, powerless woman who responds to the requirements of her husband in a traditional wifely role, but also to the nurturing female who is devoted to her husband and children. Machismo refers to the harsh and insensitive male, but also to the responsible provider of the family (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005). Additionally, Korzenny and Korzenny have
hypothesized that Hispanic men and women are more androgynous than their non-Hispanic counterparts. According to the authors, Hispanics tend to show strong masculine and feminine traits simultaneously. For instance, a typical macho may exhibit very masculine traits but at the same time become highly emotional in certain situations. Likewise, a typical mariana suffers and laments but is at the same time extremely tough when it comes to running the home and protecting the family.

Hispanics can also be considered in their perception of time. Hall (1976) describes the two time dimensions, monochronism and polychronism. Korzenny and Korzenny (2005) explain that most Westerners are monochronistic, dealing with time in a very linear way, one event at a time. Hispanics, however, are described as polychronistic, often engaging in multiple activities at the same time without difficulties.

In addition to these cultural values, Hispanics in the U.S. share other cultural traits—the aspiration for a better future for their children, nostalgia for their country of origin, the desire and need to learn about products, services, and institutions, and to get rid of uncertainty and reach stability—which differentiate them from their Latin American counterparts.

How might these cultural aspects be expressed in clothing? One could expect, for example, that collectivism and the need to maintain harmony might manifest themselves in conformity with the general social dressing norms. The tendency towards traditional gender roles in the Hispanic culture might be manifested in the use of clothing symbols that emphasize the male/female distinction. Moreover, the tendency to polychronism may require more versatile outfits.

De Mooij (2004) explains the cultural dimensions behind the social processes and people’s need for appearance. Uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and individualism-collectivism can explain differences in appearance. In collectivistic cultures such as the Hispanic culture people dress well in order to maintain harmony and conform to the social group. In these cultures, people buy new clothes particularly for social occasions, whereas in individualistic cultures it is more important to dress according to the latest fashion as a concern for self-image. In cultures with a high degree of uncertainty avoidance, people need to structure the confusing world. One way to achieve this is by ritualizing life through their dress. This perspective seems relevant to understanding the
difference in the importance given to appearance among Hispanic women across different levels of acculturation.

There are several characteristics that give Hispanics certain common cultural features, despite the particularities of each country. These include the influence of the Spanish, Arab, African and indigenous cultures, a common language, shared values and beliefs, and common ways of looking at the world. These shared cultural characteristics are also observable in cultural products such as clothing.

In a compilation of articles about Latin American fashion, Root (2005) puts together research about the nature of dress in Latin America. This research shows that, despite the highly diverse nature of Latin American countries, there are several overlapping socio-cultural influences that have shaped general characteristics of this culture. For example, prior to colonization, textile and dress served as indicators of social and religious identity. During colonization, there was a clear relationship between being dressed and being civilized, where being naked equaled being barbarian. Moreover, the influence of European and Asian fashion styles and materials during and after the colonization is still present in many traditional clothing features in Latin America, along with some pre-Hispanic motifs and designs.

There are certain historical circumstances that have influenced particular regions and their fashion (Root, 2005). For example, the *china poblana* costume in Mexico evokes the dress of Asian women brought to Mexico as slaves in the seventeenth century. Also, after the Spanish-American war in 1898, Puerto Rican women’s clothing became less influenced by Spain. For instance, women started using fewer mantillas and more hats. Also, as they became more independent and professional, they began to use less full silhouettes, less ornamentation and more unrestricted clothing.

Another more recent example is the revolutions in Cuba and Nicaragua which created an anti-fashion movement based on the idea that fashion is associated with capitalism and domination (Root, 2005). Despite local differences, it is possible to say that the multicultural influence that shaped the general characteristics of the Hispanic culture can also be seen in cultural products such as the dress and fashion.

Clearly, another aspect which binds Hispanics in the U.S. is the contact between two cultures: that of their Latin American heritage and the U.S culture. The contact
between these two cultures produces variations in different aspects related to the creation, interpretation, and diffusion of meaning through clothing.

The processes that people experience when they are in contact with two different cultures is referred to as acculturation. The following section reviews this phenomenon.

**Acculturation**

The interest in the cultural diversity of the U.S. has produced abundant research on acculturation. It is important to understand this process of adaptation and change that Hispanics undergo when they come into contact with the U.S. culture.

The first definitions of acculturation as a cultural phenomenon were offered by Redfield and other anthropologists (Redfield, Linton, & Herkovits, 1936) who identified the changes resulting from the contact between two cultural groups. Acculturation is identified to produce changes in both the non-dominant and the dominant groups (Berry, 1998). However, more changes occur in the non-dominant group than in the dominant group. The non-dominant group, for example, often adopts the language, religion, laws, and other institutions of the dominant groups. In return, the dominant culture adopts some aspects of the non-dominant group such as modes of dress, food, and music (Berry, 1998).

The basic dimensions used when discussing acculturation are the orientations in terms of attitudes and behavior toward one’s own group and towards the dominant group (Berry, 2003). These orientations or attitudinal dimensions manifest themselves as a “relative preference for maintaining one’s heritage culture and identity and a relative preference for having contact with and participating in the larger society” (Berry, 2003 p. 22; Phinney, 2003). These dimensions are represented with bipolar arrows with positive and negative orientations. The arrows intersect and create an “attitude space” defined by four groups in which each individual’s preferences can be organized. Each group refers to a different acculturation strategy.

*Assimilation* refers to the strategy of non-dominant groups when they do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek interaction with and participation in the other culture. *Separation*, in contrast, is when individuals of a non-dominant group prefer to retain their original culture and avoid interacting with others outside their original cultural group. The *integration* strategy is used by individuals who maintain their original culture, yet participate with others during daily interactions. There is the will to be an
integral part of the dominant society. The last strategy is *marginalization*. It refers to the lack of interest in either the cultural maintenance of the original culture or interaction with the dominant group (Berry, 2003).

**Acculturation in Hispanic Marketing.** In the Hispanic marketing industry, acculturation has been widely used to create market segments. One of the most frequent segmentation approaches is the linear division by language dominance. However, the multidimensional model has also been applied by experts. Korzenny and Korzenny (2005) proposed a bidimensional model that differentiates four groups, very much in alignment with the four groups proposed by Berry (2003) mentioned above.

The *Hispanic dominant* group is composed of individuals who depend on the Spanish-language and show attitudes and values attached to their countries of origin. They depend on Spanish-language messages to learn about product and services that are new to them (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005).

*Bicultural or acculturated* individuals constitute the second group. They can “navigate between the Hispanic and the Anglo cultures” (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005, p.141). Bicultural group members are expected to have values that are a combination of those of the culture of origin and the host society (Kara & Kara, 1996). In terms of consumer behavior, they tend to make decisions based on the situation and their reference groups.

The third group is *assimilated* individuals. Even if they may still have some emotional attachment to the Hispanic culture, they do not identify themselves as Hispanics. Finally, the last group is the *culturally unique* and refers to those individuals who do not identify themselves with either the Hispanic culture or the Anglo mainstream culture, and therefore develop a unique identity (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005). In Figure 1 I have combined Berry’s (2003) acculturation strategies and Korzenny and Korzenny’s (2005) acculturation segmentation.
There are several factors that might influence acculturation. Berry (2003) explains that if the contact is voluntary, people are more likely to participate in the larger society through assimilation or integration than those who are not in voluntary contact. Also, those people whose appearance makes them different from the dominant population may feel less attracted to assimilation or may be kept away by racism and discrimination. Also, national policies and multicultural ideology in the larger society and how they come to life in daily interactions may reinforce certain strategies. It will be interesting, for example, to see how the current debate on immigration in the United States influences the acculturation process of the Hispanic population.

Yet another phenomenon related to acculturation is the so-called “retro acculturation.” This term refers to the search for cultural identity or roots by Hispanics belonging to second or third generations who are highly assimilated (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005, p.141; Valdes, 2000, p. 46). This trend among later-generation Hispanics not only affects the rediscovery and appreciation for the values of their cultural heritage, but also affects their consumer behavior. The trend seems to be to use Hispanic media as a means of language learning or cultural maintenance; furthermore, they explore more products that evoke their origins such as food, music, clothing, literature, etc.

In terms of consumer acculturation, there are several individuals and institutions, which have a significant role in immigrant consumer learning. Peñaloza (1990) analyzes
sources of information that heavily impact consumer acculturation such as family, peers, and media. The author further describes how economic, religious, educational, and political institutions influence the consumption learning process of Mexican immigrants.

Acculturation exerts a powerful influence in the change of the core values of the groups involved (Marín & Gamba, 2003). For example, Cuellar, Nyberg, Maldonado, & Roberts (1995) studied the relationship between a behavioral measure of acculturation and the five cultural cognitive constructs of machismo, familism, folk beliefs, fatalism, and personalism. The scale measuring machismo focused on both the positive and negative aspects of it, such as being a womanizer and a brave and courageous male. The familism scale examined the size and level of emotional support from the family and relationships. The folk beliefs scale examined the acceptance of folk illnesses and supernatural factors regarding health. The fatalism scale measured the extent to which people believe their future was beyond their control. Finally, the personalism scale measured the warm and personal way of relating to individuals. Except for personalism, results show a decrease in the personal significance of the other cultural constructs related to acculturation. These results show that acculturation not only influences behavior, but also cognitive factors.

Research focused on Hispanic women shows additional interesting aspects of acculturation. In terms of marital relations, Hispanic women have moved from traditional gender roles and attained more egalitarian roles in their daily lives. Further, acculturation is positively related to more liberal views about women (Kranau, Green, & Valencia-Weber, 1982). Other studies have shown that second generation Puerto Rican women are less likely to accept stereotyped gender roles and report more assertive behavior than their first generation counterparts. However, in these studies, the level of education was a stronger predictor than generation (Leaper & Valin, 1996; Rosario, 1992; Soto & Shaver, 1982; Soto, 1983; Valentine & Mosley, 2000).

**Clothing and acculturation**

There is a small body of research that studies acculturation, fashion, and ethnicity. Although not all these studies have investigated the Hispanic culture, they represent important accounts as for how culture and acculturation influence fashion behavior. Forney and Rabolt (1985-1986) studied the relationship between ethnic identity, ethnic dress, and the use of ethnic reference people and ethnic market sources for information.
on contemporary dress. This study, which focused on Japanese and Chinese immigrants, found that a high level of ethnic identity was related to a higher inclination toward ethnic dress and a higher use of family, ethnic friends, and ethnic sources for information about contemporary dress. Also, Kang and Kim (1998) studied the decision-making patterns of purchasing clothes among Asian Americans. The study showed not only that Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans differ in their relative reference group influence, media influence, and store attributes importance, but also that this behavior depends on the level of acculturation.

Another study conducted among Chinese students (Shim & Chen, 1996) showed two distinctive groups which differ in their overall acculturation characteristics. The less acculturated, more ethnocentric group showed more confusion and uncertainty toward apparel product choices and the shopping system in the U.S. The more acculturated group of Chinese students showed characteristics more similar to the American shopper in terms of apparel shopping interest, media consumption, and lifestyles.

Rajagopalan (2002) studied the levels of involvement in Indian apparel and contemporary American clothing across different levels of acculturation. The results suggest that a low level of acculturation is related to a higher level of involvement in Indian ethnic apparel.

There is very little academic research dedicated to the consumer behavior of Hispanic women as related to their level of acculturation. However, there is an important group of studies that compares Hispanic, Mexican, and Anglo women in different aspects of clothing and appearance. An assumption underlying this group of studies is that clothing and appearance are among the first symbolic elements of a culture to be adopted in the acculturation process, because they are observable and salient symbols of the new culture (Kaigler-Walker & Ericksen, 1989a).

Ericksen and Kaigler-Walker (1987) developed a methodology to measure the cultural collective taste and acculturation of Hispanic women based of their adoption of clothing symbols of the American culture. According to the findings, the adoption of clothing symbols only for specific situations, like conducting business, represents a low level of acculturation because this does not constitute an internalization of the values prevalent in the American culture. On the other hand, the adoption of clothing symbols for every type of occasion represents an internalization of the prevailing American
values. Moreover, in these cases the use of ethnic clothing is “utilized for specific situations when one wishes to show pride in culture or to identify with the ethnic culture” (p. 4). A limitation of this particular study is that it does not describe the characteristics of the looks or styles analyzed, making it difficult to identify the specific elements that constitute the cultural taste and the clothing symbolism.

As a follow-up to this research, Ericksen and Kaigler-Walker (1988) conducted a survey with Anglo, Mexican, and Hispanic American women. The findings showed no significant difference between Mexican and Anglo women in the way they evaluate the styles identified as Anglo-American style. Interestingly, Hispanic-American women differed from Mexican women, thus showing evidence of acculturation into the U.S. society. More significant differences were found between Hispanic American and Mexican women than between Hispanic and Anglo women. For example, Hispanic women were closer to Mexican women in their perceptions of the Anglo dressy and casual styles, but they were closer to the Anglo women in their lower evaluation of the appropriateness of all three Mexican styles. Acculturation is reflected in this act of moving away from the complete acceptance of the Mexican style, although the alignment with the Anglo look is not total. This study showed that Hispanic women of different levels of acculturation vary in the degree to which they accept clothing symbols associated with the Anglo culture. A high level of acculturation is generally related to the acceptance of Anglo clothing symbols for all occasions, whereas a low level of acculturation is reflected in the adoption of only some clothing symbols.

Another related study conducted in California by the same authors (Kaigler-Walker, Ericksen, & Mount, 1989b) included Hispanic and Anglo women belonging to the same social class. Significant differences were found; suggesting that social class membership alone is not a predictor of perception of appropriateness of styles. The findings showed that level of acculturation was a greater influence on Hispanic-American women’s perceptions of clothing styles than was social class.

**Hispanic women and consumer behavior towards apparel**

In addition to the studies about Hispanic women, clothing, and acculturation, there exists a group of studies about Hispanic women and their consumer behavior towards clothing.
Robles (1995) studied the differences in search behavior between Cubans and Puerto Ricans in the U.S. in terms of ethnic identification, purchasing involvement, and social class. There were no significant differences in the information sources of reference groups, store related sources, and miscellaneous readership. The most influential source was reference groups. Family was the reference group that held the most influence, followed by friends. Puerto Ricans showed more involvement in the purchasing process than Cubans. There was no difference in the importance of personal appearance and attitudes toward marketing across groups.

Pasarell (1995) studied the lifestyles and apparel consumption patterns of Caribbean Hispanic women. Respondents were moderately fashion-conscious but purchased more fashionable than classic clothing. Almost half of the respondents preferred to shop where there were bilingual sales associates and Latin music playing. Caribbean Hispanic women preferred natural fibers and bright colors throughout the year. The findings also showed that Hispanic women did not have any preference for designer or status-oriented clothing. Moreover, Caribbean Hispanic women in this study showed a preference for functional attributes such as good quality, functionality, and price over fashionable attributes such as style, color, brand, and uniqueness. These results, along with the fact that respondents showed moderate involvement with people, were interpreted as moving away from the stereotypical role of the Hispanic woman who puts family and others first and places importance on status symbol brands.

A recent study related to Hispanic working women and their use of business jackets (Stoyanova & Yoo, 2005) suggested some important characteristics of this group of consumers. First, it was found that Hispanic working women preferred to buy professional clothing in department stores, supporting the findings by Pasarell (1995). The authors interpret this as a preference for status symbol products and services. According to the authors, higher status is generally connected with shopping in department stores. Another finding showed that respondents preferred purchasing business jackets separately, rather than as a suit. This reflects a need for versatility and the need to create a more casual look. Finally, the respondents showed a preference for combining their business jackets with pants instead of skirts. According to the authors, Hispanics may find that pants offer a more flattering effect to their body type as they elongate the figure. Also, it may demonstrate the high fashion awareness of Hispanic
women, since pants suits are considered less traditional than the skirt business suit. Finally, pants may be preferred because they do not restrict the body movement, which is appreciated in the fast-paced business world. The last important finding in this study is that Hispanics were willing to spend a considerable portion of their income on professional outfits. Approximately half of the respondents spend 10%-30% of their income on professional clothing. The authors offer a cultural interpretation for this stating that this might reflect the need of Hispanic women to make a good impression about themselves and their status through clothing.

In addition to the academic research, there is some available information from proprietary studies focusing on Hispanic women’s mindset as related to apparel. Research conducted by Cotton Inc. (2004, 2005) has shown that today’s Hispanic woman is fashion-forward, brand-conscious, and cognizant of trends and styles. Also, when compared to Caucasians and African-Americans, Hispanics were more likely to count on friends for advice when shopping. In reference to appearance, Hispanics were more likely than Caucasians and African-Americans to prefer clothing that looked better on them as opposed to clothing that was comfortable. Hispanic women spent more time shopping than their counterparts and also perceived shopping as a social experience.

There is the popular belief that Hispanic women have a unique way of taking care of their appearance, which makes them more appearance-conscious than their Anglo counterparts. Marketing research has validated these beliefs. For example, in terms of style, it seems that Latina women give great importance to details. Victoria Sanchez-Lincoln states: “When Hispanic women go shopping for apparel, they’re looking for styles with special details like embroidery, unique stitching and glitter — anything that makes a piece more special and will spice up their wardrobe… And color, bright bold colors and prints are very important.” (Cotton Inc, 2005). According to Kim Kitchings, director of research and strategic planning for Cotton Inc., Latina women are early fashion adopters because they “jump on a trend as it’s happening, rather than catching it when it’s phased through the mainstream” (Cotton Inc., 2005). Another interesting finding related to the influences and attitudes of Hispanic women is that 60% of the women used in this study get their clothing ideas from what they already like and own. Also, in terms of attitudes in social settings, nearly 6 out of 10 in this age group feel better when they get a second opinion on clothing purchases, and 65% of these women
are often asked for advice about clothes (Megan Huffman, Manager, Supply Chain Insights, Cotton Inc., personal communication, September 17, 2006).

This chapter has reviewed the theoretical approaches and empirical research that focuses on how the meaning of fashion and clothes is constructed and diffused. Figure 2 represents the conceptual map of this research.

![Figure 2. Research conceptual map](image)

**Research questions**

At this point, it should be clear that there is a lack of research in most of these research and theoretical traditions as related to Hispanic women and their relationship with apparel. Considering the lack of academic research, and using the concepts of the
literature review as sensitizing concepts, this investigation aims to answer the questions below:

According to the symbolic interaction perspective, we understand the world using a frame of interpretation based upon the norms and values that we learn through human interaction. In order to understand how important clothes and fashion are for Hispanic women, we need to ask:

**RQ1**: What are the norms and values learned through social interaction as related to clothing and fashion?

Symbolic interaction and semiotics also explain how clothes create and communicate individual and social identity. Clothes play a role in communicating the signifying system within which we define ourselves. Therefore a key question in this study is:

**RQ2**: How do Hispanic women use clothes and fashion to communicate individuality and social status in terms of prestige, age, gender, and ethnicity?

Early theoretical approaches about clothing explain that we use clothing to fulfill the basic needs of protection, modesty/immodesty, and adornment. However, these functions of clothes may vary across culture. Therefore I ask:

**RQ3**: How do Hispanic women perceive the basic functions of clothing in terms of protection, modesty/immodesty, and adornment?

The diffusion of innovations approach suggests that new fashions are communicated through media and interpersonal influence. This theoretical perspective also explains that there are some intrinsic aspects of the innovation that facilitate its adoption. In order to understand how clothing adoption works among Hispanic women in this study the following questions are proposed:

**RQ4**: What are the characteristics of communication channels of the social networks in which meaning is created and diffused?

**RQ5**: Which aspects of new styles or clothing items facilitate adoption?

Related to the characteristics of the innovation itself is the issue of the brand. The theoretical approach of symbolic consumption explains that the decision-making and product adoption is influenced by the symbolic meaning that the product may have. It is then important to ask:

**RQ6**: What is the role of brands?
Diffusion of innovation explains the decision-making process. This study aims to understand how Hispanic women in this study decide what to wear and what to buy. Consequently, I ask:

**RQ7:** How is the adoption decision-making process?

Finally, because the meaning of clothing is expected to change as Hispanic women acculturate into the American culture:

**RQ8:** How do all these above aspects change according to the level of acculturation?

These research questions address the main theoretical concepts related to the importance of clothing at the individual, social, and cultural level. By answering these questions this research represents a contribution to a better understanding of human behavior as it relates to material culture.

**Anticipations**

Even if this study is not about testing hypotheses, based upon the existing research described above, it is possible to anticipate certain differences between less acculturated and more acculturated Hispanic women. For example, less acculturated women may be more likely to conform to group expectations, be other-oriented and maintain group harmony in their choices related to clothing and appearance than the more acculturated ones. Also, because the Hispanic culture is hierarchy-oriented and values traditional gender roles, less acculturated women may tend to have clearer differentiations of dress according to gender, age, and social status than the more acculturated ones. The latter group will tend to value equality and less traditional categorizations in these topics. Less acculturated women may be more likely than their counterparts to consume brands that highlight their economic success. Moreover, due to the influence of indigenous, African, and Asian cultures, less acculturated Hispanics may tend to use clothing as amulets, use more adornments and use a brighter color palette and more details than more acculturated Hispanic women.

Other expected differences are that less acculturated women may have a more homogenous network of friends and may be more influenced by friends and family in the adoption of new clothes than the more acculturated ones. Also, less acculturated Hispanic
women are more likely to use shopping as a social activity than their more acculturated counterparts.

Guide for sensitizing concepts, definitions, and terms

In the framework of qualitative inquiry and grounded theory, the literature review provides the researcher with a set of sensitizing concepts (Patton, 2002). In this section, I will shortly explain the sensitizing concepts that compose the initial direction in this research. These short operationalizations serve as guide to understand the phenomenon of communicating through clothing as explained in the literature.

The analysis and interpretations of the interviews and observations allow for an understanding of the phenomenon from the respondents’ perspective. Looking at fashion through the eyes of the respondents brings to life and reshapes the definition of these concepts. Moreover, new concepts and relationships will emerge, creating the new theoretical framework grounded in the respondents’ accounts.

Because this research is about the meaning of clothing beyond its material function, novelty or temporal adoption, the terms clothing, dress, apparel, and fashion are used here interchangeably. The focus of this research is on the meaning of dress in both old, classic items and styles and new, temporary items and styles. There are several reasons to assume that novelty and change are intrinsic to clothing in our modern society. For example, there are new items introduced by the fashion industry at least every season. Moreover, new styles or clothing items are adopted in situations that are new for the individual, and existing items can acquire new symbolic meanings due to a particular event.

However, this section acknowledges the fine distinctions in the terminology found in the literature. The distinction of fashion as an innovation is further elaborated in the literature review.

Clothing, apparel and dress

According to Sproles & Burns (1994) clothing is a generic term that refers to any covering of the body. Apparel is also related to body covering but with a decorative aspect to it. Dress is the most inclusive of the terms and refers to “the total presentation of all covering and adornments worn on the human body” (p. 7).
Fashion

Fashion is “a style of consumer product or way of behaving that is temporarily adopted by a discernible proportion of members of a social group because that chosen style or behavior is perceived to be socially appropriate for the time and situation” (Sproles & Burns, 1994, p.4). For a comprehensive etymology and evolution of the term fashion see Barnard (1996) and Kawamura (2005). Other terms that are commonly used as synonymous of fashion are style, mode, vogue, look, trend, taste, fad, and others (Kawamura, 2005). Even if there are subtle differences in the meaning of these terms, they all convey change and temporary adoption.

Elements of clothing

Clothing fashion is composed of silhouette, design details, and material. Silhouette refers to the shape or lines of the style, for example, tubular or triangle silhouettes. Design details are the particular elements of constructions such as collars, pockets, and sleeves. Material refers to the fabrics as composed by a combination of pattern, color, and texture (Sproles & Burns, 1994).

Meaning

The definition of meaning that lies beneath the ideas in this research is taken from semiotics, communication, social psychology, and anthropology. The assumption here is that fashion and clothing have meaning because they are considered to be a signifying system in which the definitions of the individual and the social order are created, experienced, understood, and communicated (Barnard, 1996). Also, meaning is the social construction of reality that explains the world and helps people make sense of what is around and decide how to act (Geertz, 1973). Because it is socially constructed, meaning is arbitrary. Following the tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure (1974) and Roland Barthes (1983), meaning in clothing can exist in two different dimensions: denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the literal meaning, whereas connotation relates to abstract associations that many times imply judgments, feelings and values. In this study, the emphasis is in the connotative meaning of clothing.

Symbolic meaning

A symbol is an entity that represents some other entity (Morris, 1955). Symbols are a type of sign (unit of signification) in which the signifier (the form in which the sign appears) does not resemble the signified (the mental construct) because the relationship
between these two is purely conventional and must be learned (de Saussure, Bally, Sechehaye, & Riedlinger, 1974).

**Hispanic or Latino**

In this investigation the terms Hispanic and Latino are used in a synonymous manner. Since 2000, these terms have been used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau to refer to people of any race in the United States who identify their origins as coming from a Spanish-speaking country. Origin can be considered the nationality group, heritage, lineage, or country of birth of the individual or the individual’s parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States.

The use of these labels is accompanied with inevitable controversy. Some people disapprove the use of the term Hispanic arguing that it was imposed by the government and that it has the connotation of colonial Spain. The term Latino also causes controversy because it technically includes people from any Romance language-speaking country (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005; Sabar, 2001). However, in the context of the United States, the term is generally used to refer to people living in the United States of Latin American origins and their descendants born in the United States. Both terms, Hispanic and Latino, are often further criticized because they are too broad and erase the many cultural and ethnic differences of people coming from diverse countries. Regardless of these disputes, it is commonly accepted that in the population there is more agreement than disagreement in the use of either label, even if some polls have slightly favored the term “Hispanic” (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005; Sabar, 2001). Also, in the Hispanic Marketing industry both labels are used interchangeably when referring to Hispanics or Latinos as a group of people who share a common cultural heritage. For example, the labels are used in a synonymous manner in magazine titles such as *Hispanic Business,* and *Latina Magazine.* Another indication is found in the title of the 21st semi-annual conference organized by the Association of Hispanic Advertising Agencies, titled *Latino Character.*

**Functions of clothing**

**Protection:** refers to the characteristic of clothing of protecting the body from heat, cold, and incidents, but also from immaterial damage.

**Modesty:** refers to notions of what is decent/indecency, proper/improper in terms of revealing or covering body parts.
Immodesty: function of clothes to draw attention to body parts.

Clothing as communication

Differentiation/individuality: refers to the notion of clothing or elements of clothing helping individuals to differentiate themselves from others, as through self-expression and personal creativity.

Social affiliation: the use of clothing or elements of clothes to express group membership.

Social status (prestige): the use of clothing or elements of clothing to indicate social worth and one’s position in society, as in reflecting the occupational role with the use of uniforms.

Social status (gender): the use of clothing or elements of clothing to indicate femininity or masculinity.

Social status (age): the use of clothing or elements of clothing to indicate youth or the lack of it (maturity).

Social interaction: dynamic social action between individuals in which each one modifies his or her actions due to the actions and reactions of the other individual involved in the social contact.

Diffusion of innovation

Fashion innovation: clothes or element of clothes that are perceived as new. The aspects that influence adoption of the innovation are: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, observability, and trialibility.

Social network: the social structure to which individuals belong. The social interaction with members of the social network facilitates interpersonal influence.

Homophily: degree to which individuals that communicate share attributes such as values, beliefs, etc.

Heterophily: degree to which individuals that communicate are dissimilar in some attributes such as the ones mentioned above.

Fashion opinion leader: individual who exerts informal influence on other individuals’ attitudes and behavior toward fashion.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on the understanding of how Hispanic women of different levels of acculturation communicate individual, social, and cultural aspects of identity through clothing and appearance. This chapter explains the methods employed and the rationale behind the methodological choices made. Here I provide an overview of the research approach, the sample and sampling strategies, as well as the procedures of data collection and analysis.

Because this study is exploratory, I selected a qualitative research approach in the form of in-depth interviews and observations. The selection of the participants was based on purposeful, intensity, and referral sampling strategies. A screener was used to select 10 participants according to the criteria of level of acculturation, self-identification, and attachment to the Hispanic culture, and interest in clothing and fashion. Interviews were conducted in the participants’ houses. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, sorted, and coded, using the software HyperResearch for the two last processes. Also, pictures were taken to document participant’s clothing choices and the researcher’s observations. Moreover, the researcher used notes to record observations and initial interpretations throughout the research process. A constant comparative method was used to find patterns and themes in the data. Initial findings were discussed with participants, committee members and marketing professionals as a credibility assessment tool. In the last section of this chapter I describe the sampling strategy and who the informants were.

Qualitative inquiry

Qualitative research is a type of research that obtains findings not available from statistical procedures or any other means of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). There is no absolute consensus on the different philosophical and theoretical perspectives that differentiate forms of qualitative research (Goulding, 2002; Patton, 2002). The distinctions between epistemologies and methodological approaches behind qualitative inquiry are not clear-cut, making it difficult to situate research (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This section constitutes an acknowledgment of the assumptions behind this research.
This investigation fits in the social sciences interpretivist inquiry paradigm which is associated with other philosophical approaches such as naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), social constructionism (Berger & Luckman, 1967), and phenomenology (Husserl, 1931). The epistemological stance of interpretivism assumes that the focus of the research is on understanding the phenomena in context, considering different actors’ perspectives, and including the involvement of the researcher (Carson et al. 2001). Interpretivism is closely linked to the philosophical tradition of *Verstehen*. The concept of *Verstehen*, associated with the ideas of Max Weber (1968), refers to the understanding of human behavior from the actor’s point of view. The tradition of *Verstehen* emphasizes the importance of the context, and the empathic involvement with the actors when investigating human action (Patton, 2002).

There is a growing use of qualitative research in marketing, particularly in the area of consumer behavior (Goulding, 1999). There is also an increase in qualitative research papers in important academic and industry journals. This indicates that qualitative research is no longer viewed as speculative, as it was in the past (Goulding, 2002).

The purpose of this study is to explore and explain an aspect of human behavior by discerning the symbols and meanings that emerge from social interaction. Thus, qualitative inquiry in the form of in-depth interviews and observations seems to be the most appropriate approach.

Qualitative research aims to understand the culture of a group of people from an *emic* perspective, meaning that the researcher aims to find the insiders’ view. According to Kenneth Pike (1954), the *emic* perspective consists of reporting by using classification systems based on the language and categories used by the group of people that are being studied. In contrast, the *etic* perspective is the analysis of a culture based on categories created *a priori* by the researcher.

This study offers a reconciliation of both perspectives. The approach of this research is to use concepts and categories based on the theoretical frameworks exposed in the literature review as analytical guidelines and principles. But, as the research progresses, those categories emerging from the field will be incorporated into the basic structure created by the research questions. This combination of *emic* and *etic* concepts is partially in alignment with grounded theory. Grounded theory suggests that ideas coming
from the literature should be conceptually connected to the theory that emerges in order to enhance theoretical sensitivity (Goulding, 2002).

The use of conversational in-depth interviews with an interview guide, as explained later in this chapter, was chosen because it offers the benefit of being flexible enough to pursue new information within the predetermined objectives of the research. The use of the interview guide also guarantees that in each interview every basic topic is covered and helps make the most of the time available with each respondent (Patton, 2002).

**Sampling**

Guided by the nature of qualitative inquiry, the sampling strategies involved in this research were purposeful sampling, intensity sampling, and referral sampling. The following section aims to elucidate the assumptions and procedures underlying the definitions of these types of sampling. The intention is to avoid a common criticism of qualitative research because the sampling and data collection methods are not explicit and clearly explained (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Coyle, 1997).

**Purposeful sampling.** Purposeful sampling, also called theoretical, selective, purposive, or judgment sampling (Coyle, 1997; Goulding, 2002; Patton, 2002), consists of selecting information-rich cases for in depth study. The logic behind using information-rich cases is that they can offer powerful and in-depth information related to the objectives of the study (Patton, 2002). The criterion for the sample selection is representativeness. For this study, certain criteria were established *a priori* to develop a screener for the selection of respondents. The criteria to establish representativeness were related to the level of acculturation, attachment to the Hispanic culture and interest in clothing and fashion. These criteria ensured that the respondents would maximize the possibilities of obtaining robust data.

**Intensity sampling.** Related to the above is the intensity sampling strategy. The concept of intensity sampling is used by Patton (2002) to describe the type of sampling consisting of “information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely). Extreme or deviant cases may be so unusual as to distort the manifestation of the phenomenon of interest. Using the logic of intensity sampling, one seeks excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest, but not highly unusual
cases” (p. 234). Patton (2002) adds that intensity sampling demands prior information and considerable judgment because the researcher must initially define the nature of the variation in the particular situation and then sample intense cases of the phenomenon of interest. For the current research, intense cases were sampled based on the acculturation level. Latina women that intensively demonstrated low and high levels of acculturation were selected as emblematic examples and comparison groups of the acculturation phenomenon. Also, it was important to ensure a diverse sampling by selecting Hispanic women with backgrounds coming from different countries in Latin America. It was out of the scope of this study to include a woman from each the Latin American countries that compose the U.S. Hispanic population. However, women with origins in six Latin American countries were represented in this study, which is an important variation considering that the sample size was 10 case studies.

**Referral sampling.** The last strategy in sampling is the referral sampling. Once a respondent was located and interviewed, she was asked to facilitate the location of other information-rich respondents. At least 3 out of the 10 respondents were contacted by referral. The description of how respondents were selected and contacted is outlined below in a section where I describe each participant in the context of the interview.

**Acculturation screener**

The main underlying assumption in this study is that clothes have a different meaning for Hispanic women of different level of acculturation. This assumption derives from the studies on acculturation that suggest that the contact between two cultures generates variations (Berry, 2003). These variations include changes at the material level. Tangible objects, for example clothing, may be indicative of deeper, intangible elements of culture such as values, attitudes and beliefs. In order to create comparison groups for this study, a screener was created that included measurement of the level of acculturation.

There has been a prolific body of research on how to measure acculturation. In the quest of understand acculturation as a multidimensional process, various scales have been created, combining factors such as language, number of years in the U.S., ethnic identity, religion, age, education, intermarriage, and income (Ogden, Ogden, & Schau, 2004). However, scales based on language usage are commonly applied to measure acculturation (Kara & Kara, 1996; Norris, Ford, & Bova, 1996; Wallen, Feldman, & Anliker, 2002).
Language usage has shown to be the strongest and most reliable factor in assessing acculturation. For example, Cuellar and his colleagues (1980) developed the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americas (ARSMA). The ARSMA is a 20-item acculturation scale based on four dimensions: language usage and familiarity; ethnic identity and generation; reading, writing and general cultural heritage; and ethnic interaction. They conducted a factor analysis of the scale using varimax rotation method and found four factors. The factor of language showed the most variance (64.6%). Marín, Otero-Sabogal, and Perez-Stable (1987) also developed a short scale composed of 12 items in three dimensions: language usage, media, and ethnic social relations. Of the three factors, language was the most reliable factor with an alpha coefficient of 0.90.

In this current study, the respondents’ level of acculturation was assessed using the Short Acculturation Scale (SAS). The SAS is a four-item Spanish-language usage scale that has shown to have good reliability and internal validity (Norris et al., 1996; Wallen et al., 2002).

To create the acculturation scale, the following questions were included in a questionnaire as part of the screener (see Appendix A):

1) Which language do you feel most comfortable speaking?
2) Which language do you prefer to speak with friends?
3) Which language do you think in?
4) At home, which language do you speak?

Respondents answered these questions on a 5 point scale, specifying:
1— if they speak Spanish 100% of the time; 2—if they speak Spanish 75% of the time; 3—if they speak Spanish and English equally; 4—if they speak Spanish 25% of the time, and 5—if they speak English 100% of the time.

Each item was scored from 1 to 5 points. Thus, the values could range from 1 (100% Spanish) to 5 (100% English) for each of the 4 questions. The scores for each item were added up to create an acculturation scale ranging from 4 to 20, with a score of 4 being the least acculturated and a score of 20 the most acculturated. These questions and response items are based on ones used in previous studies (Norris et al., 1996; Wallen et al., 2002).
The purpose of using a screener was to identify Hispanic women that tend to fall into the extremes of the acculturation continuum. By doing this, I was able to compare and contrast groups that are dissimilar to each other.

In order to identify into which group each respondent fell, I created the three groups:

1) **Less acculturated (Scores 4-8):** these are the respondents that score between 4 and 8. A respondent answering 1 (100% Spanish) to all 4 questions would score a total of 4, falling into this group. Another example would be a respondent who scored a total of 8 because she answered with 2 (75% Spanish) in 2 questions, 1 (100% Spanish) in one question, and 3 (50% Spanish) in one question.

2) **Bicultural (Scores 9-15):** these are the respondents that get 9 to 15 in the final score. Respondents falling into this group were not considered because they do not offer enough contrast with any of the other two groups.

3) **More acculturated (Scores 16-20):** this refers to respondents that scored 16 to 20 in the final sum. An example would be a respondent that gets 4 (25% Spanish) in 3 questions, and 5 (100% English) in 1 question (17 total score).

In addition to the battery of questions for the SAS, the questionnaire also included a series of other questions to satisfy additional sampling criteria (Appendix A).

It is important to demonstrate that the respondents positively identify with the Hispanic culture. Cultural identification was assessed by asking an open question about self-identification, and a question about the degree of affection to the culture. In relation to self-identification, only those respondents that answered with a label that is relative to the Hispanic/Latino culture were considered for this research. As for the level of affection, respondents scored their degree of attachment or affection to the culture in a scale from 0 to 10, indicating: 0 —no attachment at all, 5 —neutral, and 10 —extreme attachment. Only those respondents scoring 6 or higher were considered for this research.

**Acculturation level validation**

I included several questions regarding other material aspects of culture in the interview guide. The objective was to validate the level of acculturation of the respondents using cultural elements other than language. I included questions regarding music, food, and literature.
In all cases, the lowest level of acculturation indicated by the language scale was validated by the respondents’ understanding or preference for Hispanic music and literature as well as their preferences for homemade meals. Only one of the respondents in this group admitted to being lazy in the kitchen and eating out most of the time. Curiously enough, this was the only non-married participant in this group. The preference for cooked-from-scratch meals over prepared meals is one of the habits related to food that characterizes the Hispanic consumer behavior (Package Facts, 2003).

There was another factor influencing these respondents’ cultural maintenance. Four of the five respondents falling under the less acculturated group were married to Hispanic men. The fifth respondent was divorced. All of the respondents in this group, except one coming from Cuba, maintained strong and active contacts with their friends and families in their country of origins. They reported visiting their countries of origins at least once a year. Those who had affection for literature preferred to read in Spanish. Although most of them had a preference for music in Spanish, they also liked and enjoyed music in English.

The group of more acculturated respondents was a mix of three US-born women whose mothers were first generation Hispanics, and two women who came to the United States when they were very young. This group reported preferring literature in English. As for the music, only two of the interviewees reported listening to Hispanic music. One of them just mentioned liking Buena Vista Social Club and reggaeton. The other participant was more knowledgeable about different genres, authors and less mainstream music in Spanish. This could also be influenced by her general interest in music because she is a radio DJ.

In terms of food, most of the respondents among the less acculturated Hispanic women emphasized the importance of cooking from scratch most of their traditional meals and preferring eating at home.

On the other hand, most of the respondents in the more acculturated group admitted eating out very often and cooking typical Hispanic dishes only occasionally. Some of them also indicated liking one of the local Cuban restaurants and occasionally buying Goya products such as black beans and *adobo*.

Among the acculturated group, only one of them was currently married to an American man. Another one of the respondents had been married twice to Americans and
was dating another. One of the respondents was dating a Cuban-American man, another one an African-American man, and the other one was not dating anyone at the time of the interview.

It can be concluded that respondents’ behaviors and preferences related to music, literature, and food validated the measurement of acculturation with the Spanish language usage scale.

**Additional criteria**

An additional criterion for respondents was their interest in fashion and clothing. This was assessed by asking a respondent to score her interest in fashion and clothing on a scale from 0 to 10; 0 being not all interested, 5 neutral, and 10 extremely interested. Only those respondents scoring 6 or higher were considered for this research.

For both groups, the acculturated and the less acculturated one, additional criteria were based on demographic features that characterize the average Hispanic women in the U.S. Respondents were 21 to 40 years old, part time or full time employees, and they were living in Florida. Appendix B shows the dates and locations of the interviews.

The age groups are close to 25.9, which is the median age for Hispanic women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Women 21-49 compose 20.8% of the Hispanic population, (Synovate, 2004). It is assumed that women older than 21 years old may already be full time or part time employed. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2004), around 57% of Hispanic females 16 years and older in Florida are in the labor force. It is also assumed that this group represents a segment of Latina women that have enough resources to afford clothing choices. Additionally, the fact that these Latina women are part-time of full-time employees is necessary to ensure respondents’ various social roles and participation in activities that define different situations and opportunities to display various outfits.

For this study, country of origin was not a criterion for the selection of respondents. It is possible to argue that Latina women of different countries of origin may have different perceptions and behaviors toward clothing. However, this study is more about the commonalities and the cultural aspects that bind Hispanic women.

It is also necessary to acknowledge the influence of the geographical location in the choice of clothing for the respondents in this research. Clearly, Florida is a location
where seasons are not dramatically marked, therefore, the range of seasonal clothing is limited.

This research does not include immigrants of indigenous origins. The issues affecting the meaning of clothing among these groups are very interesting but outside the scope of this research.

In conclusion, the sample was composed by 10 Hispanic women, ages 21 to 40, part-time or full-time employed and living in Florida. These individuals represent a group similar to the average Hispanic woman.

Sample size and multiple-case study approach

The sample for this research consisted of 10 cases with respondents of the comparison groups (5 low acculturated and 5 high acculturated Latina women). Typically qualitative research concentrates in depth on comparatively small samples (Patton, 2002). This case-oriented strategy allows for detailed examination of individually selected respondents.

A multiple-case study (Yin, 2003) or collective case study (Stake, 2000) approach contains more than a single case. One of the advantages of using a multiple-case design is that the evidence is considered more robust and the study is seen as more compelling (Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) compares the logic behind studying 6 or 10 case studies with the logic behind conducting 6 or 10 experiments. According to this, each case study should be selected to predict similar results, or to predict contrasting results but due to a predictable reason. In the current of research, contrast is expected to be due to different levels of acculturation. To complement Yin’s (2003) perspective, I also followed Denzin (1989) concept of multiple exemplars. He suggests that after the deconstruction of prior notions about a phenomenon, the researcher collects multiple cases, brackets them, and closely analyzes the essential components. The components are finally rebuilt into a reordered unity and put back into the natural context. Cases studies are chosen because it is thought that understanding them will bring better understanding about a larger collection of cases. Case studies do not lead to generalization but they may lead up to generalization-producing studies (Stake, 2000).
Data collection

In-depth interviews

Finding respondents started several months before the fieldwork took place. I started reaching participants by contacting personal acquaintances. I also reached out to Hispanic marketing professionals and a professional friend that works with Hispanic communities in Florida. These professionals helped me distribute several screeners and contact respondents that fit the criteria.

Interviews started after approval by the Human Subjects Committee at Florida State University.

For this study I conducted 10 interviews/cases. These 10 cases resulted from the collection through several personal friends and Hispanic Marketing professionals, of around 40 screeners. The first 6 interviews were conducted in Miami. Once I had contacted in Miami 6 respondents that satisfied the criteria, I scheduled a week to travel there. One of the scheduled interviews had to be cancelled. Luckily another participant referred me to one of her friends who I interviewed once I verified that she satisfied the criteria. Later in this chapter I describe every interview and participant in this study.

As soon as I returned from Miami with more than 18 hours of interviews, I started the transcription process. The remaining 5 interviews were conducted in Tallahassee during the following month, as I received screeners of women who satisfied the criteria. During the transcription process I took notes of issues to consider for the following interviews that I was conducting in Tallahassee. Unfortunately, during the intensive data collection period in Miami, I was not able to transcribe one interview before conducting the next one. This process could have improved the early identification of patterns. However, the notes and observations that I wrote down as soon as I could after each interview allowed me to incorporate new ideas for the next day.

The interviews took place in the respondents’ houses in the period between January 2007 and March 2007. The respondents were debriefed in advance about the purpose of the study. I sent an introductory e-mail with an informal explanation of my research and my contact information. In most cases, I had several phone conversations with the respondents before the actual interview. This helped me create a stronger rapport with the participants before the actual interviews.
Interviews lasted approximately two to three hours. They were digitally recorded with the consent of the respondent. Interviews were open-ended and conducted in a very relaxed and conversational style. I used an interview guide that I had previously tested in five pilot interviews. This guide (see Appendix C) ensured me that every key point of the inquiry was covered, and that the vocabulary used was clear and prompted the desired accounts. As expected, the conversation did not follow the topics in the same order as in the interview guide. When an interview was close to the end, I reviewed the interview guide to verify that all points had been discussed.

The design of the interview questions was based on the purpose of each of the research questions. The interviews started with a warm-up question about what participants were wearing at the moment of the interview.

The questions in the interview guide were generally ordered from general to specific. However, I do not think that in any interview we followed the protocol in the exact order planned.

In-depth interviews have an advantage in that they are similar to informal conversations, so they offer flexibility, spontaneity and personalization (Patton, 2002). The interviews took place at a date and time agreed upon with the respondents, trying to minimize interruptions and inconvenience to them. Six (6) of the interviews were conducted in Spanish and four (4) in English, according to respondents’ preference. I read the informed consent form to respondents before the interview started (Appendix E).

Observations and pictures

The in-depth interviews took place in the respondent’s house, allowing me to observe the respondent’s wardrobe. Observations served to collect data not only about the participant’s lifestyle in her own surroundings and her relationship with objects, but also about the concrete elements in her wardrobe that were part of her identity. I was able to personally see and touch their clothing, thus allowing me to have a better idea of the colors, materials, lines, and details of most of the clothing items they referred to in their verbal accounts. For example, observations allowed having a better understanding of what respondents meant by “short” when they referred “short skirts.”

Observing non-verbal communication in the respondents also helped me in the interview probing process. For instance, a particular element or feeling that I observed
lead to further questions. I took notes after the interviews following an observations guide prepared in advance (Appendix D). I took pictures of most of the items and outfits respondents showed me during the interview. The pictures helped me remember and organize the details of each respondent’s wardrobe when it came to the analysis and interpretation of the data.

**Data analysis and interpretation**

Since qualitative research is discovery-oriented, the research design should be open to changes as the situation evolves and the understanding gets deeper (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The methodological implication for this is that data collection and analysis are open-ended. The researcher interviews, decodes, and interprets in a continuous loop of action. This means that after or during the transcription of each interview I initiated the analysis so that I could rethink the questions in my next interview. As explanations and relationships emerged, they were verified and contrasted against other interviews and existing literature. This process is reflected in Figure 3. An example is explained below.

Transcriptions of the interviews and notes from my observations were entered in the qualitative data analysis software HyperResearch. Transcriptions, analysis and interviews were conducted simultaneously.

As I started to analyze the first set of interviews, I realized that the adequacy of the grounded theory approach for this study needed to be reevaluated. After the open and axial coding of the first 3 interviews, I realized that the patterns that were emerging from the data gravitated around concepts that were very similar to the ones already identified in the literature; therefore the microscopic coding seemed to introduce an unnecessary complexity. At that point I decided to reevaluate the analysis strategy. Because I had started the study with research questions that were specific enough, I decided to reorganize the responses and my observations and annotations by lining up the key quotations with the research questions.
Figure 3. Research design

The technique for analysis employed in this study was based on the constant comparative method, which consists of identifying concepts and themes by comparing and contrasting new data to previous interviews and interpretations, identifying commonalities and contradictions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Miles and Huberman 1994; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). The software HyperResearch was very useful to help me to organize, sort, and retrieve the coded data.

The analysis consisted of coding, grouping, sorting, finding patterns and linkages, explaining under what conditions they hold true, and exploring how these patterns related to the existing theories. This way the meanings held by the women I interviewed produced *emic* categories that were grouped under the 3 main areas intrinsic in the research questions: Norms and values learned regarding clothing and appearance, communication of individual and social identity through them, and adoption and buying-decision-making.
Here is an example of how the coding and analysis took place. During the first interview the importance of _fit_ emerged. In the course of the next interviews I tried to understand how and why it was so important. The analysis showed that there were three aspects of fit: the importance of clothes fitting one’s body shape which was influenced by the fact that women were used to tailor-made clothes by their mothers. Then, the importance of fit in a symbolic way, referring to the way clothes represent who they are (“it is me”). And finally fit in the sense of clothes helping women get closer to the idea of beauty by concealing and enhancing parts of their bodies. By putting these three interpretations together, the conceptual category “fit” was created. The concepts and categories were then linked to the approaches of symbolic interactionism (how the social interaction with the seamstress mother influenced this aspect of relationship with clothes), consumer behavior (difficulties in the decision-making process), and the influence of media in the creation of an ideal body image (i.e. women wanting to look thin and tall).

**Reporting the findings**

It is a challenge to reduce the data in a synthetic, relevant, and creative way. The goal of this research is to generate an explanatory framework.

Reporting a qualitative study should not consist of pages and pages of descriptions, interviews and notes that the researcher used to generate theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest reporting the findings in the form of a clear set of propositions, or a theoretical discussion based on the conceptual categories. The authors also suggest, for the readers’ sake, that the writer present merely sufficient material (quotes, field notes, events, etc) to explain how the codes or the hypothesis emerged. On the other hand, it is also important to convey a sense of reality, so that the readers might vicariously experience the field. The report of this research will try to show a balance by using data only to give credibility to the context and the theoretical evolution. The procedures were described only to ensure that the analysis was systematic, logical and methodical. The findings in this research are presented as follows: first, an introduction to the finding; second, the evidence for the finding; and finally, the explanations and the links to the theories.

As a researcher I am concerned with the standards of quality used to judge qualitative research. Qualitative research uses trustworthiness and credibility assessment
instead of internal validity assessment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). In order to achieve this, the accuracy, completeness, and fairness of the data were discussed with at least two of the participants. Overall the reaction of the participants in this discussion was positive and provided confirmation of the findings. In addition to the assessment coming from the participants, the findings were also partially discussed with doctoral committee members throughout the research. Finally, during the last stage of the research, I was invited to present my finding to a Hispanic advertising agency with clients in the retail industry. This discussion with a small group of professionals who had experience with the understanding of Hispanic women and their relationship with clothes also contributed to the evaluation and verification of the findings in this research.

**Who were these 10 women?**

In this section I present the women who participated in this study. Here I describe how I contacted them and how the dynamics of the interview went. This accounts for the description of the sampling strategy. I also offer a more detailed description of who these respondents are, what they do, and how they live. With this I intend to provide the reader of this study with a fuller vision of the characters and how clothes play a role in their lives. This is in alignment with the principle of “thick description” which suggests that through the presentation of detailed and concrete description of the locations and characters we help the reader understand the phenomenon in a more direct fashion (Geertz, 1973). The names here are fictitious for the sake of respondents’ confidentiality.

1. **Norma (less acculturated).**

   Norma is a 27-year-old woman from Venezuela. She has dark olive skin, long curly hair, brown eyes and full pink lips. Her body is a pear shaped body and she is thin. From this description she looks like the “typical” Latina, a *mulata*, although I think that she could also pass for Middle-Eastern, but she has no direct Middle-Eastern background. She is what one could call a “girly girl,” always put together, with a little bit of make up, soft and delicate in the way she talks (no bad words or talking loud).

   Norma works as a Spanish teacher in a school. She has a Master’s degree and used to work in the advertising industry in Venezuela. Her husband is a musician. He plays classical and jazz guitar. He performs every week alone or with a band at restaurants and other events. She regularly goes with him to the places where he is
working or for rehearsals. That is part of their lifestyle. Also, as her husband is an artist he has a special interest in all artistic forms and aspires to make a living of his own through his art (music, drawing, and painting). Norma is very supportive of him and she is his number one fan. Besides going out to bars and restaurants where her husband plays the guitar, they sometimes go dancing. Norma particularly loves dancing any kind of Latin music like salsa and merengue. At the time of the interview her most recent musical acquisition was the last album from Juan Luis Guerra, a famous bachata (music genre) singer from the Dominican Republic. She considers it a work of art and cannot stop playing it over and over.

Norma takes care of herself in the sense that she does not want to gain weight so she eats small portions, but she does not work out very often. Her mother visits her at least twice a year, and when she comes she stays with Norma and her husband for at least 1 month. Norma’s husband has an aunt and an uncle that have spent in the U.S. more than 20 years.

Norma has been living in the U.S. for six years, the last two of which she has been in Miami. Norma is a personal friend of mine. I met her via e-mail before I came to the U.S. four years ago, and then we became good friends. I thought she could be an ideal participant because I had observed that she was very fashion-conscious and liked to buy the type of clothes that were popular at the moment. For example, as soon as wedges became popular, she bought some. Also, as we were already friends there was no need to devote time to creating rapport with her because it was already there.

I called her one day to tell her that I was planning to go to Miami to conduct the interviews for my research and that I was planning to interview her. She was excited about it. As soon as we arranged the date she became a little nervous because she had to clean up her closet in order to be “presentable.” I insisted that she did not have to do it because the idea was that everything should be as close to her real life as it could be. When I arrived at her house, she confessed that she had cleaned up a little bit, but my impression is that she is a very organized person.

She was wearing a tank top with green stripes, pink Capri pants, and flip-flops that had glittery details. She explained to me that this is not the way she usually dresses when she is at home. When she is at home, she wears old shorts and t-shirts. But because I was coming to visit her, she dressed up a little bit and decided to wear the type of
clothes she would wear during the weekend to have a coffee with a friend. The flip-flops,
she explained, were only to wear at home. If she did happen to wear flip-flops out, they
would have details that made them less generic and a little bit more dressy and feminine.

Conducting the interview was an opportunity for us to talk about our lives, have
dinner together and for me to see her new apartment. Norma is married to a Peruvian man
whom she met when she still was a student.

In Miami they rented a very small apartment, which they have decorated in a very
nice way. The walls were painted in royal blue and yellow. Some of the drawings made
by her husband decorated the walls. The tablecloth and other decorative items in the
kitchen were colorful and typically Venezuelan craft-like souvenirs.

The interview with Norma started with a little crisis. We had planned to conduct
the interview relatively early in the evening so that we could later have dinner together
with her husband. When I arrived there, she showed me the apartment, had coffee and
cookies, and we just started talking about a lot of things because we had not seen each
other for a long time.

When the moment came to start the interview, much later than we had planned, I
realized that I had forgotten my researcher’s kit (digital camera and voice recorder) in my
friend’s apartment, where I was staying. I panicked for a while, thinking: “How is this
possible? What kind of a start for data collection is this?” Thankfully, almost everybody
has a digital camera nowadays, and Norma was not an exception. Not only that, she also
had one of those tape recorders that are becoming part of ancient history. I had to quickly
run to a Dollar Store close to her house to buy tapes and batteries. By that time, her
husband was about to come home for dinner. She called him and asked him to wait a little
bit longer, so we could at least start the interview, and we did.

Norma was very loquacious; she understood that being descriptive and detailed
was welcomed. As she showed me clothes, we laid them on the bed and on the sofa so
that I could take pictures. She was very patient and preferred to wait until the end of the
interview to put everything back into the closet. The closet was not very big and she
shared it with her husband. The left side was for him, the right side for her. They also had
drawers and plastic boxes to make a better use of the space. All her clothes looked well
kept and clean. Her closet was organized in categories: long sleeves, polo shirts for work,
blouses for going out at night, etc.
Her starving husband called when he was on his way home. We had to stop the interview in order to take care of dinner. I continued recording the conversation because as she finished cooking, I kept asking questions. Her husband arrived, and we stopped the conversation about clothing. We ate arepas, (typical Venezuelan corn bread, similar to soft Mexican tortillas), with shredded meat and black beans. After dinner was over, we finished the interview in the living room because her husband retired to the bedroom (it was a 1-bedroom apartment).

Several weeks after this first interview, I conducted a follow up interview with Norma by phone. This second interview lasted around 45 minutes. I asked her to elaborate on some of the ideas from the first interview and to comment on some topics that had emerged with other participants.

2. **Celina (less acculturated).**

Celina came from Cuba via Mexico when she was in her 20s, where she did her Master’s in economics. In the U.S. she did a second Master’s in Spanish. She is now 36 years old, teaches Spanish at a university in Miami. She is married to a Cuban who has lived in Miami for more than 20 years. They have a two-year-old daughter. Only 3 years ago was she able to bring her parents from Cuba to live in Miami.

I found Cecilia through a personal contact that lives in Miami and works as a counselor with Hispanic women. This friend on mine, Rocio, is a Venezuelan woman in her 50s, and had access to a good network of Hispanic women. When I explained to her what my study was about, she let me know that her Hispanic women were probably not the best informants because of their socio-economic status. Rocio works with women that need to be educated about finances, careers and personal matters. She told me that common advice for these women is to be more careful with their income, because they tend to spend a disproportionate amount of their incomes on clothing and beauty products. However, Rocio thought she had the perfect informant for me. She put me in contact with Celina, a neighbor of hers.

I first tried to contact Celina by e-mail, but she did not respond. Later I learned that she is not a fan of computers. I finally called her on the phone and we had our first long conversation about my study. She also answered the questions in the screener by phone because she preferred not to deal with it by e-mail. During the following days, we
had a couple of more phone conversations in which we tried to schedule the date for the interview.

I scheduled my meeting with Celina for a Friday morning because she does not teach on Fridays. I arrived at her building in Miami Beach around 10:00 am. I was surprised when I saw her. I had a different picture in my mind of how she would look. I thought she was going to be an older-looking woman, maybe more conservative and serious. On the phone she sounded very formal, particularly because she addressed me with “usted” which in Spanish is the second person pronoun that denotes formality.

When she came down to the lobby I saw a gorgeous, tall, blond woman, wearing make up and heels, with her hair perfectly arranged. As we were going up in the elevator and I thanked her for collaborating with me, she replied empathically saying that she knows exactly how important it is to help people writing theses because she has done it twice. It was then that I learned that she has two Master’s degrees, one in economics, from Cuba, and one in Spanish from the U.S. I also quickly realized that she was dressed as she was because before the interview she had been running some errands. I think she also thought that since this was a serious study about clothing, she should look nice and put together.

Celina’s apartment was nice and small. It had big windows so it was light and clear. The walls were white and the decoration was simple. Maybe because of the 2-year-old child there were not many objects around the house, except a mountain of toys in a corner. I could smell beans cooking. She told me that it is her husband who usually cooks the Cuban food (rice, beans, pork) they eat almost daily. She asked him not to come back home before 1:00 pm, so we could conduct the interview.

Celina’s closet space was relatively small. She complained that it was too small for all the clothes. She used to live in the house where now her parents live, and there she had more space for clothes. She even left there some of the clothes she does not use often such as the gowns. So, her clothes were really packed in this small space. Her closet was not very organized, and every time she wanted to show me something she had to look and look, saying “Where is it?”(Dónde está?).

During the interview, as she started showing me all her clothes, I asked if she minded that we left everything out for me to take the pictures at the end. She agreed so I used a sofa upon which to pile all the clothes. The idea of taking the pictures at the end
was not to interrupt the flow of the conversation. I had learned during my pilot interviews that the interviewees sometimes stopped talking when I took pictures because I lost contact with them.

Cecilia was very delicate and feminine. She spoke slowly and with a smooth voice. As she talked she was constantly playing with her hair. During the interview she received several phone calls, which she answered in Spanish. One call was from a friend who wanted the ticket for a social event which Celina was not attending. Before she had her daughter Celina, her husband, and her friends used to go out for dinners and dancing several times a week. Now they go out dancing maybe once a week. Even if she enjoys salsa and other Latin music, for dancing she prefers electronic music, so she rarely goes dancing to Salsa nightclubs. Celina enjoys going to different restaurants in town. She has a very active social life, with a lot of friends that she has cultivated over the last 12 years.

It was very interesting to listen to Celina talk about her socialization into the consumer culture. She described me how she felt when she arrived by saying that a child would know more about finances, prices, and the use of money than what she knew when she arrived at the U.S. She also described how she struggled during her first years to gain financial stability in a short period of time. She had four jobs while she was completing her Master’s degree. She wanted to make money and gain back all the years that she felt she had lost in Cuba. It was during this time that she met her current husband. He introduced her to the Saint Jude Thaddeus whom she invoked in difficult times.

Celina has a sense of satisfaction with her life and her achievements. She was happy with her current job because it also allowed her to have a family life. She said: “I am happy with my life and I don’t want more than what I already have” (Estoy contenta con mi vida y no quiero mas de lo que tengo).

3. Elena (less acculturated).

Elena is a 30-year-old journalist from Venezuela. She has lived in Miami for four years. She came to the U.S. because when she divorced she decided to start over and go back to school for a Master’s degree.

I met Elena through a professional contact in a Hispanic Marketing organization. I had exchanged some ideas about my study with this person and she referred me to a co-worker who was a recent arrival from Venezuela. She said this Latina woman was very fashion—and appearance-oriented and gave me her e-mail. I sent an e-mail to her with
the screener attached. She replied very quickly with the screener filled out and with her phone number. I called her one afternoon while she was walking home after work. We talked for about an hour. She was very inquisitive about what I was doing. As she is a journalist she could not but ask me a lot of questions about my research.

Creating a connection with Elena was easy not only because she was very talkative and extroverted but also because we both come from Venezuela and we have a similar educational background. In the course of our first telephone conversation Elena revealed a lot about her interest in clothing and about how her style has changed over time.

After several other short telephone conversations we finally met. We decided to have dinner in a Vietnamese restaurant close to her workplace on a Friday night. The co-worker who had introduced me to her and another friend also came for dinner with us. Actually I met with them first at the restaurant and we waited for Elena who was fashionably late. Elena was tall, has long brown straight thick hair, brown eyes, and light olive skin. She could have been a model. She was very expressive with her face and hands when she talked and when she listened.

After dinner we went to her house for the interview. It was already almost 10:00 pm. As we arrived at her house, we were talking about many topics such as music, and the political situation in Venezuela. She lived in a studio apartment which was nicely decorated. She worked in her space a decorative space divider made out of dark wood sticks which gave the room a tropical-Asian look. The apartment had a walk-in closet which was full.

With Elena it was a challenge to start the interview because she talked a lot about many other things, her blog, her friends, her past. During the interview itself it was also difficult to know when to bring her back to the conversation about clothing because she digressed a lot. It was remarkable how Elena revealed personal stories about her marriage, her divorce, and her relationship with her mother with such ease. Interestingly enough all these stories had a connection with clothes. For example, she told a long and detailed story about how her ex-husband and his family would treat her if she did not look like a model, wearing designer clothes and perfectly arranged. She also referred to an episode with a pair of shoes, which her ex-husband did not want to buy for her. That event catalyzed in her the wish to divorce him.
Elena is very energetic. It was a challenge to keep up with taking the pictures during the interview. Early in the conversation I realized that I could not leave the pictures for the end because she was showing me so many clothes that I needed to take pictures quickly. Following her suggestion, I laid a towel on the floor, over which I would quickly spread the clothes for the pictures. Elena got so engaged and excited about the conversation and the stories related to her clothes that she started showing me pictures on her computer from events for which she was wearing certain clothes. Then she started talking about the people who were in the picture, and so on.

When I checked that we had covered all the topics in the interview it was around 1:00 am. She wanted to go out and party, but I needed to go back to my friend’s house, do data back up and wake up early next morning for some other interviews. She was disappointed. Before I left her house she burned me a CD with music, showed me her blog and some of her favorite blogs about culture and literature, and added me to her messenger.

The week before I would edit this section, I chatted again with Elena. She got married a couple of months ago and she was moving to San Francisco.

4. Maria (less acculturated).

I contacted Maria through Norma. After I interviewed Norma she remembered that she had an ex-roommate still living in Tallahassee who she thought would be a good informant for my study. Norma contacted Maria first and asked her if she would be willing to collaborate. She accepted, so Norma sent her an e-mail with the screener which she forwarded to me. We arranged to meet on a Saturday morning.

Maria is 30 years old. She arrived from Venezuela eight years ago. Back in her country she studied English (modern languages). One and a half year ago she received her PhD in multilingual education and became a teacher of English to international students. She is married to a Mexican man and they do not have any children yet. It is interesting to note that Maria speaks English almost like a native speaker. However, she prefers to speak Spanish and in fact she speaks Spanish most of the time she is not at work. That is why she fell into the less acculturated group according to the screener.

Maria is of average height, has very white skin and black curly medium length hair, and black eyes. She has a pear body shape and is a little overweight. In fact, she
mentioned to me that she had gained a lot of weight lately which had caused her to stop using some of her clothes.

As soon as I arrived at her house she offered me a cup of coffee which I could not resist because it was made out of an espresso machine with authentic Venezuelan coffee. Enjoying such a well-prepared homemade coffee was a good warm-up for the interview. We were in the kitchen talking about the food we miss from our country. She explained to me that she and her Mexican husband try to cook from scratch as much as possible.

Maria and her husband live in a townhouse that she had decorated with an Asian theme. She went for this style because she wanted to create a calm atmosphere. The walls in the living room and kitchen were white with a couple of dark red vertical stripes and matched the pillows on the beige sofa. There was a huge flat screen television and a small bar. The objects used for decoration such as picture frames and candle holders were dark brown as well as the coffee table. Pictures with Chinese characters and reproductions of Salvador Dali’s work hung on the walls. On one of the tables in the living room there were pictures of her wedding and other family events. The master bedroom also matched the Asian style and the colors of the living room. There was a closet, of which only a small part was occupied by her husband’s clothes, the rest was all only for part of her clothes. The rest of her clothes were in the other closets in the guest room upstairs. The second room upstairs was the office. Maria painted the motives that decorated the wall by herself, inspired by the symbol of her husband’s favorite soccer team. She said she enjoys painting and other crafts, like the one she recently discovered: making jewelry. She made and sold earrings and bracelets. Also, as a hobby and to help the small business of her friend in Venezuela, she sells necklaces made out of strings and colorful wood parts that her friend sends several times a year.

As we conducted the interview, she received a call from a new neighbor from Peru who just married an American. This woman did not have a lot of friends and was very bored at her house. Maria invited her to have lunch out and then go to the store where she buys the material to make jewelry. Her friend was very excited about it.

After we finished the interview, I asked her to show me the earrings that she had made. We sat down on her carpet and she opened several little boxes. She makes beautiful pieces in silver with small stones, like the earrings with irregular shape that I bought that day and that I am wearing now.
5. Ana (less acculturated).

Rocío, the woman who introduced me to Celina, also put me in contact with Ana. Rocío is not as close to Ana as she is to Celina. However, she considered Ana a stylish woman and therefore a potential information-rich respondent for my study.

Ana is a 40-year-old pediatrician from Colombia. She is very active and works out more than one hour daily. See has curly medium length brown hair and light olive skin. She likes to wear white and pastel colors. She defined her style as a little bit romantic, meaning that she likes light fabrics, with ruffles, different collars, and skirts with light movements, delicate flower prints, and so on.

Ana took a break from working fulltime last year. She decided to take more time for her family. She is married to a Colombian doctor and they have two daughters, one is ten and the other six years old. Now she has more time to her hobbies, like fine cooking. She has a great collection of international cookbooks and magazines. Her kitchen is full of sophisticated cooking gadgets. Ana, like Maria, also likes to create her own jewelry, particularly earrings. She showed me the boxes where she keeps the jewelry material. She does not sell like Maria does. She only makes jewelry for herself and her family and friends. Ana also uses silver and stones to make jewelry but she also likes to buy beads with colorful details.

The interview took place at her apartment during one afternoon. Her daughters were watching a movie in the living room. Her husband arrived and stayed for a while in the room where the closet was, so we sat in the girls’ room to start the interview. For the first part of the interview she could not show me the clothes she was talking about, so I decided to take notes of the pieces and combinations I wanted to photograph later. After we covered the topics in the interview guide and her husband went playing with the girls, we went into her room. She shares the walk-in closet with her husband. Her side is full of pastel colors as well as bright reds and blues. I could not take pictures of some of the clothes Ana had mentioned during the conversation because they were in the laundry basket.

Ana and her husband encourage creativity and aesthetic appreciation in their daughters. They are learning to play the cello and violin. They have a lot of educational games around the house. I observed that one of the toys they had was a “fashion kit.” It consisted of a series of plastic sheets with holes with the shape of different clothing
items. The kit also had papers with different prints and a book with ideas. One draws the silhouette in the paper, cuts it out and creates combinations.

For Ana and her husband it is also important that the girls appreciate the Hispanic culture. They both are fluent in Spanish; in fact, while I was there the girls spoke Spanish with their parents most of the time. Ana and her husband buy the girls Spanish-language children’s literature by Spanish and Latin American authors. They encourage them to appreciate Latin American music. They travel to Venezuela and Colombia at least once a year, and they often eat typical meals such as plantains, beans, and avocado.

The interview was interrupted a couple of times by the husband asking questions, the girls fighting and wanting the mother to intercede, and a hunger attack. At that point we took a break in which we had tea with cookies.

6. Roxana (more acculturated)

Roxana is a friend of Celina. Celina referred me to her because she has a lot of clothes and cares about her appearance and is very flirty. Before going to Miami I talked to Roxana shortly on the phone. She was always busy and it was difficult to find a date for the interview. Of all the interviewees, I think Roxana was the most challenging for me because she was not as eloquent as the other women. I had to probe much more than I did with every other woman. Her answers were very short and concrete and she was in a hurry. Celina had warned me that Roxana’s personality was a little impatient.

Roxana is 39 years old. She came from Paraguay 20 years ago. She has been married twice to American men, but she is currently divorced and dating a younger American guy. She lived in New York and Virginia before coming to Miami a couple of years ago. Roxana frequently travels around the world because she works for a big airline.

Roxana is very tall and thin. She has very long straight brown hair, tanned dark skin and oriental (indigenous) eyes. After the interview she was going to meet her boyfriend, so she was very dressed up, wearing a printed blue top, dark tight jeans, and a matching belt and heels. She was also wearing a very strong sweet perfume.

Roxana lived in the same building as Celina, so Celina took me to Roxana’s apartment and introduced me to her. Roxana had prepared a plate with cheeses, chips, and salsa and offered me something to drink. Celina and Roxana talked for a while about a problem with the concierge.
Roxana’s apartment was decorated in a little overly pompous and busy way. The curtains were brilliant green with golden details. The sofa and carpet matched the curtains. She had many framed pictures, for example pictures of her and her boyfriend at the beach. She had a candle lit, a little table fountain, and several glass containers of different shapes with chocolates and candies. Her bed had a lot of pillows with different designs and colors. One of them had an embroidery which said, “The queen sleeps here.”

Roxana started showing me her clothes and it became clear that I had better take the pictures right away. She was a little impatient about having the clothes piled up or outside the closet. In her room she had two walk-in closets, one regular closet, and a large chest drawer. Everything was full. The walk-in closet to the right was for pants, dressed, blouses, and suits. The one on the left was for belts, bags, hats, and shoes. Jeans and going out tops were in the wall closet.

After we finished the interview she called her boyfriend to let him know that it was over so they could meet soon. We went back to the cheese and crackers and she started asking me questions about my life.

In my interview with Roxana an interesting language issue took place. I knew from the screener that Roxana preferred to speak in English. However, when I introduced myself in our first telephone conversation she answered me in Spanish. Also, when she was speaking with Celina they were speaking in Spanish. So I assumed that the interview would be in Spanish. However, when we were concluding the session, Roxana mentioned that she had been speaking Spanish again only lately, since she moved down to Miami. She also said that she sometimes found it difficult to talk about clothes in Spanish. At that point I wondered if she would have been more eloquent in English. This suggests that researchers should always verify in which language participants feel more comfortable speaking, also taking into account that participants may have different language preferences for different topics.

7. Monica (more acculturated).

I met Monica in Tallahassee a few months before data collection. She was excited about helping me with my research. She is a 25-year-old Cuban-American. She grew up in Central Florida where there were not many Hispanics. She is a vet technician and a part-time student. She is dating a Cuban-America man who is a vet technician as well.
Monica has long, brown, straight hair, medium olive skin and a pear-shaped body. She lives in a small house that she rents from her boss. I went to her house one weekday afternoon after work. When we met, she was still wearing her vet uniform which consists of garnet veterinarian scrubs. She warned me in a humorous way that she just arrived from work and that she must be stinking.

Monica showed me her house and the seven reptiles she keeps. One of the two rooms upstairs looked similar to a natural science museum with glass boxes, sand, logs, and reptiles inside. She had named them and treated them as her babies.

The windows in her room look out into giant oak trees. The walls are painted in pastel green which matches with the light green curtains and bedding. The whole house is decorated very simply, which gives the place a sense of calmness. In the living room she has a TV on all day, and a sort of collage with pictures of trips taken with her boyfriend.

After the tour of the house we started the interview. When she opened her closet I realized that she had a lot fewer clothes that the other participants that I had interviewed so far. Nevertheless she thought that she had more clothes than necessary. I also think she was the participant with the fewest printed and colorful clothes. Most of her tops had horizontal stripes, and everything was cotton. Monica’s bed was very close to the closet. She stayed between the bed and the closet pulling items out, which I laid on the bed and photographed from the foot of the bed. This allowed us to keep talking and taking pictures without interruptions.

The interview was conducted in English. In general, transcribing the interviews in English was more challenging than transcribing the ones in Spanish. Particularly Monica’s interview was challenging because she talked very fast and quietly.

8. Jocelyn (more acculturated).

Like Monica, Jocelyn is an acquaintance of mine. Jocelyn is 21 years old. She has a very unique style. She is always wearing something that calls people’s attention and she has eight tattoos on her body. I did not know she was Hispanic until I asked her if she had a Hispanic friend that would be willing to participate in my study. It happens that Jocelyn was born in Costa Rica from Cuban parents. She came to Miami when she was 6 years old, but she still goes back to Costa Rica every couple of years.

Jocelyn was the youngest participant. She is relatively short, has brown medium length hair, brown eyes and light skin. She works part time as an office assistant as well.
as a real state assistant. She is also a student in Humanities. She is dating an African-American guy. She defines her style as somehow hippie and punk. She likes to wear a lot of black, some male clothes, raggedy jeans, big belts, and vintage jackets and blouses. She wears a lot of bracelets and necklaces.

Jocelyn struggled with obesity until she was 19 when she started working in a local market that focuses on organic and local produce. At that point she learned about healthy eating habits and started cooking from scratch. She said that finally she feels comfortable with her body and she will never go back to eating junk food. She likes Cuban and Costa Rican food, so she calls her grandmother for recipes, but then she replaces the unhealthy ingredients with healthier ones. For example, instead of using pork she uses tofu and so forth.

Jocelyn lives in a townhouse with a roommate that I did not meet. The kitchen is an important place because she tries to cook from scratch as much as possible, and because she often entertains friends at her house. Her room is on the second floor. It had a balcony and a big closet. The walls were decorated with reproductions of Japanese art and some panels that she created in order to hang her accessories. She also had a broad on which she wrote creative ideas or quotes that she liked. She mentioned that her boyfriend saw her room that day and was amazed that it was so organized. She cleaned the room up for the interview; apparently, it was usually a lot more chaotic.


I met Belinda when she was a participant in a focus group conducted by students in a Hispanic Marketing Communication class. She called my attention because she was very eloquent and fit the profile for my research. After the focus group I approached her. She was happy to collaborate with my study and she found the topic very interesting. The following day, I sent her the screener by e-mail. She was perfect for the study. That same week I went to her house to interview her.

Belinda is 25 years old. Her mother is from Equator and her father is American. She was born and lived in a small town near Tampa until she came to Tallahassee for college. She is a part-time graduate student in Communications and she works full-time for the Department of Health. She is currently single.

Belinda is short and thin. She is very athletic because she practices martial arts. She has olive skin, short straight hair and big almond-shaped brown eyes. She wears
dramatic dark brown eye make up. She is very vivacious and talkative. She is constantly laughing and making jokes.

Belinda lives in a townhouse with an African American roommate. The living room is decorated with African-inspired elements, such as leopard skin, wood animal statues, and masks. Belinda pointed out that this is her roommate’s decoration. The kitchen is not very spacious and it seems that is it not used regularly. Belinda’s room is upstairs. She has a TV in front of her bed, and a furniture piece which holds her vinyl albums and a record player. She is a DJ, and in fact, she initiated a program in the local university radio station which plays Latin music.

I interviewed Belinda around 6pm. We were both tired and hungry, but we still managed to have an entertaining conversation. Belinda had just arrived from work and had changed from her working clothes to a t-shirt and comfortable house pants.

Her closet was not very big. The clothes hanging were the ones that could wrinkle easily, mostly work clothes. She also had some divisions on the bottom of the closet for her folded pants and tops. I took pictures of the clothes that we laid on her bed as she talked. By that time I was already an expert in taking pictures quickly so that I did not lose eye contact with the interviewee. After I took pictures of some clothes I passed them back to her to hang up so as to minimize the mess, but she actually preferred to leave the clothes out so that it would be easier to her to find what she wanted to show me. She also thought it was a good opportunity to organize the closet, which she almost never did.

After she showed me most of her clothes and we had covered the topics in the interview guide, we sat down on the carpet. She then showed me a lot of her accessories, make up, hair products, and jewelry. During the conversation, we ended realizing that we have some friends in common. After almost three hours of conversation we were starving even more than before.

10. Soledad (more acculturated).

Soledad was the last woman I interviewed. However, she was one of the first women I contacted. I almost gave up on interviewing her. A series of unfortunate events made us cancel our meeting two times. Finally, one day, when I was still transcribing and analyzing the previous interviews, Soledad contacted me to ask me if I was available that same day after work. She realized that it was the perfect time to do it because her kids
were out of town so she would have a little more time for herself and really wanted to collaborate with me as agreed. So, I went to her house that same day.

I had met Soledad in an art exhibition of a common friend of ours, a long time before I started collecting data. When I met her, I thought she would be a good respondent because of her individual style but also because she was eloquent and was very interested in my topic. Soledad is a short, thin woman with very dark long hair and brown eyes. The day I met her, she was dressed all in back. She was wearing very red lipstick and a big blue necklace. Before talking to her I could tell she was Hispanic. That same day she gave me her card and we agreed that she would be one of my participants.

Soledad is 40 years old and she is originally from Colombia. She has been living in the U.S. for 15 years. She has 2 kids (17 and 14) from her previous marriage and she is currently married to an American lawyer. She believes she acculturated very quickly because she made a conscious effort to adapt once she realized that she wanted to stay in the U.S. For example, she avoided hanging out with other Hispanics so that she could learn English better, and she stopped eating Latin food, no only because she could not find it where she was living, but also because it made her too nostalgic. However, she kept permanent contact with the rest of the family in Colombia.

Soledad works for the Department of Health. She is the leader of an important research project there. She has very few friends in town, though she sometimes goes out with her husband’s friends. She tries to attend the cultural event in town, such as art shows and the theater. Other than that she prefers to spend her free time with her family at home.

Soledad lives in a house in the suburbs of Tallahassee. I arrived at her house a little early so I had to wait for her approximately 10 minutes inside my car. Before the interview she had to take care of the dog and the cat that had been inside the house all day long. Then we had a cup of coffee while we chatted about how we finally met for the interview.

Soledad’s house is decorated with framed reproductions of Gustav Klimt’s paintings. She also has interior plants. Her dark wood bed looks colonial and the walls are light brown.
We started the interview because we realized that we only had two more hours. Her husband was coming back from Orlando that evening and she did not know if she had to pick him up at the airport yet, so we started talking about clothes.

Soledad’s closet was small and packed. She had difficulties finding and pulling out pieces. She started showing me some funny golden tops that her husband bought her in Paris while they were there on vacation. She was laughing because her husband buys her horrible clothes that are not her style at all. She does not want to hurt his feelings or discourage him from thinking about her when he travels and shops.

The interview with Soledad was in Spanish. After the experience with Roxana, I knew I needed to ask in which language she wanted to talk. Soledad has a very fine voice and speaks very smoothly. I had to remind her a couple of times to speak louder in order to have a clear record of the conversation. Even if the digital recorder was very close to her face, there were some parts in the recording that were challenging to understand.

Her husband called to let her know that he had found a ride from the airport and that he was coming home. At that point I finished taking the pictures I wanted. We finished the interview in the kitchen while she cooked dinner for her husband. She prepared a salad and put some frozen fish steaks in the microwave. She invited me to have dinner with them, but I already had a commitment. Her husband arrived and we chatted shortly about the interview and the scarlet diet. Then it was time to leave.

Several weeks after this interview, Soledad and I met to have coffee together. She was very curious to know what I had found in my research. I used this opportunity to confirm my conclusions and interpretations.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS. LEARNING WHAT TO WEAR.

Introduction
This chapter focuses on the social forces that shaped the way Hispanic women in this study relate to clothing and how these same forces influenced how they communicate. By addressing the major norms and values that the women learned through social interactions during their childhood and over some of the important events and changes in their lives, this chapter answers the following research questions: RQ1 What are the norms and values learned through social interaction as related to clothing and fashion?; and RQ8 How is it different according to the level of acculturation? Also, aspects of the protective function of clothes (RQ3) will be addressed. These questions were based on concepts explored in the literature review. Understanding the norms and values learned is important from the symbolic interactionist perspective (Blumer, 1969; Kaiser, 1997) because this reveals how symbolic meaning emerges from social interaction. Hispanic women experience the type of social interaction that involves the contact of two different cultures. It becomes crucial to understand the norms, values, and meanings attached to clothing that these women learn when they come to the U.S., or growing up in a Hispanic family in the U.S.

The discussion of norms and values learned is linked to every other aspect of the research. However, the concepts of protection and modesty related to the basic of functions of clothing are included here because they emerged in the participants’ accounts, specifically when they referred to their past experiences.

Hispanic women in this study showed that the way they relate to clothes and appearance is derived from norms and values characteristic of the Hispanic culture, regardless of their level of acculturation.

This chapter discusses the importance of the interaction with mothers for these women in the understanding of the world and themselves, through clothing. Mothers had an impact in women’s emotional connection with clothes, in the initiation into womanhood, in the expectations of clothes’ quality and fit, in the development of style, and in the understanding of what is appropriate in public and private spaces. Also, cases of role reversal emerged, in which the daughter is the influential agent in the mother. The
influence of other institutions such as school, church, and work revealed how women communicate ideas of conformity and resistance, respect, and regard for other people and institutions through clothing and appearance.

Women in this study also showed the influence of spirituality in the special protective and magical powers conferred to certain clothes.

Whereas all of the above was somehow common for both less acculturated and more acculturated women, less acculturated women in this study referred to experiences unique to them as immigrants from Latin America: becoming a consumer for the first time, experiencing the cold weather, becoming more empowered, and becoming more casual.

**The prevalence of the Hispanic values**

What did Celina, a Cuban 36-year-old woman who arrived in Miami 12 years ago, have in common with Monica a 27-year-old daughter of a Cuban immigrant, in the way they chose their clothes and appearance?

Celina said that when she was not wearing work clothes she preferred to wear more “daring” (atrevidos) short tops, tight pants, bright colors and lots of glittery materials. She went to the hairdresser once a week, noting “this is religious for me” (eso es religioso para mi); she wears eye shadow and lipstick everyday because “the expression of the eyes and the face are very important for a woman” (la expresión de los ojos y la cara es muy importante para la mujer). Monica, on the other hand, wears less bright colors and considers her style to be “simple.” She he prefers olive green, light steel blue, pastel colors, and light grey. She does not “like to reveal skin.” When it comes to hair and make up, Monica does not want to look like she “does not care,” but wears only the minimum.

As I heard and analyzed the accounts of these 10 Hispanic women of different level of acculturations, it became apparent to me that they had something in common that goes deeper than what makes them different. Beyond the differences in their level of acculturation, lifestyles, and professions, they all have in common something which differentiates them from non-Hispanic women. These women have constructed (or are still constructing) a sense of identity that is the result of a negotiation between the norms, values and beliefs coming from both the Hispanic and American cultures. This
negotiation which is at the core of the acculturation process is expressed in the way they dress and in the way they relate to their appearance, regardless of their individual styles and tastes.

Throughout their lives, these women are in contact with both cultures and many times they are in the position of choosing which aspects they want to adopt or maintain from them. Hispanic women pick and choose, select, which norms and values they incorporate from the new environment, and which ones they maintain or abandon from the original environment.

Women who grew up in Latin America learned mostly from other female figures in their family and social circles how to dress, how to look for certain occasions, etc. Then, when they came to the U.S. they encountered certain differences in those norms and learned new norms. Given that these women come from a Western culture, the differences in the way they dress are not as drastic as they would be between females coming from Middle Eastern or Latin American indigenous cultures. However, the assumption is that clothing as part of the material culture will reflect the cultural differences that are not tangible such as values and beliefs.

As for the women that were born in the U.S. or came to the country at an early age, they are also influenced by both cultures: they went to American schools and hung out with American friends but still grew up in a home with the same norms and values of Hispanic mothers who migrated to this country.

As these women socialized in the context of both cultures, they selectively adopted norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors from each culture in order to develop their sense of selves as well as their social identity. The contact and interaction with both cultures cause them to adopt or maintain some features and leave others behind. This dynamics makes them unique. The following sections explain this dynamics and the instrumental actors involved in it.

**Mothers and early influences**

For most of the participants the influence of their mothers and grandmothers was determinant in the way they feel about clothing and appearance. This is not surprising if we assume that in early stages children do not select their own clothes. Mothers typically dress their children according to their own tastes, until children start to develop their own
preferences. Kaiser (1997) calls this “investiture” (p. 156). As girls grow up they develop their own individual taste at the same time that they learn the social norms related to clothing and appearance. A study conducted with Puerto Rican girls (Haiman, 1993) showed that at the age of 5 years old, girls already had the discursive capacity to make aesthetic distinctions between styles. Also, at the age of 8, girls used sources of information other than adults such as mass media and observation to form their criteria about fashion.

There are a number of ways in which mothers shaped the ways in which the women in this study perceive clothes. Clothes represent a strong emotional link between mothers and daughters. Clothes become a sign of love and a reason for pride. Mothers initiate their daughters into the feminine world with clothes. Mothers transmit and enforce the rules, values and beliefs related to clothing that allow women to understand and interpret their social environment. Mothers have an impact on how women perceive their own bodies, their self-esteem and what is socially appropriate.

**The emotional connection.**

An important finding is that several women in this study grew up having a mother or a grandmother who was a professional seamstress or at least knew how to make clothes. They grew up having clothes tailor-made for them by their own mothers or grandmothers. Even now, two of them have their mothers and grandmothers occasionally sew clothes for them in their country of origin.

Growing up with a dressmaker in the family has different implications. The accounts of the participants depict the emotional connections that they had to clothes made by their mothers and grandmothers.

As a child Maria spent many hours at her grandmother’s workshop helping her grandmother sew buttons and stitch. Her grandmother made her dresses for every important event and also for everyday use. Maria laughed when she remembered how her grandmother spoiled her: “I would go to her workshop upstairs, pick up a pattern from a magazine and tell her ‘I want this one.” At the end of the day I went back home wearing the new clothes sewed for me. She really spoiled me.” (Translation). ¹

Even by the time of the interview, grandmother and granddaughter lived together through the experiences around clothes that connected them. For example, last year Maria went to Venezuela twice to attend the wedding of two of her brothers. She bought the
dress for the first wedding here in the U.S. During her stay in Venezuela, her grandmother took her measures to make the dress for the second wedding, which was going to take place several months later. When Maria came back for the second wedding, she was completely moved when she saw that the dress was not totally seamed, but instead the pieces were provisionally held together with pins. Her grandmother was waiting for her to arrive and try the dress on before finishing it. She wanted to be sure that it was going to fit perfectly in case she had gained weight. Her grandmother had also selected the fabric and the color taking into consideration what she wore on the first wedding. Maria was impressed by her grandmother’s gesture of love, particularly because she is no longer a young woman, and hers was not the only dress she made during those busy days for all the family. She said: “I love this dress, my grandmother is so lovely, she knows me so well, she knows what I like and what fits me” (translation). Through clothing, the grandmother showed her love and understanding for who Maria was. She also helped Maria feel special.

Another example of emotional connection between a mother who made clothes and her daughter is Norma’s story. Norma’s mother also sewed, but she did it exclusively for women in the family. Some of Norma’s favorite blouses were the ones made by her mother. At the time of the interview Norma and her mother were still constantly interchanging information about the clothes that they saw in stores and on the streets in both countries. Every time Norma bought new clothes, she sent her mother pictures of her wearing them. Sometimes her mother was the one who told her about current fashions in Venezuela, and sometimes Norma’s mother replicated designs she had seen in magazines or stores and sent them to Norma in Miami. Clothing was always one of their topics of conversation. Norma describes their relationship as follows:

It is like a communion between her and me. If I see something new here I ask her if she has also seen it down there. If she hasn’t, I’ll send her a picture, and she will look for it in the malls, and maybe copy it and make it for my cousin. (Translation).

Through clothes they showed that they understand each other, that they had something in common, and that they were deeply connected despite the distance.

Clothes made by her mother created a sense of pride in Norma, particularly when she received compliment on them. She explained:
I like it a lot when people tell me ‘what a beautiful skirt’ and I can tell them “my mother made it for me.” Instead, if I were wearing something that I bought I would just say “thank you.” Generally when I am wearing something she made, people ask me about it, it calls people’s attention. (Translation).  

Moreover, the clothes made by her mother symbolized the love that her mother had for her. In her own words:

I think this is so important to me because this is how she shows her affection towards me. Her dedication, the time she invests in copying, in creating, in going out to look for the lace that matches [the fabric], if it does not work she goes and looks for another one. She invests a lot of time to do every single thing. If she didn’t love me, she wouldn’t do that for me. (Translation).

The time and dedication invested by Maria’s mother in creating clothing just for her represented her motherly love. This connection created between Hispanic mothers and daughters through a tangible object is comparable to the family relationship created by food cooked from scratch in the Hispanic culture. Homemade food is highly valued among Hispanics, particularly among less acculturated ones because “cooking from scratch is a way of life for most Hispanic housewives. Packaged or frozen food would reflect badly on them as mothers” (Packaged Facts, 2003, p. 3). The analogy between cooking and sewing for the family is certainly limited. Industrial clothing can be found almost all around the globe and women do not need to make clothes to dress their families. However, if they can, it becomes a powerful and special way of showing their love and care, similar to preparing a very special meal.

Korzenny and Korzenny (2005) refer to the cultural drivers, and the role of the mother when it comes to providing food and clothing for their children: “The mother has primary responsibilities for tending to the children making sure that they are healthy, nicely dressed in clean and as attractive clothes as the family can afford, and that they eat healthy and tasty foods” (Korzenny and Korzenny, 2005, p.187). They also refer to the emotional connection created by the dedication of the mother: “Children are very close to their mothers and admire their devotion and sacrifice for the happiness of their sons and daughters” (p.188).

The importance of custom-made clothes made by mothers or grandmothers was not unique to Maria and Norma, two of the less acculturated women. Jocelyn and Soledad are more acculturated but their grandmothers also made clothes for them. Their stories about the impact this had on their relationship with clothes offers additional insights.
Jocelyn’s grandmother was a designer and owned a sewing school in Costa Rica. Jocelyn felt lucky that her grandmother helped her develop her creative side and individual taste. She also learned a few fashion tricks from her grandmother:

When I was growing up, my grandmother was a fashion designer in Costa Rica and she had a sewing school there. So I would design something and she would make it for me. I like a lot of black. She always told me that black is very slimming; since I have dark eyes black makes them pop.

Also, her grandmother had an important impact in teaching her the traditional feminine style. She said: “When I was little basically my grandmother made most of my clothes, and I was more like a girly girl.” Soledad’s experience was similar: “My mother and my grandmother made clothes for me. My grandmother said girls have to look nice, with nice dresses, emphasize the waist, be put together” (Soledad, translation).

**Rite of passage**

Shopping with her mother was an experience that created a special connection between Ana and her mother. In her account, Ana went back to her teenage days and said:

I remember when I was an adolescent and my mother started buying clothes for me to look beautiful. I remember going with her to buy shoes. She would buy some for her, some for me. Also, we used to go a lady who sold imported clothes in her house and buy things for both of us. I would choose what I wanted, but of course with the limitation that I could take only what she also liked. (Laughing). (Translation).

This shopping experience represents a sort of rite of passage where the mother introduces the daughter into womanhood. What seems to make this experience even more special is the fact that these shopping trips were to somebody’s house. It gives them a sense of intimacy and uniqueness that shopping in a large, impersonal store would not have.

According to my own experience and past observations, I believe this is a common practice not only in Venezuela and in other countries in Latin America. Some women make a living or a side business out of traveling to other countries, most likely the U.S. to buy clothes that they sell to their friends. They work as small-scale importers. As these women start knowing the tastes and preferences of their clients, they start buying more and more personalized styles or even taking particular requests. Word of mouth travels quickly among friends and many times women invite other friends to these
women’s houses. This practice might also involve lay away, credit, flexibility and convenience in payments. It is very important to the women that the clothes are imported; it serves as a guarantee of quality and probably of status as well.

This practice has also potential implications for young women’s consumer socialization. On one hand they may learn to appreciate the personal attention and the intimacy of this transaction. On the other hand they may get used to have a smaller variety of clothing options from which to choose.

**Generation to generation**

The connection between mothers and daughters was also embodied in certain garments that were transmitted from generation to generation. These pieces were so important that these women carried them with them even when they moved to the US. Bringing these items from their countries of origins was like bringing a piece of family and tradition with them. For example, Ana had a stole from the 20s or 30s that belonged to her grandmother. Her mother passed it to her. She kept it carefully in her closet and used it only for very special occasions.

Maria kept in her closet a little strapless red dress that did not even fit her. It is a legacy from grandmother. She showed me the dress saying:

> This dress is going to impress you, it comes from generation to generation. This was my grandmother’s when she was young she made it herself. My mother wore it and then she gave it to me. I’ve never worn it, it doesn’t fit me, but I don’t want to get rid of it. (Translation).  

The fact that she kept this dress in her closet in a country where she started a new life shows that the dress symbolized the connection with her mother and grandmother. Having these symbolic clothing articles with them seems a way to guarantee the continuity of the traditional values that they represent. It is interesting to note that none of the more acculturated women mentioned having a clothing piece coming from previous generations.

**Standards of quality and fit**

Having a seamstress at home had also practical implications. An important insight that emerged from women in both groups is the influence their mothers had in their perceptions of the quality and fit of clothing.

As a consequence of living so close to where clothes were made, the women became very critical. Their standards for good fit and quality were high. In their
conversations they showed a relatively sophisticated knowledge about fabrics and finishing. For example, Soledad (more acculturated) pointed out that quality was one of the most important factors when buying clothes. She said:

I look at it on the inside and how it is finished. My mother was a dressmaker and she liked garments to be implacable on the inside. She would sew twice the inside seams, like designers do. (Translation).\(^9\)

Maria (less acculturated) also explained how fine her mother’s sewing was: “my mother sews in a very delicate way. It takes her a long time. When you see the clothing she makes they look almost reversible because they are perfect on the inside.” (Translation).\(^10\)

Another consequence of being used to having clothes tailored to their exact measures is that these women found it challenging to buy clothes that fit their body types the way they wanted. This was particularly true for pants.

When talking about her difficulties to find pants in the U.S., Maria explained how she felt about wearing pants that did not fit her body perfectly: “it feels like it is not your own clothes, it is like you are using borrowed clothes. Like it is not your size or your clothes” (Translation).\(^11\) She explained that everybody in her family was very picky when it came to clothing because the grandmother used to tailor all their clothes.

This account supports the idea introduced by symbolic consumption in which products are considered part of our extended selves (Belk, 1988). Clothes have to be compatible with one’s sense of self and fit is part of it. In this similar vein, clothes made by mothers symbolize parts the influence of the mother in the construction of the self. I’ll address some other implications regarding standards of quality due to the influence of tailor-made clothing in Chapter 7.

**The rules of the house and getting independent**

Mothers who did not make clothes themselves were still key in passing norms and rules about clothing. Belinda’s (more acculturated) mother, for example, had very clear rules:

The most important rule was: only natural fibers. We were not allowed to wear polyester. So, cotton, silk, linen, and wool were the only fabrics we were allowed to wear. She said they look fake. She felt they don’t wear well, they wash badly. That is how she felt about acrylic, rayon, and polyester.
When Belinda became independent, she had her own rules and considered some of her mother’s regulations nonsense. She said: “We were raised to wear nylons with skirts; of course, who wears nylons with skirts anymore? This is Florida. It is ridiculous! I wear things tighter than she would like me to. I don’t wear only natural fibers anymore.”

Even if Belinda, a second generation Latina, has separated herself from some of the conservative rules imposed by her first generation Hispanic mother, by wearing synthetic fibers and tighter clothes, she still considers her mother as a role model for style.

Soledad’s perception of how women should look when they are in public was strongly influenced by her mother and grandmother. The fact that she has been living in the U.S. for more than 15 years has not changed it.

I don’t like to go out like a mess. Not even to go to the grocery store. I would never wear this [showing shorts and flip-flops] to go to the store, like people do here. One learns at home that if you don’t put yourself together you look you’re ill. My grandmother always said to me ‘always go out put together’, “wear make up or you’ll look like you are sick.” I grew up with that. My grandmother still wears heels and puts herself together to go to the supermarket. (Translation).

This is a good example of how values that are engrained in individuals do not fade over time and how this is reflected in a tangible aspect of culture as it is appearance. Soledad learned to be other oriented in the way she should manage her appearance in public and that has not faded over time. A resistance to adopt the behavior that she considered prevalent in the U.S. has helped her maintain her original values related to appearance.

**What is appropriate**

Another way in which mothers exerted their influence was in teaching the social norms of what is appropriate and acceptable to wear in public and in developing the sense of modesty. Some of the accounts referred to the times when the women were adolescents and started wearing clothes that exposed their bodies. Their mothers functioned as a regulatory force teaching them to communicate the right message according to their social norms. For example, Ana (less acculturated) said:

Your mother always influences you. When you start to dress in more revealing clothes your mother says ‘nooo, that is not appropriate’. My father would address
it in a humorous way. When he saw me leaving the house with a miniskirt he would say ‘where are you going wearing only half a dress?’ (Translation).  

Elena (less acculturated) explained that her parents were very strict; they would not let her go out showing her torso or with very short shorts. They would make her change clothes before going out. Her father did not let her wear an anklet when she was a teenager because that was for “prostitutes” (prostitutas).

The enforcement of norms of decency was not unique in the less acculturated women. Belinda (more acculturated) also referred to similar situations: “my mother wouldn’t let me go out with something too short or too tight,” “we were raised not to show our bellies,” “I would never put something this short on if I am at her house.”

Following the parental normative in terms of dressing is a manifestation of the value of respect for parents that is essential in a hierarchical culture like the Hispanic culture (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005). These interactions are examples of how participants learned the symbolic meanings associated with clothing and accessories. The importance placed in how one looks in public is a manifestation of the collectivistic culture than tends to be other-oriented.

Another aspect of this behavior is the need of differentiation between public vs. private spaces. This can be explained by the cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance. De Mooij (2004) explains that “strong uncertainty avoidance makes people want to be well-groomed when they go out into the streets. It helps to structure the ambiguous world” (p. 170).

Chapter 6 addresses in more detail how the other orientation of the Hispanic culture affects women relationship with clothes and appearance. The issue about clothing, sexuality and modesty, and the behavioral results of the values learned through social interaction, will be discussed more in-depth in the next chapter.

**Role reversals**

Another interesting aspect in the daughter-mother-clothing relationship is when the second-generation daughter is more conservative than her Latina mother. This is the case for Monica who grew up in a small town in Florida where there were not many Hispanics. Monica did not see her mother as a role model for dressing. On the contrary, she felt a little embarrassed because her mother looked different from the rest of the people:
I didn't want to look like anybody; I just didn't want to look like my mom. Because I’m pretty conservative and I like to be covered, but my mom would wear little tank tops, and mini skirts and that was not what I wanted to look like. I would tell her “mom, put some clothes on.” So, I did anything not to look like her. I didn't really have anybody that I wanted to look like. I wanted her to cover up. She was wearing what I should be wearing, the little clothing. Still today I have to tell her “don’t go too far, please don’t wear that.”

In the case of Monica and her mother it looks like the roles were reversed. One would expect that it is the mother who would tend to be more conservative and therefore needs to control and somehow censor the daughter’s tendencies to wear revealing clothing, as in the previous examples. However, it looks like Monica felt her mother was different from other mothers of her age in a conservative town. Monica’s mother might have a more relaxed idea of what is socially accepted in terms of dress according to age, similar to what some of the participants felt. The topic of age will be discussed more in-depth in Chapter 5.

There was another type of role reversal in the case of Celina and her mother. Celina, as mentioned before, grew up in Cuba with little choice in what she could wear. Celina’s mother came to Miami only 3 years ago. Celina recognized that part of the restriction was because there was no dressmaker in her family. She emphasized that her mother had a hard time raising her and her brother:

In some families the mother or the grandmothers were seamstresses. That was not the case in my family. My mother was a hard worker, she worked very far away from home, and she really didn’t have the time to take care of our clothes. (Translation)\(^\text{14}\)

Even if they did not live in the same house, it was Celina who had socialized her mother in the consumer’s world, including the consumption of clothes. It is also interesting that Celina gave her mother some of the clothes and accessories that she no longer used because they were no longer fashionable. It suggests that her mother was less aware about what was fashionable or that she did not care using clothes that seemed to be out of style to her daughter.

The nature the role reversal in this mother-daughter interaction can be compared to what many other immigrants and their children experience. Because children acculturate at a faster pace than parents do, they become a bridge for their parents to the consumer culture (Peñaloza, 1990).
In the way Celina referred to her mother, one can feel the sense of gratitude for the sacrifice made by her mother. This is an illustration of the sense of sacrifice and devotion characteristic of Hispanic women, conceptualized as Marianismo (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005).

**Mothers and self-concept**

Not every woman in this study showed a positive reaction when it was the time to talk about their mothers’ (or a stepmother’s) influence on the way they dressed. Jocelyn (more acculturated), for example, lived with her Cuban father and American stepmother for a while. She explicitly said that when she was a teenager: “My step-mom influenced me negatively. She did not want me to wear tank tops because she said they were scandalous and that my arms were too fat for them. So I did not wear tank tops because of that.”

Jocelyn’s words had a hint of resentment for her stepmother’s negative force in her self-esteem, body image and individuality. She contrasted this force to her grandparents’ more understanding attitude that encouraged her to be herself. She said: “My grandparents, if they would say something I would say ‘listen, this is my style.’ As they are getting older and wiser they say ‘it’s ok, it’s your style’. But even if they are conservative they are ok with that.”

Elena (less acculturated) also let see a level of stress caused by the pressure imposed by her mother to look nice and put together:

My mother influenced me but in a coercive way. I still did what I wanted. But my family has codes, for example no polyester, only cotton, not to let see your bra strap, don’t show your belly. She is very demanding when it comes to clothes. She looks at you to see if you nails are clean, if your hair is dirty, if you gained 1 gram. I am always fat for her. (Translation).\(^{15}\)

Again, this example also addresses the importance placed by mothers on being well-groomed every time, characteristic of high uncertainty avoidance cultures (De Mooij, 2004).

It is clear that clothing and appearance became a central part of the mother-daughter relationship. This relationship can be bonding, resulting in a sense of self that connects in a positive way with the influence of the mother. But in other cases, the sense of self was guided by a separation and rebellion against the mother’s influence. Mothers
become role models of style (and self)—whether for how their daughters want to be or how they do not want to be. This is in alignment with the theory of self-concept development. According to this theory one’s self-concept grows out in part from how one compares oneself with others. Furthermore, the self-concept is also influenced by the reactions and evaluations people receive from others (Sproles & Burns, 1994).”

Here is the contrast between these two reactions: Norma admits, “I think that when I’ll have my mother’s age I will dress like her.” In contrast, Monica: “I just did not want to look like my mom” and “I did anything not to look like her.”

**Live influence**

For most of these women, the connection to their mothers through clothing was still alive. For example, for Ana and Norma, whose mothers still lived in their country of origin, going shopping for clothing with them, when they came to visit them in the U.S., became a special event. Taking them to the stores, helping them to find what they were looking for, and also buying for them, became part of the ritual of the visit: “When my mother comes to visit, we go together shopping for clothes, we try things on and help each other find the perfect clothes, we always fall in love with some clothes” (Ana, less acculturated, translation).

Norma’s mother still made clothes for her and sent or brought them to her when she came to visit. When her mother was in the U.S. for visits, shopping for clothes was one of the activities they liked to do the most.

So was it for Belinda whose mother lived in Central Florida. When she visited her they shopped for clothing together. Here is what she said about the experience: “I like to shop with her, we can enjoy it together, and it’s something that can be bonding.”

This enduring bonding can be explained by the traditional child-rearing way characteristic of the Hispanic culture. In this tradition, Hispanic children tend to depend on their parent for much longer than they do in the American culture, thus affecting their decision making (Korzenny and Korzenny, 2005; Valdes, 2000)

**The influence of institutions**

Socialization is the process of learning the skills necessary to function as a member of one’s cultural environment (Sproles & Burns, 1994). Generally it starts with
the parental training. Families are the most important socialization agent until one starts interacting in broader social contexts such as church, school, work. Sproles and Burns (1994) explain further:

In the adult years, social learning of norms for dress comes from combined influences of primary groups, secondary groups, and the collective behavior of mass society (…) the adult is also confronted with new social experiences and groups that require learning of new forms of social behavior and complementary styles of dress (p. 147).

The following section presents the participants’ accounts about how socialization agents other than family influenced their relationship with clothes.

**Religion, church, and respect**

One would expect that religion and Catholicism have an impact on the way Hispanic women relate to clothes and appearance. Traditional values of modesty and shame could be translated into conservative standards of what is decent and appropriate. However, it seems that among women in this study religion was not an important influence on their everyday way of dressing. In fact, not all of the participants were raised Catholic or were active in any religion. Nonetheless, women seemed to have learned the importance of showing respect to the institution and to God by the way they dress when they go to church.

The relationship between clothes and religion seemed to be relevant mostly in the context of the Church as a sacred place. Communicating respect and veneration through clothing in this case was bound to the location and situation. Here are some of the accounts about how they learned about religion and how to dress to go to church.

Jocelyn (more acculturated) is 21 years old. She sees herself as a very “liberal” person and has 8 tattoos on her body. She is not religious even if she grew up with her grandparents who are “devoted Catholics, they go to church and have a giant statue of Mary.” Her other set of grandparents were Christians, therefore she has “these two forceful religious aspects which clashed together and made me believe nothing.” Even if she claims that she is not religious, she sometimes goes to church with her Catholic grandmother for occasions such as her birthday or Christmas. Jocelyn is very informal and casual in her daily life. However, she says that for church she would not wear her long, dragging and destroyed jeans. She says
I grew up knowing that you don’t go to church with cut off little shorts because you are going to meet the Lord. I try to cover up my tattoos for her, so that she doesn’t have to hear anything from her friends.

Even if she was not religious, Jocelyn followed the norms of respect when she had to go to church, mainly to please her grandmother. This is a demonstration of how valuable it is to maintain harmony in her social environment. By showing respect to the institution, she also showed respect to older members of the family. These are values that are engrained in the Hispanic culture. Jocelyn, who showed her irreverence and rebellion in the way she looks, still maintained certain aspects of the Catholic heritage coming from her Hispanic background. Showing respect by the way she dresses when she goes to church is not due to Jocelyn’s personal relationship to religion or to what church means to her. It rather seems that it is due to the importance placed in maintaining harmony with her grandmother. The notion of respect, as a regards for people’s feelings reveals again the collectivistic and the high power distance orientation in the Hispanic culture. The manifestation of the notion of hierarchy and respect as related to religion is different in Norma’s case.

Norma (less acculturated) was Catholic. Since she married her Peruvian husband—who is not religious—she only went occasionally to church. She said that in church you have to show “respect.” She explains:

Respect is not to show your skin. [Respect is] to be covered. When you go to God’s house you go to listen to him, to be with him, not to have other people looking at you, or to look for a boyfriend, or to show off your beautiful clothes. You go there to listen and be in communion with him. (Translation).17

Norma’s approach shows that going to church is a special event that demands serious not playful clothing because the purpose of the visit is spiritual. One’s appearance should not be the center of attention. It seems that clothes should be as neutral as possible removing from the individual any displays of features such as gender, or social class.

Soledad (more acculturated) did not go to church anymore. But she explained what she learned back in Colombia about dressing to go to church:

Jesus is an important person. He is your Father. It is a figure that you respect therefore you cannot go to church dressed careless, because it would show that it is not important for you. When something is important for you, you dress for that occasion. If you don’t care, you don’t care about how you look; it means you
don’t care about church and God either. That is what lack of respect means. (Translation).\textsuperscript{18}

This perspective differs from the previous one. While Norma valued gravity and neutrality of appearance to go to church, Soledad thought that there is a need to correspond the significance of God in one’s life with the amount of care and attention put in one’s appearance. By dressing in a thoughtful way, people’s appearances indicate the level of devotion and deference.

When talking about church and clothing, the notion of respect emerges as a central force. Respect is very important in the Hispanic culture because it is hierarchy and power-distance-oriented. However, it is interesting to see how women used clothing for different manifestations of respect. Jocelyn focused on being neat enough to please her grandmother, Norma thought that it is necessary to be humble and understated, whereas Soledad learned that showing respect was more of a celebratory action and implied a display of special clothes consistent with the importance of the occasion.

\textbf{Superstition}

These women, religious or not, communicated devotion and respect through the way they dress to go to church. In addition to this, some participants also referred to dressing practices that show the influence of other spiritual believes.

Norma (less acculturated) did not have clothes that worked as amulet. However, when she had an interview or some important event she wore something that her mother had given to her, or maybe something blue. As a child she went to the school of metaphysics for children and she learned that certain colors have certain meanings. For example:

\begin{quote}
To go to the doctor I wear something blue, blue is the color of protection, or I would wear green which is the color of healing. If I have an important test I would wear white because is the color of wisdom or yellow which is the color of enlightenment. (Translation).\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

Under this light, clothing becomes an object with spiritual properties. The clothes given by her mother may make her feel protected and safe. Each color transmits a different quality.

Another example is Celina. Celina (less acculturated) loved black clothes. However she would never wear black in a circumstance in which she needed to solve a
problem or to create a positive outcome. She thought it “brings bad luck” (*trae mala suerte*) or “delays” (*atrás*). Also, for an important meeting such as a job interview she would wear something green because it was “the color of hope” (*el color de la esperanza*). She could not remember where she learned these practices but she said: “I’ve always done it, I know it is just superstition but it tranquilizes me” (*toda la vida lo he hecho. Yo sé que es solo una superstición, pero me tranquiliza*).

Not only less acculturated women had clothes to which they conferred magical qualities. Roxana said that until not long ago she had an outfit that she wore over and over for every important task because in one occasion it had brought her good luck. It was a white blouse with a royal blue skirt. “I would die if I didn’t find it. I would desperately look for it until I found it.”

Jocelyn’s amulet was an anklet. When her grandfather passed away, her grandmother made herself the rosary he was buried with. With some of the remaining beads Jocelyn and her sister made anklets for each other. She now wears it most of the time and it is part of her total look. She said: “He was wonderful. It makes me feel closer with him. When I am nervous I play with it. Some times I am a little religious and pray to him.”

These accounts exemplify the fact that both, less acculturated and more acculturated women conferred clothes and accessories protective qualities. To different degree and with different causes, clothes materialize spiritual believes. This behavior has no rational explanation and may come from the different religious influences that characterize the Hispanic culture. It is assumed that the American culture is more rational and scientific oriented; therefore this type of believes would not be typical. These findings address part of RQ 4 related to the basic function of clothes.

**School**

School was also a social environment in which participants learned norms and values regarding clothes and styles.

> When I was at the university, everybody used Timberland shoes; I also bought my Timberlands because everybody had them. You had to have Levi’s 501 in every color, and a shirt. It was very simple and you didn’t have to have a big variety. (Maria, less acculturated, translation).
This example shows that Maria adopted the norms and coded appearance to communicate group membership. By wearing what her reference group was wearing, she communicated her social identity and interconnectedness with them. It is interesting to see that this group of students in a private university in Caracas, Venezuela looked involved with global brands such as Timberland and Levi’s. In this social context, using imported American brands symbolized status and prestige, since at that time only wealthy individuals were able to afford them. From the symbolic consumption perspective, Maria used these brands to help the social construction of self by creating a sense of membership. It becomes clear that immigrants that come from the middle class may be familiar with brands. According to my observations the style that Timberland and Levi’s offer is very casual and it seems to be pretty prevalent in the U.S. It means that Hispanic women that had already adopted this look before coming to the U.S. may experience very few changes in their way of dress. What may be interesting to explore is the change in the brand symbolism. Does the perception of brands such as Timberland and Levi’s change when they come to the U.S.?

**School and resistance.** Another way in which participants showed an understanding of clothes and how they communicate group membership was by resisting what they considered to be the general norm. This resistance was addressed by the women who identified themselves as “intellectuals.” Elena (less acculturated) and Jocelyn (more acculturated) studied in the humanities area, whereas Soledad (more acculturated) studied medicine. All three reported going through the stage of resistance for mainstream fashions and ideologies by adopting more “authentic” and “autochthonous looks.” They admitted having the influence of the hippie subculture. This “localistic” perspective is clearly in contrast with Maria’s accommodation toward the main group in her school and the American brands.

Soledad (more acculturated) described her adolescent style as “aboriginal” (*aboriginal*). She said:

It was the ideology. We were more concerned about the intellect, about studying. There were 2 groups: the one of the intelligent women and the one of the stupid ones. We thought we were among the intelligent ones. We watched independent movies, we liked arts, and there was a respect for the indigenous. A lot of that was to separate us from the rest. We liked to dress more ‘aboriginal,’ like using autochthonous skirts and accessories. (Translation).
The value for what is autochthon was a reaction to mainstream fashion which is associated with capitalism and domination (Root, 2005). Women learned the coded appearance to convey this ideological resistance. By trying to differentiate themselves from a group they did not identify with, they became similar to others which they related to.

Elena was a journalist and she liked to hang out with poets, writers, artists, and intellectuals. She defined her style as “bohemian-chic,” which is an evolution of the “hippie” self to the professional “grown up” self.

Soledad thought that she still has not abandoned her “aboriginal” perspective and sometimes it reflects in her looks: “I sometimes see myself still buying Indian skirts. I don’t think I have completely abandoned that style.”

These views reflect that some of the norms and values learned are not abandoned with time or changes of lifestyle, but rather they are incorporated in their evolving identities.

**Work**

Participants also referred to the work environment as a place where they learned norms and values about clothes and appearance.

Two of the more acculturated women needed uniforms for work. Uniforms are legitimating emblems of membership within organizations (Sproles & Burns, 1994). They emphasize membership and minimize individuality. Uniforms also entail an explicit normative. The clothing code in uniforms is rigid and there is little place for negotiation.

Those women who did not have to wear uniforms for work learned coded appearance through both explicit and implicit norms.

Norma (less acculturated) was a Spanish teacher. She taught Spanish to children of all ages. The dress codes were explicit in her work handbook. The handbook stated that female teachers should not wear skirts above the knees, shorts, sandals, heels, tank tops or other clothing that expose the body. She understood that some of the restrictions were based on safety, like not wearing heels not to hurt the children, or not wearing sandals not to get hurt by the children. Other rules were based on modesty. The intention was not to call attention to the teacher’s body. She learned through experience that older kids start to be aware of the female body. To avoid reactions such as “I can see your bra” she discontinued the use of button-up shirts, which tend to open. As a result of the
explicit norms in the handbook and what she learned from the interaction with students and other co-workers, Norma decided to adopt a sort of uniform consisting of a chemise type of shirt (no cleavage, no bottoms, long enough) with pants or capris. Norma indicated that her co-workers sometimes wear workout pants and shoes to work, but this is a style she resisted, because her workout clothes are just for working out.

In the place where Maria worked, norms were not explicit. Maria (less acculturated) taught English to international students. She did not receive instructions about how to dress for work. She said that at her workplace there are no explicit rules but rather an implicit code. People “don’t dress too formal, but it has to be loose (not tight)” (no muy formal, pero holgado), so she never wore tight pants for work. She also learned that, working with international students, she should create a relatively formal image because they are not used, as American students are, to the informality of the school. Sometimes they were not used to having female instructors. She said:

> We also have Arab students. They are not used to having women teach them and give them orders. So, you have to be more serious and formal (…) they call attention to the interns that work with us when they wear shorts to work, that is too informal.” (Translation).

Because of her social experience with culturally diverse individuals Maria acquired the competency to communicate through clothes her role as a professor in a sensitive and respectful way. But what is Hispanic about this behavior? This might not be different to the way an Anglo woman would communicate her role as a professor in this same context. It is possible to say that Hispanic women and Anglo women might behave the same because of the role they have to play.

This section presented the norms and values that are common to both less acculturated and more acculturated women in this study. The following section focuses on experiences that are unique to the less acculturated women.

**Acculturation. New norms and behaviors to learn**

One of the obvious differences between the less acculturated and acculturated women I have interviewed is the fact that the less acculturated experienced immigration as adults. The changes in clothing and appearance that these women went through when they arrived in the U.S. is not as extreme as it could be for women of another culture such as Middle Eastern or any other culture in which clothing is more ethnically oriented.
Women in Latin American cities do not dress considerably different than women in the United States, particularly not those coming from the middle class, and differences in clothing are subtle. However, my respondents have told stories of changes they experienced in dressing behaviors after coming to the U.S. Those changes included being confronted with consumer society for the first time, experiencing cold weather for the first time, embracing womanhood, and understanding informality.

**Becoming a consumer**

The case which most stood out from the others in this study was the story of Celina. Celina taught Spanish at the University of Miami, and she was married and had a daughter. Her parents came from Cuba a couple of years ago. Celina grew up in Cuba with very little choice in anything, including clothing. Obviously the consumer experience she had before she left the communist system is very different from the one the other participants had.

My brother and I had very few clothes. We had to wash them over and over. In Cuba there are few people who have a closet with choice and variety. When I got out of Cuba, I went to Mexico for a master’s in Public Administration, and that was the first time that I went out, I was 24. It was then that I started going to stores. I said ‘how wonderful, I can buy anything I want (…). Of course I already had my taste, things that I liked, things that I had seen in magazines or on TV, but not because I had them. It is now that I finally have the things that I like, and what I want. Before I didn’t. (…) I came from Cuba with nothing. I didn’t know how to write a check, I didn’t know what a credit card was. It doesn’t exist in Cuba. It was like being born again. (Translation).\(^{23}\)

To explain this experience it is possible to use the concepts of symbolic interaction applied to acculturation. In the communist system, the coding of clothing is similar to the coding of uniforms. Since there is no actual market or variety of products, people tend to wear what is available and everybody tends to have a similar look. In that context, clothes communicate equality, social membership, and community, weakening the possibilities for self-expression. Those are the codes that Celina learned in the social context she grew up with. Her consumer socialization experience in a free market society started relatively late. She had to learn every behavior related to consumption from scratch.

Like many other immigrants, Cecilia came to the U.S. in search for a better life. Her story illustrates what many Hispanic immigrants experience when coming from very
limited resources. Celina exemplifies the concept of consumer acculturation which refers to the “cultural change as manifest in the marketplace” (Peñaloza, 1990, p. 19). She experienced consumer socialization as an adult, something that, in non-communist societies, takes place in childhood. Peñaloza (1990) explains that age, education, and the passing of time are important variables in the studies of consumer acculturation, however more important is how that time is passed. For example, peer socialization seems to be very important in gaining experience quickly in the marketplace. It is not illogical to imagine that once Celina arrived to the U.S., her involvement with other previous Cuban immigrants with whom she could identified, was crucial in understanding the marketplace.

At a different level, for Celina, clothes meant freedom. The fact that she could afford to buy clothes that she liked and expressed her personal taste symbolized a disruption to her previous state of constraint and deprivation. The freedom provided by the consumption culture has allowed her to manifest her individuality through clothing and appearance.

**Experiencing the seasons**

All of the less acculturated participants in this study came from countries with tropical climates, lacking the four seasons. Winter and colder weather were completely new for some of them. Norma, for example, bought and wore boots and jackets for the first time after she came to the US.

Women coming from tropical weather learned norms and rules related to seasons when they arrived in the US, which they not necessarily followed. For example, several of them brought up the rule about not wearing white shoes after Labor Day. This rule, however, was not relevant for them and they did not follow it.

Ana very clearly articulated different areas in which she learned new rules related to seasonal materials, colors and styles:

In terms of materials, during the spring and summer you have to wear linen, and cotton. I learned that by watching [people]. Also people say things to you. During summer I went to work wearing a corduroy skirt, and the secretary told me ‘you must be dying of heat’. It was a short skirt. I wasn’t dying. People [here] are too square because [they say] corduroy should not be worn in the summer. [I think] one should use corduroy whenever one wants. (Translation). 24
Her resistance to adopt this rule might also be explained by the fact that in Latin America stores often sell seasonal clothes even if in those places cold weather does not exist. My informal observations in Latin America indicate that people sometimes, for the sake of style, use winter clothes even if the weather is not cold. One may see somebody wearing a winter coat in Caracas, where there is no winter.

Ana also complained about how, in the U.S., certain colors are so closely attached to seasons.

Here colors are by season. In the fall you notice everything is yellow and orange (...) Of course you could wear red all year round if you wanted to, but people here use more red during the holidays, more white during the summer, brown during the fall. (Translation).

She was also confused before she learned that people buy clothes for next season several months in advance.

It is crazy how people [in the U.S.] buy clothes several months before they need them, just to be ready for the next season. It has happened to me that I go to the store and want to buy something that I need in the middle of a season and it is no longer available. We are still in winter and stores already have springtime styles. (Translation).

The feeling among less acculturated women was that they were comfortable wearing any color, any time of the year and that they do not necessarily limit themselves to the color that is “in”: “Here people say that white is only for summer and black for the winter, not me, I use any color all the time” (Norma, translation). One way to explain this behavior is to see it as a resistance to adopt the norms of style ruled by reasons. However, it is also possible that these women haven’t had the time to accept and internalized seasonal style changes.

It is interesting to note that Becky, a second generation participant that has lived most of her life in Florida seems not to feel the changes in colors and seasons. She said:

As for the seasons I care more about the fabric than about the colors. I think pink is a yearlong. I think that, in Florida, colors are not as important because it is a tropical climate. In Florida you can wear white after Labor Day, I do, I don’t care.

This can be explained because in Florida the weather is relatively stable for most of the year. People can use light clothing for at least eight months out of the year. It would be interesting to study acculturation reflected in the adoption of winter clothes in
Hispanic women who move to other regions where the seasons are more marked than in Florida.

The learning of new meaning attached to clothing is explained by symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Kaiser, 1997). This approach assumes that meanings associated with clothing or any other cultural object emerges from social interaction and new contexts and interactions transform meanings. The story about the corduroy skirt is an example of how this material changed its meaning for Ana after she interacted with other individuals in the context of a summer in the U.S. Her statement suggests that she understands that the meaning in the new context is different; however, she shows a resistance to the new meaning.

The fact that women in this study resisted the colors dictated by the market every season also raises the question: are they less fashion conscious? Or are they more likely to be the innovators because they do not follow the rules dictated by the industry?

Following the bottom-up model of fashion diffusion (Field, 1970) it is possible to think that designers and marketers in the clothing industry have been inspired by sub-cultural groups that do not follow the guidelines of the season to incorporate new colors, styles and materials into their collections.

**Becoming sexier and more colorful**

Another interesting theme related to the change participants experienced once in the U.S. is the increased adoption of more revealing and colorful clothes.

Norma, for example, began to wear her hair long, curly and down. When she was in her home country she never used it like this. She used to go to the hairstylist weekly to have elaborated styles done. Also, she admitted that before coming to the U.S. she would never have dared to wear some of the sexy dresses and tops she now wears. “I was too shy,” *(era muy tímida)* she said. Moreover, before she came to the U.S., her wardrobe tended to be basically blue and grey. Nowadays she wears almost every color.

This change could be explained by a life stage factor. She reached a different stage of her life in the U.S., because in this country she finished a master’s degree, she got married and she became financially independent. This new status may have improved her self-esteem allowing her to feel more confident and playful about her appearance. Also, her husband’s influence encouraged her to try different colors and styles. He joined the conversation about Norma’s clothes for a while, pointing out that her tendency is to
go for dark, plain colors, but now she is enjoying more the colors that contrast with her dark skin.

Another factor involved in this change may be that in the context of the U.S. having a colorful look that enhances her “hispanicity” has a more positive connotation. Her long curly hair and the contrast of bright colors with her brown skin may not be unusual in her country, but in the U.S. it becomes exotic and “cool.” Hispanic celebrities such as Shakira, J-lo, Salma Hayek, etc. have had an impact on leveraging the image of Hispanic women in the U.S. Having a certain Hispanic look has positive connotations in mainstream American culture. This may produce a sense of pride and self-esteem in Hispanic women who in their country of origins did not feel special or comfortable with their physical appearance.

**Dressing casual**

An important theme that emerged among the less acculturated woman was the association of the American style with casual style. This association had both positive and negative connotations and produced contradictory feelings among participants.

One interesting example was a story told by Norma about one of her girl-friends. Norma’s longtime friend from Venezuela moved to Boca Raton four years ago. When they both lived in Venezuela, Norma always admired the way she dressed. She was her aspirational role model because she “she always looked nice.” She was always in nice pants, blouses, high heels sandals, and everything matched. Sometimes when they went shopping together they would buy the same clothes. Her friend would always look very nice in the new clothes, and Norma asked herself: “Why does she look elegant and I don’t?” This friend used to sell clothes and Norma was one of her clients. She helped Norma choose what to wear, how to match, and what was ‘in.’ Nowadays, her friend is no longer somebody she wants to emulate. Norma expressed with disappointment:

> Now she doesn’t pay attention what she wears, she is all day in flip-flops. Maybe what happened is that she married an American. She also gained a lot of weight. That is also why in your survey she answered that she was not interested in clothing. (Translation). \(^{28}\)

It is not possible to conclude that the changes in style suffered by Norma’s friend are due to the process of acculturation. From Norma’s words it seemed that she was not very proud of herself for the change. I cannot comment on the individual circumstances
that led her to give up something that seemed to be very important to her before. However, one can say that in the United States she can wear flip-flops in public without the social sanction that she would have experienced in Venezuela, where in general flip-flops are used only in the private context of the house or at the beach. Not having the social pressure to be dressed up at all times facilitated the relaxation of norms, producing a change in her appearance. It is also important to note that Norma’s attitude towards her friend’s current careless style indicates a negative sanction. Her friend was not an example to follow anymore and Norma somehow felt sorry for her.

The process of adopting a more informal style after one has analyzed the environmental clues becomes clear in the following statement:

I learned watching other people, what they use. At the beginning you try to guess. You think that something is appropriate and when you arrive there and you see that people are more informal, and then you change your style a little. (Ana, translation).

**The paradox: to care or not to care.** Most of the less acculturated women agreed that in the U.S. norms about appearance are more relaxed than in their country of origin, meaning that the standards for what is socially accepted are less strict. This fact produced conflicting feelings. On one hand, they appreciated the freedom to be less casual but on the other hand, they resented the lack of care that this relaxation produces. Maria’s anecdote illustrates this: Maria was an English teacher in Venezuela. She started teaching at a very young age and she was barely older than most of her students. She felt the pressure to wear formal clothes in order to look more “serious” towards the students. She was used to an environment where male professors wore suits and ties. Then she came to the U.S. as a student and joined a center for teaching English for international students.

Here is how she described her initial reaction to the informality she encountered in the U.S., and how her perception changed over time:

The first time I met my professor—the program director—he was wearing flip-flops and shorts. I was totally shocked. Later you understand what it is about and you appreciate it. Now, when I go back to Venezuela I get stressed. I have to bring my nicest clothes with me. Down there everybody looks like models. Now I see it from a different perspective and I think sometimes there is too much vanity [down there]. (Translation).
Maria’s values regarding clothes have shifted as she has learned to appreciate the more relaxed norms about clothing and appearance in the U.S. She now values the comfort and freedom given to the individual in a less other-oriented society, qualities which are considered negative in the other-oriented value system of the Hispanic culture where she came from. For example, she was glad that she could now do what she could never have done in Caracas: go to the supermarket wearing shorts and flip-flops. However, she would never go to work or to a concert wearing flip-flops. This suggests that she has adopted values related to individual comfort over social conformity only in certain contexts. The context of the supermarket seems to be low on the scale of formality as compared to work or a concert, which would be high in formality.

Norma also enjoys the sense of freedom she feels in the U.S. to wear “whatever you feel like, whenever you feel like it” (lo que te de la gana, cuando te de la gana). She contrasted this sense of freedom to the restrictions caused by the social pressure in her country of origin. Here is what she said:

I like that here nobody is going to criticize you for what you wear. Down there it is very different because you know that people are looking at you and judging you. Not here. Here you can go around [looking] like a crazy woman and nobody is going to tell you anything. But on the other hand, I don’t like that you can also look very nice and nobody is going to say anything either. (Translation).\(^{31}\)

Norma’s words reflect two sets of values. Like Maria, she seemed to value the individuality and self-expression of the American culture, but simultaneously she missed the social approval and positive feedback which characterize the other-oriented Hispanic culture. In addition, Norma manifested her dislike for the excessive informality of Americans because “they go in flip-flops everywhere, even when they go out.” Also, when talking about dressing too casually for work she said: “Even if I were allowed to do it, I would never do it, because I don’t like it.” (Translation).\(^{32}\)

This apparent contradiction is an indicator that the adoption of the new culture (represented here by informal clothing) may be something that participants adopt only partially and for certain situations.

**Summary and conclusion**

This chapter addressed the following research questions: RQ1 What are the norms and values learned through social interaction as related to clothing and fashion? RQ8
How is it different according to the level of acculturation? Also, aspects of the protective function of clothes were discussed RQ 3 how do Hispanic women perceive the basic functions of clothing in terms of protection, modesty/immodesty and adornment?

One main conclusion is that participants in this study are similar in one fundamental way: when it comes to clothing and appearance, they are driven by the values and beliefs that come from the Hispanic culture. The fact that they have been in contact with both the Hispanic and American cultures at different times in their lives creates a tension between what they want to adopt and what they resist giving up. However, their preference seems to lean towards the Hispanic cultural values that are deeply rooted in their hearts and minds.

In terms of the nature of early social interactions that influenced their relationship with clothes and their understanding of themselves and the world, no noteworthy differences emerged, particularly because the influence of the Hispanic mother was present for all participants. Both groups were similar in the way the interaction with their mothers shaped their relationship with clothes. Clothing articles symbolized the emotional connection and love between them. Mothers who made clothes for them also influenced their standards of fit and quality, styles and materials. Finally, the interaction with their mothers had an influence on the way the women relate to their own body and self-esteem.

The long lasting influence of the mother on the decision-making process about clothing and appearance seems to be a manifestation of the traditional parent-daughter relationship in the Hispanic culture that encourages dependency even when children are adults.

Other socialization agents such as school, church, and work had an influence on the way participants in this study understand the world through clothing. Respect is a value that both acculturated and less acculturated women communicated through clothing. Women in this study communicated respect to God and to the church in different ways: dressing in a way as to maintain harmony with a family member who attends to church, by being simple and solemn, and by dressing up to be consistent with the importance of the celebration. Because the Hispanic culture is a high power distance culture and has religion at its core, one can understand that clothing and appearance would be used to communicate the distance between humans and God.
Also related to religion and spirituality, women in this study conferred magical and protective powers to clothes. These beliefs with no rational explanation may reflect the influence of customs coming from African and indigenous cultures as well as a result of the global trend for soul searching and individual fulfillment.

Other norms and behaviors learned in school were related to social affiliation and differentiation through resistance. By adopting the look used by the reference group with which they wanted to be identified, women communicated a facet of their social identity. The idea behind this behavior is “to have is to belong” (Wattanasuwan, 2005). One can expect that the need for social affiliation is very important in school age. Even more so, in a collectivistic culture where maintaining harmony and saving face is important, conforming to the expectations of clothing and appearance becomes instrumental. However, participants also showed signs of resistance. By adopting an autochthonous look in contrast to well-known brands, women communicate their statements against the mainstream-dominant consumerism. This attitude echoes the anti-fashion movements in Latin America that stand against the domination of capitalism (Root, 2005).

Finally, the other socialization institution in which women learned norms and values related to clothing was work. Here they adopt the explicit norms and values that the institution dictates explicitly or implicitly. The meaning of working clothes for these women’s professional identity will be discussed later in this study.

The findings in this portion of the study have shown that there were more commonalities than differences in the learned norms and values related to clothing and appearance. Those commonalities are largely explained by the common bicultural nature of these women. It has been also shown that the most important values and norms are largely influenced by traditional Hispanic cultural orientations that persist over time.

It is also important to acknowledge that all these women, acculturated and less acculturated, came from relatively similar socioeconomic backgrounds. With the exception of Celina who grew up in Cuba, the less acculturated ones came from the middle class in their country of origin. They were educated and, in most cases, their parents were professionals. As suggested by Korzenny and Korzenny (2005) the middle classes across countries are more likely to be similar among them. The fact that clothing and fashion is pretty much globalized, together with the fact that the women interviewed...
belong to a similar socioeconomic class, make the differences among them less apparent and more subtle.

However, there were few important elements that were unique for the less acculturated group.

The first difference is intrinsic to the immigration experience and conveys the encounter with some of the aspects of the consumer system that was completely new to some of the women coming from Latin America. For example, one participant learned to be a consumer just in her middle 20s. This experience is very different to the experience Anglo women or of Hispanic women that arrive to this country at an early age. Another set of new consumer rules that women coming from Latin America have to learn is the norms related to clothing and the four seasons. They come into this country with no pre-determined seasonal related meaning for materials and colors. It is through social interactions in the new contexts that they learn to change and reinterpreted the seasonal language of clothing.

The last aspect in which less acculturated women differed from the more acculturated ones in terms of values and norms, is shown in their preference for a formal style over the casual style. Underlying this stylistic preference is the need for hierarchy and structure as well as the need for generating positive impressions in others. These values characteristic of the Hispanic culture was less prevalent among the more acculturated women who did not show strong negative attitudes toward the casual and relaxed style related to the Anglo culture as less acculturated women did.

The issue of formal and casual styles is not only related to the others or individual orientation characteristics of the Hispanic and American culture. This need for differentiation between the degrees of formality of events reveals a need to structure the world which is characteristic of the cultures high in uncertainty avoidance, such as the Hispanic culture (De Mooij, 2004). Moreover, it also reveals the need for hierarchical differentiation distinctive of high power distance cultures (Hofstede, 1991). The initial confusion that can be experienced when meeting important people wearing very casual clothes may be due to the lack of visual clues which help to interpret social status. How does a less acculturated woman read her boss’s higher position in the hierarchy if he is wearing flip-flops and Bermudas instead of a suit and a tie?
It is important to note that less acculturated women did adopt the informal and casual style, but they did it for a limited situation, for which they consider it appropriate. For example, going to the supermarket. This situational adoption may imply that there is not a complete internalization of the values that are related to the casual style, such as individualism and equality as explained by previous research (Ericksen & Kaigler-Walker, 1987). According to the literature, the situational adoption of values indicates that the process of acculturation is not linear, but at least bidimensional (Berry, 2003; Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005). During the acculturation process these participants not only adopted norms from the host culture, but they also maintained norms and values attached to their original culture by not giving up their need for having an appearance that they considered acceptable of the social situation.

I have discussed how these findings are related to the theoretical framework or cultural orientations, acculturation, and biculturalism. But the findings in this section also support the symbolic interactionist perspective. Two of the premises of symbolic interactionism are that meaning is constructed through the process of social interaction and also through the individual internal dialogue that reinterprets experience (Blumer, 1969).

Interactions in the social contexts of family, church, school, and work shaped the understanding of coded appearance. Social interactions constructed the language for communicating individuality, respect, veneration, and admiration through clothing and appearance. Social interactions also constructed the meaning assigned to clothes when they were believed to have magical powers. The spiritual beliefs coming from the various influences present in the Hispanic culture are learned and reinterpreted.

Conferring magical powers to clothes also comes from the interpretation of individual experiences, for example, when one explains a positive outcome through the clothes one was wearing during the event.

Another example of how meanings are modified and reinterpreted at the level of the individual can be seen in the context of the rebellious “anti-fashion” fashion adopted by some of the participants. They learned in the context of their reference group at school the anti-establishment connotations of ethnic clothes. As they moved into the professional world, the meaning of rebellion symbolized in a skirt or a blouse was modified and reinterpreted after subsequent experiences and interactions with others and with
themselves. The same clothing article, reinterpreted, can undergo a meaning transformation from hippie rebellious to “bohemian-chic.” Bohemian-chic is a fashion trend that commercialized and legitimized clothes and patterns that initially were associated with hippies and ethnic groups. Once elevated to the level of “chic,” the reinterpreted meaning not only contains the original connotation of resistance against the status quo but also the connotations of being modern and up-to-date.

One final thought is about the bicultural nature of the participants in this study. According to Korzenny and Korzenny (2005) bicultural individuals have a more complex view of life, allowing them to have “the best of both words” They say

They have the opportunity to select attributes of both cultures that they enjoy.

Those who acculturate, as oppose to assimilate, have a more complex view of life.

The bicultural view of the acculturated Hispanic is likely to bring about generations of individuals with a broader perspective on life. (136)

Hispanic women in this study showed that they not only select attributes from one culture or the other but also that they display characteristics of one culture or the other depending on the particular situation.

This chapter has explained the main aspects and agents that shaped important norms and values related to clothing and appearance for the women in this study. The following chapter explains how the women communicate different facets of their identity through clothing. The discussion of the following chapter cannot be separated from the discussion about norms and values learned. The way women communicate gender, age, and ethnicity in their current lives is a consequence of what they have learned through social interaction.
queda bien va y busca otro, ella se toma tu tiempo para hacer cada cosa. Si no me quisiera, no haría nada de eso. (Norma)
6 Mi mama y mi abuela eran costureras. Mi abuela siempre decía “las muchachas tienen que verse bien, con vestidos buenos, mostrar la figura, estar bien arregladas” (Soledad)
7 Recuerdo cuando era adolescente y mi mama me empezó a comprar ropa para verme linda. Recuerdo que iba con ella a comprar zapatos. Ella compraba para ella y para mí. Y había una señora a la que le comprábamos ropa. Yo las elegía, pero con la limitación de que a ella no le gusta, no entra en la lista. (Ana)
8 Aquí te voy a impactar con un vestido de generación en generación. Este era de mi abuela lo hizo ella misma cuando era joven. Se lo puso mi mama, y ella me lo dio a mí. Y yo no me lo he puesto, no creo que me quede pero es un clásico, no lo quiero regalar. No se cuantos años tendrá. (Maria)
9 Yo miro las cosas por dentro para ver como son los acabados. Mi abuela era costurera y a ella le gustaba la ropa impecable por dentro. Cosía todo con costura doble, como los diseñadores (Soledad).
10 Mi mamá es muy delicado, se tarda mucho. Es super delicada. Tú ves cosas que ella hace y parece costura reversible porque la costura por dentro es perfecta. (Maria)
11 Se siente como si la ropa es prestada. Como que no es tu talla y no es tu ropa. (Maria)
12 No me gusta salir desordenada, ni siquiera a hacer grocery, me pondría esto, como hace la gente aquí. Uno aprende en su casa que si tú no te arreglas pareces enferma. Eso siempre me lo decía mi abuela. Y también “siempre que salga, salga arregladita.” Eso ha venido como en la familia y también “siempre maquillese, sino parece enferma.” Yo crecí con eso y mi abuelita siempre se pone tacones y sale arregladas al supermercado (Soledad).
13 Tu mama siempre influencia, cuando te empiezas a vestir, lo que es apropiado o no. Cuando te empiezas a vestir con cosas reveladoras y tu mama dice “nooo, eso no es apropiado.” Mi papa me echaba broma, me hacía reír y se burlaba, hacia chistes de cuando empecé a usar minifaldas me decía “epa, ¿pa’ donde vas con medio vestido?”
14 Había otras familias en la que la madre o la abuela era costurera, en mi familia no era ese caso. Mi mama era una señora trabajadora, trabajaba lejísimos, tenia que montarse en el autobús y vivíamos lejos, no tenia tiempo realmente para ocuparse de la ropa de nosotros (Celina)
15 Mi mama me influenció pero en sentido coercitivo, pero igual hice lo que me dio la gana. Pero mi familia tiene códigos, por ejemplo no poliéster, todo es algodón. No dejes ver la tira del sostén, no enseñar la barriga. Mi mama es muy exigente con la ropa. Si tienes las unas limpias, si tu pelo está sucio, si engordaste 1 gramo. Para ella yo siempre estoy gorda (Elena)
16 Cuando mi mama viene de visita, salimos a comprar ropa junta, nos probamos cosas y nos ayudamos a elegir la ropa perfecta. Siempre nos enamoramos de algo (Ana)
17 El respeto es no mostrar la piel sino estar cubierto. Uno va a la casa de Dios es para escuchar y estar con él y no para que las otras personas lo estén mirando a uno, para buscar novio o para exhibirse, mostrar la ropa linda que se tiene, sino para sentarse y escuchar y estar en comunión con Dios. (Norma)
18 Jesús es una persona importante, Dios es tu padre, es una figura que se respeta y no se puede ir vestida como quieras, pues no estas ensenado que algo es importante para ti... Cuando es algo es importante para ti... Cuando es algo es importante para ti... te vistes para esa ocasión. Si no te importa, no te importa como te ves, no te importa (donde estas). si no te interesa como vas vestida, pues tampoco te interesa estar en la iglesia. Eso es parte de la falta de respeto (Soledad).
19 Para ir al doctor me pongo algo azul, porque es el color de la protección, o el color verde que es el color de la sanación. Por ejemplo, si voy a hacer un examen importante me visto de blanco, porque es de la sabiduría. O amarillo que es la iluminación (Norma)
20 En la época que fui a la universidad, todo el mundo tenía que tener zapatos Timberland... Me compre mis zapatos Timberland porque todo el mundo los tenía. Los jeans eran los 501 de todos los colores, y camisa y ya. Era muy sencillo vestirse en la universidad, no tenía que tener tanta variedad. (Maria)
21 Era como la ideología. A nosotros nos preocupaba el intelecto. Había como 2 grupos, las inteligentes y las estupidas. Nosotras nos considerábamos inteligentes. Nos creíamos las intelectuales, íbamos a la cinemateca a ver cine independiente o cosas de arte, había como un respeto para lo indígena, era también como para separarse del grupo...eso nos hacia diferente a los otros. Nos gustaba vestirnos mas al estilo aborigen, usábamos faldas y accesorios autóctonos. (Soledad)
22 Además por ejemplo tenemos estudiantes árabes. Ellos, no están acostumbrados a que las mujeres les den clase y órdenes. Hay que ser más serio y más formal. ellos le llaman la atención a los pasantes que trabajan con nosotros, cuando van con shorts al trabajo, es muy informal (Maria)
Entonces mi hermano y yo teníamos muy poquitas piezas y había que lavarlas constantemente. Cuando salí de Cuba y fui a México a estudiar una maestría en administración pública y era la primera vez que salía de Cuba a los 24 años. Allí fue cuando empecé a ir a las tiendas y decía “que maravilla puedo comprar lo que yo quiera (...) y ya claro tenía mi gusto, ciertas cosas que me gustaban. Porque veía revistas y televisión, pero no porque yo lo haya tenido, nunca lo tuve. Ahora es que yo vengo a tener las cosas que me gustan. Y lo que quiero pero antes no. Llegué de Cuba sin nada. No sabía ni escribir un cheque. No sabía que era una tarjeta de crédito. Eso no existe en Cuba. Fue como volver a nacer (Celina)

Los materiales usas más lino en primavera verano. Eso lo aprendí de ver. La gente te lo dice. En verano fui a trabajar con una falda de pana, y la secretaria me dijo “ay, te debes estar muriendo de calor” y era una falda corta por arriba de la rodilla. No me estaba muriendo de calor, la gente es como muy cuadrada porque pana no se usa en el verano. Uno usa pana cuando uno quiere. (Ana).

También los colores, aquí todo sale en colores por las estaciones, empiezas a ver todas las cosas amarillas, anaranjadas, en otoño. (...). Puedes usar rojo en cualquier momento del año pero la gente usa mucho más rojo durante diciembre, mas blanco en el verano y marrones en el otoño (Ana)

Pero es una locura como la gente se compra la ropa meses antes de que la necesite para estar lista para cuando llega la estación. Me ha pasado que voy a comprar algo que necesito en la mitad de la estación y ya no lo hay porque ya todo el mundo lo compro. Mira que ahora todavía es invierno y las tiendas ya tienen la moda de primavera (Ana)

La gente aquí dice que el blanco es para el verano. Yo no, yo uso blanco todo el tiempo (Norma)

Ahora ya no se viste así, ahora anda de cotizas, tal vez porque esta casada con un gringo y también está muy gorda. Por eso en tu encuesta contesto que no le interesaba mucho la ropa porque esta muy gorda.

Aprendí viendo lo que las otras personas usan, preguntando...al principio tratas de adivinar, piensas que algo es apropiado y llegas allá y ves que la gente se viste mas informal, entonces cambios un poco tu estilo. (Ana)

La primera vez que conocí a mi profesor, el director del programa, era en agosto y el estaba en flip-flops y shorts y yo me quede totalmente impresionada. Después lo entiendes y lo aprecias. Por ejemplo cuando voy a Venezuela me estreso, tengo que buscar la mejor ropa que tengo, para mi ir al cine o al mall me estresa, ves a la gente y parecen modelos. Ya lo veo desde otra perspectiva y me parece que somos demasiado vanidosos, es una exageración. (María)

Me gusta que te puedes poner lo que te dé la gana cuando te dé la gana y nadie te va a criticar, allá es muy diferente pues tu sabes que te están mirando ¡ay, mira, bla, bla, bla!

Aquí no, aquí puedes andar como una loca y nadie te dice nada, también puedes estar muy bien y tampoco te dicen nada.(Norma)

Se ponen chanclas para todo, hasta para salir). Así me lo permitieran no lo haría, pues eso no me gusta (Norma)
CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS —COMMUNICATING IDENTITY

Introduction
This chapter takes an in-depth look at the way Hispanic women in this study communicate individuality in terms of social status, gender, age, ethnicity, and class through clothing (RQ2). This section will also cover the basic function of clothes’ modesty and immodesty and adornment as perceived by them (RQ3). Finally, it will address how the previous mentioned functions are different for less acculturated/ more acculturated Hispanic women? (RQ8)

The importance of these questions comes from the theories reviewed regarding the functions of clothing, as well as symbolic interactionism, consumer behavior and acculturation. By identifying how women feel about clothes in relation to gender, age, ethnicity, and prestige, we can better understand the symbolic system of clothes. We can also better understand the individual, social, and cultural values that are associated with identity and how they are conveyed through clothing and appearance.

Because they came from a predominantly collectivistic culture, less acculturated Hispanics are anticipated to conform to the general social norms. One can also expect that they would try to maintain harmony in the group, and seek social approval. These behaviors should be reflected in the way they relate to their appearance. Also, less acculturated women may follow a more traditional gender differentiation through clothing than the more acculturated counterparts. In addition, since the Hispanic culture emphasizes hierarchy in society, they may be likely to use clothes that they perceive as indicating social distance.

In contrast, more acculturated Hispanic women are expected to show behaviors in alignment with the American cultural orientations. In terms of appearance, they may value individual expression, strive for equality in gender and age images, and not feel the need to use symbols to proclaim social superiority.

In terms of the basic functions of clothing, protection, modesty and immodesty, and adornment, less acculturated Hispanic women could be expected to differ from more acculturated ones as follows. In terms of modesty and immodesty one can suggest two different outcomes: on one hand, the influence of Catholicism may affect the need for modesty and covering parts of the body; on the other hand, the popular assumption that
Hispanic women tend to be more revealing can be confirmed. Simultaneously, coming from tropical climates where light clothing is a necessity, less acculturated women may tend to dress showing more skin.

Largely, the findings in this section revealed that there were no radical differences between less acculturated and more acculturated women in the way they convey different facets of their identity through clothing. The findings provide evidence that the commonalities are driven by values coming from the Hispanic culture. Moreover, the most important differences among Hispanic women in this study seemed to be related to factors other than the level of acculturations such as lifestyles and life stage, or individual perception of their own bodies.

Overall, women in this study communicated gender and femininity through traditionally gender-coded elements. In their perceptions, there was a need for clear differentiation between the masculine and feminine categories. More acculturated women tended to emphasize curves, and less acculturated women tended to emphasize change and variety in order to communicate femininity through clothing.

Despite the dominance of the traditional view of gender and gender roles, there were also signs of a departure from this traditional view towards a perception of femininity that involved not only a care for appearance but also empowerment through intellectual capacities and an embracement of womanhood.

In terms of age, women in this study showed resistance to displaying signs of aging and a positive attitude towards a look that they consider more youthful than women their age in the U.S. This perceived difference also seemed to affect how women identified themselves with the age categories provided by the apparel and retail industry. Even if there was a sense of pride in communicating youth through appearance, there was also a sense of ridicule and a need to save face towards older women who dress youthfully.

Communicating ethnic identity seemed relevant mainly in as much as it provided differentiation from American women who were perceived as lacking style. Ethnic identity was related to traditional elements of the Hispanic culture such as bright colors and embroideries, which in turn communicates femininity.

The main aspect in which there was a noticeable difference across level of acculturation was in the communication of achievements or social worth through
clothing. In this sense, both groups seemed to share the sense of power distance. However, it seems that they have different perceptions of their position in the social hierarchy. For less acculturated women, the way they dress and the clothes they can afford communicate their achievements but they showed a sense of gratitude, humility, and conformity that emphasizes the satisfaction for the position they have achieved. However, for more acculturated women, the sense of satisfaction was eclipsed by a sense of pride for being in a higher position in the hierarchy. Contrary to expectations, women in this study were not driven by prestigious brands.

**Feeling girly**

Gender is one dimension of self-identity that can be symbolically communicated through the use of clothing.

Participants communicated femininity according to symbols that are typically associated with females in the Western culture (Sproles and Burns, 1994). Their descriptions of the clothing that makes them feel feminine gravitated toward traditionally gender-coded items such as dresses and skirts; details such as ruffles, laces, embroidery; soft materials such as silk and cashmere, and tighter clothes that emphasize the curves of the female body.

**Details, the feminine touch**

Overall the women felt it was the details that made an outfit feminine. Here are some examples:

Ana (less acculturated) was a pediatrician. She liked to use very delicate clothes in delicate colors. The colors and prints in her closet were very similar to the ones in her daughter’s closet, or even lighter: light pink, blue, and green; small flowers in beige and red, etc. She described some of her feminine items:

My white shirt with white lace and embroidery, with different types of collars, with ruffles are very feminine, I love them. Also, my new cashmere sweater looks very feminine because it has longer sleeves that end with little ruffles and it is light blue. (Translation).1

Celina (less acculturated) was a Spanish teacher at the university. For going out she liked revealing clothes that show her curves and her skin, with a lot of details. I
would say that her wardrobe was the one among participants in this study that had the most details. Every piece had something, whether ruffles or little gems or glitter or some combinations of these. However, she wore very simple suits for the meetings at the university, which she described as somewhat masculine. To counteract this undesired but necessary effect, she wore underneath her masculine jackets shirts that had a “feminine touch” such as shining threads, ruffled collars, embroidery, lower cleavage, and transparent fabrics. Similarly, Soledad (more acculturated) did not like the button-up shirts that she sometimes used for work because they were stiff and masculine. She only had a couple of them and she made sure that they had something feminine such as prints, ¾ sleeves, no pockets, or different collars.

These responses exemplify how the clothing code works. Details such as ruffles carry semantic content that changes the meaning of a clothing item from masculine to feminine. By selecting the element “ruffles” one can visually communicate or reinforce the female identity.

Details are associated with femininity whereas simplicity is associated with masculinity. Elena expressed this idea in a clear way:

Simplicity makes things more masculine. Elaborate things are more feminine. For example, this jacket is feminine because it has these endings on the sleeves, this cut on the back and these buttons. (Translation).²

According to my observations, the clothes of less acculturated participants tended to have more details like ruffles, glitter, and prints. They also had more skirts and dresses than the more acculturated ones.

Showing womanly curves was one of the ways used by the more acculturated women to convey femininity. Wearing a dress made Jocelyn feel more feminine by contrast to the masculine effect that certain kinds of pants had on her body. As she showed me her little black dress she said: “This dress makes me feel more feminine, it helps my body look curvier. The cut off jeans make me feel more masculine because they are baggy and I have no butt in them at all.” Monica also felt that some of the “bulky” sweaters were not feminine: “Sweatshirts are masculine, I like them and I wear them at home. But when I go out I use this one here that is a bit more fitting, so I would be wearing a sweatshirt but still feel feminine. I show some curves.”
These statements show that being masculine for them means using clothes that hide parts of the body that are traditionally related to the curves of the feminine body (derriere, waist, breast). Monica’s statement also shows that she does not mind not looking feminine in the privacy of her house, but she feels less comfortable about not showing her gender when it comes to the public sphere.

Belinda’s (more acculturated) response also suggests that the delineation of the curvy silhouette is equivalent to femininity:

I like to look feminine; I like to wear things that are fitted either at the top or at the bottom. I would never wear things that are loose both ways or very tight both ways. I think it is very feminine if you wear a tight top and a flowy skirt; or a pencil skirt with a looser top. I think that women should show curves to an extent.

With this statement Belinda suggests that it is not necessary to emphasize the female body, but that the mere insinuation of the silhouette is already feminine. Norma (less acculturated) refers to a similar idea when she says that women do not need to “exhibit” their bodies, but they need to “let it show that they are women.”

**Accessories, earrings, heels, and nails**

Accessories were constantly brought up as a crucial element to communicate femininity. They included jewelry, nails, hair, make up, and heels. This is another manifestation of the social construction of gender. In the Hispanic culture, accessories, particularly earrings, are used to identify the sex of the baby. According to my general observations, in the Hispanic culture female babies start to wear earrings just days after they are born. It shapes the impression of what it means to be a girl. Wearing earrings is the basic way to distinguish the sex of the infant.

The fact that women in this study have worn earrings their entire lives may be the reason why earrings were extremely important in communicating femininity. Many of the participants reported “feeling naked,” or “feeling that something is not right, something is missing” if they are not wearing earrings. This “feeling naked” sensation suggests that there is a sense of indecency in showing the naked earlobe, which evokes the appearance of some indigenous group in Latin America for which adornment of the earlobe or other parts of the face seems to be more important that covering many body parts. This “feeling naked” supports the idea that protection and modesty are basic functions of clothing that are culturally defined (Barnard, 1996; Flugel, 1930).
One comment also suggested that women who do not wear earrings may be lesbians. Cecilia said:

Even if you are wearing very feminine clothes, if you are not wearing earrings, your femininity drops down to the floor. Almost every woman wears earrings. Those who don’t are lesbians. (Less acculturated, Translation).³

In contrast to this previous response where femininity seemed to be condensed in a single material symbol, other participants described femininity as the result of a more complex process: “When I wanna look girly I’ll probably wear heels, have my nails done. It’s more like a whole day process” (Jocelyn, more acculturated). Or “[You are feminine when you] arrange your hair, shave your legs, have your nails done, have your feet looking nice.” (Norma, less acculturated, Translation).⁴

Even Monica (more acculturated) who supposedly did not rely on heels, accessories and hair to convey femininity stated that nails help her: “When I have my nails done it makes me feel pretty, more like a girl, more feminine.” Other elements mentioned to communicate femininity were lipstick, perfume and purses, all of which are traditionally associated with femininity. The explanation given by Maria as to why purses are feminine was the following: “Men don’t go around carrying stuff and changing bags. Changing is feminine, for example, if I have the time I’ll change my bag. That makes you feel more feminine” (less acculturated, Translation).⁵

Change, a feminine force

Women in this study agreed that an important part of being feminine was to be constantly changing styles. For Maria (less acculturated), for example, a non-feminine woman would be somebody who wears the same thing every day. She used as an example an American coworker who had been wearing for the last 3 years the same watch and earrings, and the same combination of pants, knit blouse, and jacket. Maria thought that she was more feminine than her friend because she changed her accessories and style everyday: “One day I have long sleeves, one day I use a shirt, the other day a blouse, I change my style every day” (Translation).⁶ In the next chapter other associations with change and avoidance of repetition of clothes will be addressed.

The need for differentiation

One of the reasons to show even a minimum of curves or parts of the feminine body was the need for a clear differentiation between men and women. This shows that
there is a traditional perception of what the appearance of male and female should be. This binary perception of gender is in alignment with the traditional gender view of the Hispanic culture.

The lack of clear differentiation between male and female created an uncomfortable feeling in Norma (less acculturated): “I don’t like when I see somebody from behind and I don’t know if it’s a man or a woman” (translation). For her, fitted clothes should be only for women or gay men:

I don’t like men with tight clothes, if it’s gay and he likes it, that’s ok. But I hate the fitted t-shirts and pants for men, that looks feminine to me (…) fitted clothes are for women, loose clothes are for men. (Translation).

In addition to the clothing aspect of masculinity and femininity, Norma also pointed out that men should not worry as much as women in being “arranged” (arreglado) in the sense of shaving, arranging the hair, and using facial creams.

Only one participant expressed a less traditional view of gender roles as related to appearance. Jocelyn, one of the more acculturated and the youngest interviewee, said: “Just because you are a guy or a woman doesn’t mean you are supposed to dress a certain way. Definitely it is funny if a guy wears a skirt but if that is what you like, that is fine for me!”

She also admitted being comfortable looking like a guy: “Sometimes I wear things that look like what my boyfriend is wearing, sometimes I just feel in that really relaxed mood.” This example may be an indication that younger generations of Hispanics embrace androgyny and ambiguity in appearance more comfortably, which seems to be in alignment with the American cultural orientation towards gender equality.

**Girl power**

In contrast to the traditional stereotypical gender roles, there were also responses that showed a different perspective about femininity. Here some examples:

Being feminine is being comfortable with being a woman. It doesn’t mean walking around in heels (Monica, more acculturated).

Femininity to me is to transmit what you are as a woman, not to hide what you are. Femininity has to do with being proud about your own attributes. I want to be feminine but I also want to be respected for my ideas (Elena, less acculturated, translation).
These quotes coming from an acculturated and a less acculturated Latina show that there is a sense of empowerment that is a departure from the traditional and stereotypical submissive role of the Hispanic woman. As Hispanic women feel better about themselves, they have a better chance of getting better jobs, education, raising their life standards, and achieving higher economic and entrepreneurial positions.

**To show or not to show, sexiness and modesty.**

As women articulated how they relate gender and clothing, points of connection between femininity, sexual appeal, and modesty emerged.

An area of concern was managing their appearance through clothing so as to look sexy and feminine, but without looking sexually available. This was a valid concern for both, acculturated and less acculturated interviewees. The following statements reflect the tension between creating an attractive image without sending the wrong message:

Girls [sometimes] have those super short skirts. I can’t wear that. That gives the wrong impression. You are attracting the wrong type of attention. People won't take you seriously. They complain because they get the wrong attention from guys. But I think to myself "you are wearing something that shows everything.” I don't do that. (Monica, more acculturated).

I transmit femininity because I transmit decorum and I am flirty at the same time. [I transmit] sensuality when I want, but sensuality with limits (...). Femininity with elegance is not to hide [that you are a woman] but not to offer it either...you can show it but never offer it. That is decorum. (Elena less acculturated.

Translation). ⁹

I don’t mind showing my back. I like high back too. I think it is a nice part of your body that you can show without being too revealing. [That is] sexy without being over the top (Belinda, more acculturated).

Then, what are the parts of the body that may be shown without attracting the wrong type of attention and sending the wrong message?

When referring to the function of modesty/immodesty and the Hispanic culture I mentioned that there were two possible outcomes: one would be that the influence of Catholicism would generate a need for modesty, and the other outcome would be that Hispanic women have a less strict sense of modesty than Anglo or more acculturated Hispanics because if they come from tropical weather they are used to wearing less clothes. The findings of this research did not show a strong influence of religious beliefs
on the way the participants dress in their everyday life. As I explained in Chapter 4, not all the participants were actively engaged in religion. Those who regularly or sometimes went to church, however, considered that it was necessary to pay special attention to looking respectful and formal. A special kind of modesty was attached to the event and the location.

There was no difference between less acculturated and more acculturated respondents in the way they perceived what was appropriate or decent. According to my own judgment of the clothes participants showed me, none of them used clothes that would be considered indecent under current general western standards. By that I mean that they did not seem to wear clothes in public spaces that would reveal totally or partially their more sexual body parts.

Modesty refers to the concept of decency and also to the idea that certain parts of the body are shameful (Barnard, 1996). It seems that the differences among the respondents as far as modesty/immodesty goes are not based on their level of acculturation, but on their perception and acceptance of their own bodies.

Participants made references to using clothes to hide parts of their bodies that they were dissatisfied with. They identified clothes or styles that they stay away from because they called attention to body areas or physical characteristics that they perceived as problematic or shameful. Likewise, they use clothes or styles that enhance the characteristics that they considered positive. In their own words:

I show [parts of my body] what I consider beautiful. What I don’t [consider beautiful] I hide or mask. Like for example the part above my thighs, no, I don’t like it. I know that tailored clothes are favorable because I have a small waist, but [I need] looser [clothes] in the hips. (Sonia, more acculturated. Translation).

According to my observations, participants with relatively larger breasts had a preference for lower cleavage as way to emphasize this part of their body that they like, whereas those with smaller breasts admitted that they did not have a problem showing some cleavage because they “didn’t have much anyway” (Monica, more acculturated). This means that to a degree, clothes function to draw attention to the breast area without rendering it indecent.

For example, Jocelyn, the youngest respondent and more acculturated, admitted in a humorous way wanting to show cleavage because she sees her breasts as an accessory. She said: “I will show my back, part of my boobs. I’m pretty comfortable; I don’t care if
they are out. That is what they are there for. I see them sometimes like an accessory that women have and men don’t [laughing].”

The most important and problematic parts of their bodies seemed to be the torso, hips and thighs. Women complained that these are the areas where they tend to gain more weight. Showing the “extra pounds” was uncomfortable and shameful to them. Arms, back and chest (cleavage), seemed to be the parts that they felt comfortable showing. Here are more of their statements:

I don’t have a problem showing my legs (...). I gained weight in my belly. I don’t like to show my belly. I am self-conscious about it. (Belinda, more acculturated)

As long as I don’t show my stomach (...) it can’t be too short. If my torso is covered, I’m good. I don’t like this part of my body. I think if I don’t like it, I don’t like to look at it, I don’t think anybody should be looking at it either. (Jocelyn, more acculturated).

I don’t have problems showing the upper part of my body because it is not too voluminous, then I don’t feel embarrassed (...) I feel embarrassed showing my legs because they are too fat. (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).

The following statements further illustrate the feeling of inadequacy when showing certain parts of the body and the fear of having people’s attention.

I don’t need to show people my curves; I don’t need to do that. It’s uncomfortable to me to show my curves in tight clothes. I feel like “oh my god, everybody is looking at me,” but if I wear something a little more loose fitting I’ll feel more confident. I don’t feel like everybody is staring at me. I don’t like to be the center of attention. (Monica, more acculturated).

If I show my navel I feel that people are staring at me. That would annoy me because I don’t feel I am thin enough to wear that kind of stuff. I think that only people with no fat in the belly should wear that. I don’t think it looks good if when you sit down one can see three rolls and all that flesh [hanging]. (Norma, less acculturated. Translation).

The interviews revealed that modesty and immodesty are related to a sense of self-consciousness or self-confidence in their body. In most cases participants referred to their dissatisfaction about their weight and how they use clothes to mask those parts of their body where they feel they get bigger. Furthermore it became also clear that voluminous bodies are perceived as not desirable. This contradicts the popular perception that Hispanic women are more confident and accepting of their bodies than their Anglo
counterparts. One plausible explanation for this contradiction is that the exposure to Anglo culture and the media ideal body image has changed their acceptance and preference for fuller bodies.

According to my observations, most of the interviewees had a curvy figure or a pear shape, meaning that they had smaller waists and bigger hips. Sometimes they seemed to find that attractive, such as when they look for tailored clothes that accentuate the feminine figure, other times they seemed to downplay their curves. For example, Norma said that she looked for clothes that helped her look “bigger in the top and smaller at the bottom (…) I don’t think I look good in low-waist pants because my behind looks bigger.” (Translation).

Some other issues concerning femininity, body perception, modesty and attractiveness were related to how interviewees felt about age and the role of clothes in communicating age. This is the topic of the next section.

**Being young**

There were no major differences between less acculturated women and more acculturated women in the way they coded age through clothing. However, it is important to acknowledge that the youngest participants were in the more acculturated group.

In general, youth was associated with revealing (tighter, shorter) clothes whereas maturity was associated with clothes that cover the body, particularly the signs of aging such as wrinkles, fat, and flaccid skin. This means that the modesty function of clothing seems to be more important as women get older.

Women who were among the oldest participants (late 30s and 40s) revealed a positive attitude toward their appearance because they felt they looked younger than other women of their age did. Furthermore, they associated being able to wear youthful clothes with not being fat. Social feedback also played a role in telling how far one can go.

For example, Celina was 36 years old. She wore short tops and tight pants to go out. She perceived herself as more “daring” (atrevida) than other women her age:

> I know that I dress very audaciously for my age, but I don’t think it looks bad yet. It is still acceptable, because I am not fat and people tell me “you look good” and because I look put together. (Less acculturated, translation).

Roxana participated in beauty pageants in Paraguay when she was a teenager, she is in her late 30s now and she still has a very slim and elegant body. She said:
I am almost 40 and there are women my age that look like 55. It also depends on if you are fat or thin. If you are 50 and you still maintain a body and you are single (...) you could still dress sexy and elegant (more acculturated, translation).\footnote{15}

This comment also suggests that it is socially acceptable to wear what is considered sexy clothes if the woman is single and therefore in a seductive stage.

**Misses or Ladies?**

Women also articulated the difference between what they thought Hispanic and American women perceived as appropriate dress according to age. For example, Sonia (more acculturated) told a story about how she and her American boss differed:

One day I was talking to her and I told her that I had seen in Paris how even older women were wearing short skirts with long boots, [I told her] that there was not much of a difference between the older ladies and the adolescents. I told her that older women also looked sexy. And she told me “well, but those women are not in the age to wear those types of things.” I told her that on the contrary, the older one gets, the more attention you have to pay to yourself. But she has this pattern in mind that as you get older you should cut your hair, wear loose clothes. (Translation).\footnote{16}

What she added also reveals a sense of dissatisfaction towards the American clothing industry, or rather with the retail stores that are available to her:

That is why when I go to Dillard’s or Sears, the clothes [I see] are like for old ladies, or sexy like the clothes for black women, like Baby Phat, that are too small, too tight, too over the top, and not elegant (Translation).\footnote{17}

Other participants also suggested that they have difficulties finding in stores clothes that are not for girls but not for old ladies either. It seems that the categorization used by the clothing industry is not always accurate or relevant for Hispanic women in their 30s or 40s who have a desire to look young and elegant at the same time. There was also the issue of the materials used for each age category:

The clothes for misses have some details that don’t work for me, for example, the fabrics are too light and thin. As I get older, that type of fabric doesn’t work for my body. I have to wear pants with thicker fabrics. Then, the pants with those fabrics have cuts that are too straight. As for the blouses, they are also too loose and the prints are boring and too serious. (Ana, less acculturated. Translation).\footnote{18}

Another insight about how women in this study perceived the relationship between age and clothing was the fear of looking ridiculous for pushing the norms that
dictate how older women should look. When looking towards the future, two of the less acculturated women thought they would be very careful not to display the signs of aging.

When I eventually get old and start having wrinkles and I start looking like an older woman, I won’t be able to dress like this because I will look like a silly old lady. But I don’t think I will let me get older that easily. I agree with all types of plastic surgeries [laughs.] (Celina, less acculturated. Translation).

When I get older I don’t want to look like an old lady. Nobody in my family looks like an old lady. My aunt is 50 years old and she uses shorts because she has no cellulite. I have friends that are in their 40s and they dress three times younger than I do. I guess they have less fear of ridicule. I still have fear of ridicule. (Elena, less acculturated. Translation).

This sense of ridicule was also present in more acculturated participants. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Monica felt embarrassed by the revealing clothes that her mother wears. The following comments also illustrate this concern about older women trying to look too young:

[When I get older] I’ll probably not wear such short shorts or short skirts. When I see women in their 40s and 50s wearing short skirts I think: what are they thinking? I don’t want to look like them when I’m 40 or 50s. Some women have killer legs at 60, like Tina Turner. She can wear skirts as short as she wants, her legs have no wrinkles, but most women when they get older get flabby, you can see the wrinkles in their skin. You don’t wanna show that. I think it looks silly. (Belinda, more acculturated).

It may be that I see somebody that I know is older and I say “she is dressed like a little girl”, or “she wants to look younger than what she is.” My cousin’s wife, when I see her I think she wants to look so much younger than what she is: for example, [when she wears] something transparent, or a deep cleavage, as if she was going to flirt in a disco when actually she is just going to the supermarket. I would say “she found those clothes in the junior section.” I am so mean [laughs]. (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).

This last quote combines some of the ideas explained above. Maria addresses her perceptions of ridicule in an older woman who tries to look younger than what she is and looks like she is trying to be seductive, wearing clothes that seem to be taken from another age category.
Being Hispanic

Another aspect of identity is ethnicity. This section explains how women in this study feel about their ethnic identity as related to clothing and appearance.

When asked directly, some women did not associate the way they dress and their physical appearance with their ethnic identity. They said:

I don’t think what I wear shows I’m Hispanic (Jocelyn, more acculturated).

Nobody identifies me as Latina, no matter how I dress, because I am very tall. I am not the typical Cuban so they know that I am Latina only when I talk and they perceive my accent. I haven’t come across anybody that identifies me as Latina without me opening my mouth. People talk to me in English. I don’t know if it is because I am tall, but I look American to them (Celina, less acculturated. Translation).  

However, as the conversation went deeper, women in this study showed that they in fact use clothing and appearance to communicate their ethnic identity. Interestingly enough, Hispanic women identified what makes them Hispanic in the way they dress by contrasting themselves to American women.

Ana (less acculturated) and Cecilia (less acculturated) felt that American women (particularly younger women) are more concerned with following fashion than they are. They admitted being more concerned about wearing what really suits them, their tastes, and their bodies, than about wearing the latest fashion. It seems that they perceive that the fashions that young American women adopt are too casual and informal for them. They preferred a more put together look, even if it is not trendy.

Hispanic woman associated the use of bright colors and accessories as a sign of ethnic affiliation. Both more acculturated and less acculturated women shared these perceptions. Here is what they said:

I would say I am more Hispanic than American in the way I dress, but I don’t know why. Maybe because I depend less on fashion than what people here do. I depend more on what I like and I feel comfortable in. Also I love accessories and bracelets. That is more Latina style. Maybe also the colors, I like brighter colors. I like Latino styles like wide skirts, warmer colors, and red. I think that liking to wear a lot of bracelets that make noises, and big earrings. That is Latino style. American women are using them now because it is the fashion, but Latinas have used them all the time (Ana, less acculturated. Translation).  

Wearing earrings all the time I think is very Latina. I cannot leave the house without them. I think that is something cultural. Also [it is very Latina] to match everything, your earrings with your clothes. Also wearing skirts. American
women wear jean skirts, or suits with skirts to go to work, but they don’t wear skirts with bright colors and flower, or at least not that often (Norma, less acculturated. Translation). 

The American woman doesn’t have style. She always prefers what is comfortable. The Hispanic woman is always trying to put herself together and to be fashionable. I think American women don’t even know what fashion is. Well, it depends on their age. Teenagers go for what is in style. Then, the older women with children go always for classics. It is not the same thing; [American] teenagers go for fashion, but the crazy fashion. We Hispanics have a more elegant style, even if it is casual; it is always more elegant (Roxana, more acculturated. Translation).

In this last statement Roxana was trying to differentiate being fashionable, as in following the latest styles from being fashionable as in being elegant and put together. It seems that the term fashion was sometimes used to refer to the extra care that women put into their appearance, regardless of the novelty of the style. This was also confirmed by Celina’s words. She referred to young American as following the fashions but still being too casual, whereas Hispanic women are the “champion and the masters of fashion.”

Also, the fact that Hispanic ethnicity is associated with accessories, bright colors and embroideries is no surprise. The influence of indigenous, African, European and Asian cultures in Latin America has resulted in this colorful and ornamental aesthetics that has prevailed over time.

To close this section I present how one of the participants described what she liked and disliked about the stereotypical Hispanic and American looks. Her comment illustrates the process by which women in contact with both cultures selects the elements of each culture that better communicate their reality. This is a good example of what the proverbial “the best of both worlds” means:

What I don’t like in the Latina woman’s style is that she doesn’t calculate very well if she has a very exuberant body and then she wears clothes that are too tight that don’t look good on her. But what I don’t like in American women is that [their style] is insipid. Then maybe a fusion would be perfect [laughs] (Elena, less acculturated. Translation).

Communicating achievement

The last aspect of identity addressed in this study is social worth. It is suggested that fashion and clothes are used to communicate prestige (Kaiser, 1997). One of the
common assumptions about the Hispanic consumer is that Hispanics tend to prefer brands and products that convey social worth. Also, as the Hispanic culture is hierarchical (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005) the power orientation should also be manifested in the use of products that are symbolic of the status of the individual in society.

From the interviews it became clear that participants communicate aspects of their success and achievements through clothing and appearance. However, as will be explained in Chapter 7, brands were not a decisive factor in the buying decision-making process. It seems that what communicated status was based more on quantity, quality, fit, and uniqueness than on the symbolic meaning attached to brands.

Less acculturated women showed a sense of satisfaction and gratefulness toward what they have been able to achieve in life. This feeling of achievement related to their improved position in the social hierarchy is communicated through the clothes that they now can afford. For example:

If I think about it, if I didn’t have the job that I have and the education that I have, I couldn’t pamper myself. I cannot spend $500 on clothes. But I can go once a month and if I like something I can buy it, thank God. I have a lot of things, and I take care of them (...) if I didn’t have the financial stability that I have now I couldn’t do that. I am grateful to have what I want. (Maria, translation).

When talking about how her accomplishments in life are reflected in her clothes Norma said:

My “most beautiful sandals in my life” [are a big achievement], because they are expensive. Before, I would not have been able to buy them. It is not that I earn a lot of money here, but here at least I can afford something like this every now and then. Also some of the pants that I used for work that I use now. I used to wear more jeans. (...) Now I have more clothes and that reflects that I am more independent. (Translation).

Celina, the participant who came from Cuba when she was 24 is perhaps the participant who experienced the most radical social class-related change when coming to the U.S. She came from a society with theoretically no social hierarchy and therefore no need to use symbols to communicate prestige to a country where people’s worth is largely measured by what they can afford. Since she came to the U.S., Celina has been able to own several businesses, houses, and apartments. She also got married, had a child, brought her parents from Cuba, and now she has a daughter. For her, all these
accomplishments are symbols of her social worth. But in terms of clothes, for her the large variety of clothes in her wardrobe is what shows her achievements:

My whole closet is related to my success, the way I dress for different situations. I think every situation merits a different outfit. And now I can wear different clothes for each meeting or important activity (Celina, translation). 29

From the more acculturated women, Soledad suggested the use of clothes and appearance to symbolize power distance at her workplace: “There is a difference in the way I look and the way, for example, secretaries look in my workplace. The way I arrange myself and how I dress is different. I am put together.”

For Roxana, the financial success was symbolized in the unique and exclusive clothes that she could afford. Her purchasing power allowed her to be unique, which implies prestige and social worth:

I think I am unique. I can spend money on clothes. Most people have a limit when it comes to spending money on clothes. I buy everything I like. I have friends who would like to buy the things that I buy but they know that they can only afford to shop at Marshall’s (Translation). 30

It is interesting to note that women in both groups embraced the notion of power distance and used clothes to communicate it. However, each group had a different take on it. It seems that the more acculturated women positioned themselves at a high level in the hierarchy by comparing themselves to those they place in a lower position. In contrast, less acculturated women focused on how high they have arrived compared to where they were before. In other words, more acculturated women seem to value the sense of power gained by their accomplishments, whereas less acculturated ones value their achievement with a sense of personal satisfaction.

**Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter addressed RQ2: How do Hispanic women use clothes to communicate identity in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, and social worth? When discussing gender and age, the topics of modesty/immodesty and adornment emerged, thus answering RQ3: How do Hispanic women perceive the basic functions of clothing in terms of modesty/immodesty and adornment? This section also answers RQ8: How do these aspects addressed in the questions above change according to the level of acculturation?
In sum, the main difference that emerged between the two groups was related to the communication of achievements. Both groups manifested a sense of power distance and hierarchy. However, less acculturated women seemed to be driven by modesty showing gratitude for the position which they are in, whereas more acculturated women were driven by pride and positioned themselves at a higher level in the hierarchy. The appreciation and conformity expressed by less acculturated women may be a cultural condition because humility and gratefulness are cherished virtues in the tradition of the Catholic religion. In contrast, the Anglo culture is much more inclined to value achievement, accomplishment, and self-development. These findings support the cultural attributions approach that sustains that Hispanics are more likely to attribute their success to external agents, for example to God (external attribution), whereas Anglos tend to credit their successes to their own behaviors (internal attribution) (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005).

Furthermore, the findings show that for this group of Hispanic women femininity is mostly conveyed by elements that are associated with traditional gender categories. Soft fabrics, silhouette-emphasizing clothes, make up, high heels, manicures and pedicures, together with soft mannerisms, are the common symbols to communicate the social status of gender.

The previous chapter discussed how interaction with social agents influenced women’s perception of themselves as individuals and as part of society. Through the light of symbolic interactionism, it was explained that it is through social interaction that we make sense of the world we live in. Part of making sense of the world is the understanding of the basic categories such as gender. Gender is socially constructed (Kaiser, 1997). In our everyday social life we use appearance to shape our understanding of what is to be male or female. In Kaiser’s words:

Most commonly, females are expected to be immersed in the fashion and beauty culture, whereas males are not. That is, there is a strong link between femininity and beauty. Girls are traditionally encouraged to be concerned with appearance; beauty, then, becomes a kind of duty. In contrast, males are often regarded with suspicion if they seem to pay too much attention to their looks or to fashion (p. 66).
This gender view seems to be present in both the American and the Hispanic culture. However, it can also be said that the American culture has an orientation towards gender equality which includes expectations about appearance. The traditional Hispanic culture has an orientation towards gender differentiation. Therefore, the degree to which women are expected to show a concern for appearance seems to be higher in the Hispanic culture.

The traditional gender differentiation tends to be dualistic (male vs. female). According to the symbolic-interactionist perspective, “the richest interpretations of gender-related symbolism arise when a perceiver is challenged to interpret in greater detail than an automatic tendency to categorize a person would allow” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 70). According to this, people engage in a deeper kind of interpretation when they perceive something that does not fit into the categories they have in their heads, taking into considerations situational variables then deriving newly constructed meanings with restructured mental categories. In the case of Celina, the participant that associated the lack of earrings with homosexuality, it is possible that she has not had enough social interactions with people with less traditional gender-coded appearances, therefore she is not able to engage in new interpretations about what not wearing earrings conveys.

Another finding related to gender is the trend to define femininity beyond clothing and appearance. Women showed confidence and empowerment as ways of being feminine which represents a move away from the traditional values towards a place of equality and independence. It is difficult to know if this departure from the traditional view is a sign of acculturation or a sign of a general trend in Western societies.

Related to the communication of femininity was the concept of sexual attractiveness. The findings show that there is a negotiation between being sexually attractive and avoiding creating the wrong impression. It is plausible that this concern for not looking sexually available is similar to what Freitas et al. (1997) found in their study about management and identity. This research suggested “not wanting to look sexually available may be more indicative of class than sexuality. This may be both a means of protection from unwanted attention and a means of distinguishing lower from higher classes” (p. 331). The use of clothes that are too revealing and therefore signify sexual availability may be coded in this social context as coming from lower-class women who are uneducated (do not know about decorum), and attract the “wrong type of attention.”
is possible that for Hispanic women looking sexually available corresponds to a
stereotypical image of prostitutes.

Also, this idea of decorum may be related to aspects of the Mariana archetype (or
Madonna/whore archetype) in the sense of the ambivalent association of women with
both the sexuality of the whore and the purity of the Virgin Mary.

Related to the discussion about sexual attractiveness is the discussion about age.
Women in this study showed a traditional perception of expectations about age and
appearance in which it is acceptable only for young women to wear revealing clothes. It
seems that the logic behind this perception is that showing skin is acceptable for younger
women because it is when women are young that they are looking for mates and therefore
can be revealing and sexy. In this mindset, older women are not supposed to wear clothes
that reveal skin (regardless of the weather) because they are no longer supposed to be in a
seductive mode. Older women who dress younger than they are supposed to and send
seductive messages through clothing are considered ridiculous. Despite this perception,
for women in this study wearing clothes that help you look and feel young is desirable.
Moreover, it seems that they felt the social pressure to do so. Because of the other-
orientation that influences the way they look, they tried to avoid the negative opinion of
others by looking young and avoiding showing the visible signs of age, which is not
socially desirable.

Furthermore, less acculturated women in this study showed that there is a
disconnection between the clothes they like to wear at their age, and the age categories by
which clothes are organized in retail stores. This suggests that there is a need to revisit
the usefulness of those categories for less acculturated Hispanic women, and other
segmentation approaches that are based on age. There is a need to better understand the
perception of the category of age and the judgments of what is age-appropriate or not
among Hispanic women.

It seems that there is not a big cultural difference about the perceptions of the
women in this study and what Kaiser (1997) describes about the American society:
What culture defines as physical attractiveness, even in faces, may be fleeting
with age, particularly in the American society where a youthful look is perceived
to be more desirable and where the physical attractiveness stereotype can work
against even the physically attractive as they age. As the appearance of a
physically attractive individual, and especially a woman, changes over a period of years, that person is placed in the position of being at a relative disadvantage.” (p. 130).

The need to fight aging seems to be a consequence of the global influence of the fashion and beauty industry. This goes back to the idea of attractiveness. One can assume that among participants in this study there was a latent comparison between their bodies and what they may perceive as ideal bodies. It seems that their idea of physical attractiveness was influenced by media images which tend to represent and promote the thin body as the ideal body for women. In reference to this, Kaiser (1997) explains that from a very young age, American girls favor the skinny type of body similar to fashion models or Barbie dolls. Moreover, the author points out that those images of body attractiveness are highly influenced by the culture codes represented in media. It seems that this is not a uniquely American phenomenon. The popularity of international super models and celebrities is pretty much global and the controversy about their negative influence on self-esteem and health is prevalent nowadays. Latin American media also tend to promote these parameters for ideal beauty, particularly because of the popularity of beauty pageants.

This chapter also discussed the issue of clothing and ethnicity. Overall, participants in this study articulated their Hispanic ethnic identity through clothing by disassociating themselves from what they perceive as the American style. This is in line with social psychology’s approach that suggests that one of the ways individuals conduct self-evaluation is by social comparison. The awareness of how one differs from others is a source of creating one’s self-concept (Kaiser, 1997).

Participants perceived that ethnicity markers such as the use of bright colors and prints, skirts, accessories and makeup, formality and appropriateness to the occasion are the ones that differentiate them from the Anglo women. Clothing that communicates femininity and Hispanicness was perceived as closely related in the sense that American women were perceived as not very feminine in their appearance. The absence of signals communicating these social statuses was considered not desirable. Not wanting to look like American women do may have to do with not wanting to hold the values and believes attached to casual, simple, and relaxed outfits. These characteristics associated with the way American women dress evoke the lack of consideration for others and for
the social occasion, which is not in alignment with the collectivistic and hierarchical orientation of the Hispanic culture.

Self-monitoring and concern with outer appearance are manifestations of some of the values prevalent in the Hispanic culture such as other orientation and expectations of the female to be appearance oriented. This concern for looking put together is related to the value of collectivism. In a collectivistic culture, people desire to maintain harmony by conforming to traditional norms, and want to avoid losing face. In contrast, American young women, because they belong to a more individualistic culture, may be more concerned with fashion as an avenue of self-enhancement (de Mooij, 2004).

Finally, this chapter addressed the communication of status and achievement through clothing. The evidence supports the common assumption that Hispanics are driven by products that denote achievement. Moreover, the analysis showed difference across levels of acculturation in the approach towards status. Even if women in this study agreed that the variety and quality of clothes they are able to afford symbolize their improved social status, only more acculturated women seemed to use clothes as indicative of power and differentiation from lower status. This difference suggests that less acculturated women may be driven by a sense of gratitude. They still have in their minds the amount of effort needed to accomplish their personal, economic, and professional abilities. More acculturated women, on the other hand, may perceive success from a competitive point of view that is in alignment with the individualistic orientation of the American culture. Communication targeting Hispanic women of different levels of acculturation needs to take into consideration these cultural nuances related to achievement. This differentiation may help create more relevant messages not only for products such as clothes, but also for services related to personal and professional growth such as education.

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1 Mis camisas blancas con encaje y bordados, con diferentes tipos de cuellos, con volados, son muy femeninas. Yo las adoro. También mi sweater de casimir luce muy femenino porque las mangas son más larguitas y terminan con un voladito, y es azul clarito (Ana)

2 La simplicidad hace que las cosas sean más masculinas. Las cosas elaboradas son más femenina. Por ejemplo, esta chaqueta es femenina porque tiene estos detalles en las mangas, este corte en la espalda y estos botones. (Elena)
Puedes vestirte con algo super femenino, pero si no llevas aretes, tu feminidad se va por el piso. Casi todas las mujeres llevan aretes, las que no lo llevan son lesbianas (Celina)

Eres femenina si te arreglas el pelo, te afeitas las piernas, te haces las unas y los pies se ven bien (Norma)

Los hombres no andan por ahí llevando cosas. El cambiar es femenino, por ejemplo, si tengo tiempo cambio la cartera. Eso te hace sentir mas femenina. (Maria)

Un día me pongo manga larga, otro día uso una camisa, otro día me pongo una blusa. Yo cambio de estilo todos los días (Maria)

Si veo alguien por detrás y no se si es hombre o mujer, no me gusta (Norma) ---

Tampoco me gustan los hombres con las ropas pegadas. Si es gay y le gusta, bien, pero si no…esas franelas pegadas, no. Los pantalones pegados para los hombres los odio. Me parece que eso es femenino (…) la ropa ajustada es para la mujer, la no ajustada para el hombre. (Norma)

Para mi feminidad es transmitir lo que eres como mujer, no esconder que eres mujer. Feminidad tiene que ver con estar orgullo de tus atributos. Yo quiero ser femenina pero también quiero ser respetada por mis ideas (Elena)

Yo transmito feminidad porque transmito decoro y a la vez coquetería, sensualidad cuando quiero, pero sensualidad con freno. La feminidad con elegancia es no esconderlo pero tampoco ofrecerlo, puede ser, es aceptado, lo he visto, mostrarlo pero nunca ofrecerlo. Ese es el decoro. (Elena,)

Yo muestro lo que considero que tengo bonito, lo que no, lo escondo, lo disimulo. Como por ejemplo más arriba del muslo, no, no me gusta. Yo se que me favorece lo entallado porque tengo cintura pequeña, pero más suelto en las caderas (Sonia)

Los brazos y la espalda no tengo problemas en mostrarlos, de arriba no soy muy voluminosa entonces no me da pena. Las piernas me da pena mostrarlas porque son muy gruesas (Maria)

Si muestro el ombligo siento que la gente me está mirando. Me molestaría porque creo que no soy suficientemente flaca para ponerme eso. creo que para que la gente se ponga eso no debe tener ni un cauchito, me parece que no se ve bien si se sienta y se le ven 3 cauchos y toda la carne. (Norma)

Que me vea más grande arriba y más estrecha abajo. Me parece que no me veo bien con los pantalones tan abajo porque me parece que hace ver el trasero más grande) (Norma)

Se que a veces me visto muy atrevida para mi edad pero todavía no se ve mal. Todavía es un poco aceptable y como no estoy gorda, y no luzco mal porque la gente me dice ¡qué bien luces! y porque me arreglo. (Celina)

Yo tengo casi 40 años y hay mujeres de mi edad que parece que tuvieran 55. También depende de si estas gordas o flaca. Si tienes 50 y todavía te mantienes, y estar soltera (…) todavía puedes vestirte sexy y elegante (Roxana)

Un día hablaba con mi jefe que es American y le conté lo que había visto en Paris como incluso hasta las mujeres mayores estaban usando las faldas cortas con botas altas, no había mucha diferencia entre las mujeres mayores y las adolescentes y le comente como las mujeres mayores también se ven sexy y mi jefa me dijo, ‘ay pero esas mujeres no tienen edad para ponerse esas cosas. Yo le dije que no, que uno mientras más mayor mas atención tiene que poner en uno mismo, pero ella no, ella tiene el patrón de que uno al madurar tiene que cortarse el pelo , vestirse con cosa anchas. (Sonia)

Por eso es que cuando voy a Dillards o Sears, la ropa para mujeres es como para viejas, o es sexy si es para las negras, si es sexy es como para ellas como Baby Phat. Es demasiado pequeño, apretado, exagerado y no es elegante. (Sonia)

También que la ropa mas juvenil tiene unos detalles que no te sirven por ejemplo para las miss las telas son más livianas, más elásticas y en la medida en que me voy poniendo las vieja, y no puedo usar esas telas porque no me caen bien al cuerpo entonces tengo que usar pantalones mas forrados, telas diferentes. Pero entonces los pantalones en esas telas vienen muy aburridos y serios (Ana)

Cuando me empiecen a salir las arrugas y ya me vea como señora ya no me voy a poder vestir así porque ya voy a parecer una vieja ridicula. Yo no creo que yo me deje poner vieja muy fácilmente. Pero soy partidaria de hacermee todas las cirugías posibles (risas) (Celina)

[Todo sea vieja] no quiero verme como una señora. En mi casa nadie se viste como señora. Mi tiene 50 y se pone shorcitos porque no tiene celulitis. Yo tengo amigas que tienen como 40 y ellas se viste diez veces más juvenil que yo. Debe ser que le tienen menos miedo al ridículo. Yo todavía le tengo miedo al ridículo (Elena)

Puede ser que vea alguien en la calle que se vea mayor y diga “está vestida como una niñita,” o “quiere parecer menor de lo que es” La esposa de un primo de mi esposo aquí, la veo y pienso “quiere parece mucho menor de lo que es” . Por ejemplo algo transparente, o un escote demasiado pronunciado, como si
fueras a flirtear a la disco y resulta que solo va al super. Esa ropa la consiguió en la sección de juniors, diría yo, que mala soy (Maria)

22 Es que a mí nadie me identifica como latina, no importa de la forma como me vista, porque yo soy muy alta. Y no soy típica cubana entonces saben que soy latina. Cuando hablo que me ven el acento. No he conocido a nadie sin abrir la boca me identifique como latina. A mí la gente en la calle me habla en inglés. No sé si es el tamaño que parezco americana. (Celina)

23 Pensaría que yo soy más hispana que americana en el vestir, pero no se porqué. Quizás porque estoy mirando las revistas, ir a la tienda, mirar pero dependo menos de la moda de lo que la gente depende aquí. Dependo más de lo que me guste y lo que me sienta cómoda. También me encantan los accesorios, las pulseras que son como más latinas. Tal vez también los colores, cuando puedo me visto de colores más vivos. Me gustan las cosas estilo latino, las faldas anchas, los colores más calientes, rojo. (ANA) Pienso que el gusto por las pulseras grandes o muchas pulseras, que hacen ruido, con colgandéjos son latinas, los zarcillos grandes, son estilo latino, hindú. Con la moda las americanas las usan, pero las latinas todo el tiempo (Ana)

24 Llevar aretes todo el tiempo, no puedo salir de la casa sin aretes, me siento mal, creo que eso es algo de ser latina. Creo que es algo cultural. Combinarse todo, los aretes con la ropa, creo que eso es algo latino. Usar falda, las gringas usan faldas de jean, o faldas tipo sastre para el trabajo pero no llevan faldas de colores de flores, casi no (Norma)

25 La mujer americana no tiene estilo, se va siempre por lo cómodo, la mujer latina está siempre tratando de arreglarse y de estar con la moda. Las americanas creo que ni siquiera sabe lo que está de moda. Si compran algo son siempre clásicos. Bueno depende de la edad, las teenagers se van por lo que está en estilo. Ya la mujer más mayor con hijos se pone lo que se va a poner para el PTA meeting, o con su esposo a comer. Son 2 cosas distintas, las teenager se van con la moda, pero la moda loca y los latinos como que tenemos un estilo más elegante, aunque sea casual siempre es más elegante. (Roxana)

26 Latina que a veces no mide si tiene un cuerpo muy exuberante y se pone cosas muy pegadas que no le quedan bien, tampoco me gustan las americanas, me parece muy insípido, entonces tal vez la fusión sería perfecta [risas], no me moleta en realidad, pero me provoca quitarle aquí, ponerle allá. (latina)

27 Si me pongo a pensar tal vez digo que si no tuviera en trabajo que tengo o la educación que tengo no podría darme los gustos. Yo no puedo salir y gastarme 500$ en ropa. Pero si puedo salir una vez al mes y si me gusta algo me lo compro. Gracias a Dios. Tengo un montón de cosas. Las cuído y me duran. Si no tuviera la estabilidad económica que tengo no me podría dar el gusto. (Maria)

28 Mis sandalias más lindas de toda la vida, porque son muy caras. Antes no me las hubiera podido comprar, no es que gane mucho acá pero de vez en cuando me puedo comprar algo así. También los pantalones de tela, que antes no usaba, usaba más BJ, ahora si porque trabajo, no puedo usar BJ al trabajo. La ropa del trabajo, tengo más cantidad de ropa de ir al trabajo, eso refleja en mi ropa que soy más independiente. (Norma)

29 Todo mi closet y la forma como me vista en diferentes situaciones. Creo que cada situación amerita una ropa diferente, es la forma como tu uses tu ropa para cada ocasión y para cada cita o compromiso importante (Celina)

30 En el trabajo siempre me arreglo y si hay una diferencia todos los días entre como se visten las secretarias y como me visto yo. (Sonia)
CHAPTER 6
DECIDING WHAT TO WEAR.
ROLES AND STRATEGIES

Introduction

This section focuses on the strategies women used to create their different images. What goes in their minds when they select the clothing needed to convey the desired appearance or to express themselves?

This chapter describes the decision-making process that is part of the communication of individuality and social status. As extension of chapter 5 this Chapter addresses the RQ2: How do Hispanic women use clothes and fashion to communicate differentiation, individuality, social affiliation, and social status?

In the discussion about identity it became clear that the participants have a sense of the self that encompasses different roles. The different facets of the self are communicated by different clothing codes. Women showed a high awareness of the different images they create according to the audience and the situation.

Women in this study use different clothing to demonstrate their different roles. They communicate the different facets of their identity by selecting different clothing items that help them convey the image they desire to a specific audience. This behavior demonstrates these women’s communication competence. This communication competence gives them the situational ability to read the clues of the context using their knowledge of themselves and the social world to generate communication performances in which clothing has a key role. Women make meaning through clothing.

These women showed learned skills and a level of effort invested in editing their own images in a process in which the individual and the social self interplay. The external context (social space, location, familiarity, formality) and the internal context (mood) are factors that together influence, to different degrees, the act of selecting what to wear.

There were several differences between less acculturated women and more acculturated women. First, a recent immigrant might undergo an identity crisis when she arrives to this country without a role to perform in the new social environment. That void is often reflected in her appearance. Also, less acculturated women in this study tended to have an unambiguous distinction between public and private setting that was reflected in
their appearance. In this sense, younger, more acculturated women showed a more relaxed division between the image they create in private and the one they create in public spaces. Despite this blur between private and public, more acculturated women admitted using clothes strategically to mask and manage their emotions through clothing.

Other findings were valid for both groups. For their role as professionals, the women communicated competence and credibility using what they considered gender neutral clothes. In their role as students, the women also communicated group affiliation and respect through their clothes. They showed a greater enjoyment in dressing for the roles related to their social life as compared to those related to their professional life.

Dressing for the different roles necessitated an analysis of the audience and its expectations. Women in this study were high self-monitors, placing a lot of importance on behaving in socially acceptable ways and maintaining consistency with the nature of the situation. These efforts can be seen as being in alignment with the collectivistic nature of the Hispanic culture. However, it seems that these women try to find a place of intersection between wearing what they know is appropriate for the audience and wearing something that allows them to express their individual taste. Moreover, the women showed that as the audience gets to know them better, they can take more risks and become more creative with their clothing.

Finally, this chapter reveals the strategies that the women used to decide what to wear. One strategy that facilitated the process of creation of different roles was the compartmentalization of the wardrobe. Overall, women used certain clothes exclusively for some roles and not for others. Also, they planned in advance for clothes that would create the desired image. Other selection strategies included matching colors and the impression of novelty. The last set of strategies, introduced earlier, is related to dressing according to the mood.

**Playing roles—Communicating parts of identity**

Women in this study described how they dressed in dramaturgical terms. They perceived themselves as actors in the theater of life. For example, Elena (less acculturated) referred to the different roles she had played in different stages of her life and how they were manifested in the way she dressed:
Each stage in my life has been marked by the role that I have to perform. I’ve been the student, I’ve been the newspaper journalist and I’ve dressed like one. I was the wife, and I dressed like one. I’ve worn the costume for each role. Then I was nobody. When I had just arrived here I didn’t have any role or any social obligation. So, because I was a nobody, nobody was looking at me. I didn’t pay that much attention to what I was wearing. I was wearing a lot of bad quality clothes because that is what I could afford. (Elena. Translation).

Her personal account illustrates one of the internal difficulties that immigrants suffer when they arrive to another country without a prearranged plan and when the status they had in their countries no longer has meaning in their new social context. This “emptiness” or lack of social role is often reflected in the choice of clothes.

The way Elena articulated the link between role and identity suggests that she perceives them as identical. Coming to the U.S. without a role was equated to a suspension of identity. This differs from the role theory, which has roots in symbolic-interaction. According to this perspective, roles tend to be associated with “what a person does,” while identity refers to “who one is.” In this sense, individuals may perform different roles, and have different identities composed by the different roles. The “self” would be the “most abstract and inclusive concept; a global sense of who one is, composed of a subset of identities” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 193). It can be said that during the immigration and acculturation process, an identity crisis may take place as the individual is separated from one or several roles that compose their identity and the sense of self. This identity crisis can be reflected in clothes because the individual does not know what image to convey.

**Private self vs. Public personae**

Most of the women have expressed clearly that they dress according to the situation. One basic distinction was between private and public settings. I discussed in the previous chapter that one of the basic norms these women learned early in their lives was to take care of their appearance when they are in public. They learned not to leave the house with clothes that are not presentable or without make-up. It seems that the private setting works as the “backstage,” and the public setting works as the “stage” where appearance needs to be managed, using Goffman’s words (1959). Here is how Norma (less acculturated) articulated it:
I think that the clothes for home are only to stay home. Nobody outside should know how you look when you hang out at home. People outside don’t need to know if you took a shower or not, if your hair is all messy. When you go out though, you have to have a different image. At home I hang out with an old t-shirt and shorts, and flip-flops (Translation).  

Most women wore old clothes or workout clothes at home. They also reported that they would normally change clothes if they had to go out or if they were receiving a visitor.

For example when I'm home, I have my big bulky sweater. But if I have to go out and see other people I want to feel more presentable. More like I spent time on myself. I feel I'm disrespecting people if I go out and I feel like I didn't try to look good. I would feel that I don't respect those people enough to dress up a little to look nicer for them. (Monica)

Roxana liked to wear very light clothes when she was at home by herself. But she was prepared in case a sudden visitor showed up. Behind her door she had a colorful sort of robe hanging that she grabbed when the door bell rang and she wasn’t expecting anybody. According to her, that tunic makes her automatically look “presentable.” The tunic is dark blue cotton with red and golden figures. It has an Indian look to it.

In contrast, two of the more acculturated women admitted going to public places with the same clothes they wear at home. When Belinda, for example, is at home she wears workout tops, shorts or pants and she did not think it necessary to change to go to the grocery store or to run some errands. Jocelyn admitted that sometimes, she had just rolled out of bed and gone out to bars in her pajamas because she was already in bed when friends called her to go out.

The competent professional

Another important distinction that emerged from the interviews was the way the women communicated their professional persona through clothing.

Most of the women (acculturated and less acculturated) recognized the importance of projecting an image of competence at the workplace. In the previous chapter, it was discussed how the institution of work shaped some of the norms and values related to clothing and appearance. In dramaturgical terms (Goffman, 1959), the social interaction in the professional environment taught women the scripts and the expectations of the audience for whom they needed to perform the professional role.
The role of the professional woman was personified according to the standards and dress codes of the institutions they worked for. For example, two acculturated women used uniforms. One acculturated woman had explicit norms and limitations, and the others just followed what they perceived as a professional and conservative look: pants and suits in dark or neutral colors, buttoned up shirts, or knit tops, few accessories, heels, and well-put-together hair. The women articulated some of the challenges in creating the professional persona. These difficulties were related to the gender, age, and ethnic issues.

For instance, Belinda, a second generation Hispanic who used to work as a counselor in the Health department, said:

I think that as a woman, as a young woman and a minority, people put you a little sideways. You have to prove yourself first as a person who is not… [Thinking]…I look really young for my age and I’m Hispanic. So I feel I need to look a little more conservative, or always put together, always nice. So, I never wear anything questionable for work. (…). I would not even want to walk the line. I would not wear jeans skirts to work because especially being young I don’t want to get the sideways glance (…) I work with clients that are older than me and I am supposed to be giving them advice. I don’t want to look like I am 15 when I am talking to a 44-year-old mother of 3 who is using crack (Belinda, more acculturated).

Other comments coming from more and less acculturated participants also outlined how conservative and gender-neutral clothes helped women perform the role of a competent, reliable professional.

If you come across like a bimbo then you won’t have the opportunity of moving up within the corporate world. You have to be more conservative. If you are doing a presentation in front of an audience and you are wearing low cleavage, hot looking shoes, [and] a short skirt, chances are that people are not going to be paying attention to what you are saying. They are gonna be like “Oh my God, look at what she is wearing.” Whereas if you are dressed with a suit and a jacket or longer skirt and heels, it takes away the focus from you personally and…I just think it lends credibility (Roxana, more acculturated).

There are times [at work] when you have to show a non-gendered image. An image of total seriousness, so that you get assigned a lot of responsibilities. For example, if I am going to interview a woman who is a high level boss, or a prison’s manager, I need to project something super neutral (Elena, less acculturated, translation).³

Elena further explained that in her profession as a journalist it is very important for women to communicate that they are strong so that they do not get confused with
weak “girly” reporters who want to cover gossip and celebrities. For her, there was a conflict between her gender identity and her professional role, and she asked herself: “How do you balance your femininity with the “balls” (guts) you are supposed to have for this type of work? It is not easy. Most women that work in these areas look like men” (Translation).4

Dressing appropriately for work is a way for women to take control of their image in order to influence the perception of others, thus helping them to reach their professional objectives. The professional image achieved conforms to the dressing codes of the corporate world, in which feminine features tend to be neutralized.

**The student**

School was another public setting in which participants needed to think about self-presentation. In the previous chapter, the influence of school showed that it was a setting in which group affiliation/differentiation through clothing was crucial. But now that they are adults and/or are at the graduate level, these women have different challenges in communicating their roles as students.

Two of the more acculturated women referred to their role as students and how they managed their appearance. Both agreed on the need to convey an image of being responsible and competent. However, they differ in their perception of the right image to achieve that goal. For Belinda, it is important not to make a special effort. She prefers to convey a more casual look that blends with other students and does not call attention to her. If her classes are first thing in the morning, she will wear jeans and t-shirts. When the classes are after work, she will try to change so as not to go to class with her work clothes. She said:

> [In school] whom am I trying to impress? It is the same people I see everyday. Of course I don’t want to look dirty either. I remember when I was an undergrad and there were these girls that would come to class all dressed up and with make up. I looked at them and thought “what are you here for? It’s just biology 101, are you not going home before you go out tonight?” (…) I never want to look like I’m trying too hard when I go to class. I guess I want to be taken seriously as a student and I think that if I go to school too dressed up, and with too much make up, I look like I’m trying to show off (Belinda).
This contrasts with Monica’s perspective:

When I go to class, I guess out of respect for the teacher, I don't want them to think that I rolled out of bed and walked to class. I want to show that I put some effort into going to class. I just think it is more respectful. Not that I just got out of bed. I want to look a little more put together (Monica).

The difference here seems to be that Belinda created her role as a student considering other students as her audience. Belinda did not want to show the effort because she associated effort with other roles that involved showing off and calling people’s attention to herself through her appearance. Belinda was more interested in gaining social approval from those in her reference group of students. In contrast, Monica’s main audience was the instructors. She was more interested in gaining the approval from a figure of authority. The level of effort invested in her looks was associated with the level of deference that she wanted to convey to her audience.

**Functionality vs. enjoyment**

Participants referred to various other roles that they performed in public settings for which they created “looks.” Out of all the roles they performed, the professional one was perceived to be the least interesting to dress for. On several occasions, participants referred to the clothes they wear to work as a necessity, as something functional they have to have but that they do not necessarily enjoy. In contrast, they expressed much more enjoyment and fascination in buying and wearing clothes for other facets of their lives, particularly for their social roles in leisure and entertainment settings (going out with friends, husband, the movies, restaurants, dancing, and parties).

In the interviews, this sense of enjoyment came up more strongly among the less acculturated women and, according to my observations, in their closets there were a lot more clothes that they used for going out than for work.

When it is about work, I am not that demanding. I buy it because I need it. But if it is about what I really want for myself, something that I am going to take pleasure in, I am very demanding. I have to like it very much [in order to buy it] (Soledad, more acculturated. Translation).  

These little blouses here, I wear them for work. It is not that I like them a lot, but they are comfortable and convenient for when I haven’t thought a lot [about what I will wear]. I just grab a black pant and this, and that’s it (Elena, less acculturated. Translation).
My favorite clothes are the ones I use to go out, to dance (...) not the formal clothes that I use to go to the University, the jackets and so. I love getting dressed to go out. For example, I like to dress up when I go to restaurants. I say, life is too short and if you don’t dress up and look pretty to go to those places, when are you going to do it? I like doing it [dressing up]; I enjoy it very much, because it is something different from the daily routine. (Celina, less acculturated. Translation).7

Women dress for their roles and some require more effort than others. Some involve more pleasure and gratification than others. It could be said that the ones that they enjoy the most are the ones that allow them to express their individuality more freely. Because the Hispanic culture is collectivistic, social events represent a space in which the orientation toward others can be enacted. Clothes help communicate to others how important they are, be it the group with whom one is having dinner, or the owner of the restaurant.

The dramaturgical approach considers the setting or “stage” one of the important elements in the discussion of appearance management (Kaiser, 1997). The public setting, where women’s social activities take place and where the audience that they anticipate to encounter resides, guides what to wear. Participants assigned clothes to each particular role. For example, Norma has a type of blouse with ruffles that she uses mostly when she goes out with girl-friends. If it is to meet a friend in her house, she wears another type of blouse that is less elaborate and more casual. When she goes out with her husband to restaurants, the movies or to visit his family and she is performing her role of wife, she wears colorful dresses or combinations of pants with tops that show her figure.

Celina (less acculturated) also has her sexy clothes for when she goes out dancing with her husband, for example a short draped blue top that has layers that move with her body. However, she also has her casual outfits (t-shirts, jeans, and a cap) that she wears when she is performing her role of mother and takes out her daughter for a walk.

Elena (less acculturated) has clothes for going out during the day or going out at night. The clothes for going out at night are more likely to have glittery details and lower cleavage. She has clothes for playing a sophisticated role when she goes out with her older friends, and hippie clothes (silky Indian skirts) for when she goes out with her writer, musician and poet friends. Clothes for when she needs to perform the role of daughter are neat and proper.
Jocelyn (more acculturated) has outfits that she uses for when she needs to perform a more “grown up” role; for example when she goes out with her older group of girl-friends. For that role, she would wear, for example, dark, tight jeans, heels and a “girly” top. She also creates other roles by managing her self-presentation. For example, for New Year’s Eve she wanted to create an “angelic” look, so she selected a white top that had a flowy effect with lace, left her hair down and wavy, and wore light makeup. When she wants to create a “kinky,” “sexy,” or “hot” look (her seductive role), she may wear a black top with an open back and more dramatic make up.

The audience

The findings above suggest that women create their roles considering the audience they will be performing for. Women in this study thought about the audience in a variety of ways. For example, Roxana (more acculturated) anticipated the reaction of the audience through a mental rehearsal at the store:

 quand je choisis mes vêtements, je pense à ce que les gens vont penser. Peut-être que je vois quelque chose dans le magasin et je pense que ça est beau mais ensuite je pense que les gens vont penser “ce femme, elle est presque 40 ans et elle est seule, et elle porte ça” (Traduction).^8

Roxana anticipated the social expectations that her audience had of the role of a 40-year-old woman. She made sure that she did not deviate from that image, through her mental rehearsal behind the stage.

Another less acculturated woman anticipated the reaction of the general audience through the feedback received from a smaller and more familiar audience that was composed of her husband and father:

je porte des vêtements que je aime mais que mon mari aime aussi. Je pense que je le fais parce que je veux qu’ils se sentent bien à mes côtés. Je veux qu’ils sortent avec moi et se sentent bien avec moi et la façon dont je me suis habillée. Je veux que mon mari se sente bien en pensant “tous regardent ma femme.” Mais je dois aussi aimer les vêtements. Lorsque je suis single et que je suis allée sortir avec mon père, j’ai aimé chaque fois qu’il m’a dit “Je suis fier de toi, tous regarderont ma fille, et comment elle est belle” (Norma. Traduction).^9

This comment reflects the importance of feedback in the creation of her role and identity as a woman, wife, and daughter. Additionally, it outlines the traditional relationship between women and beauty, according to which women are expected and encouraged to be concerned with appearance (Kaiser, 1997). It is important to note that this woman did not subordinate her own personal taste in order to please her significant
others. It seems that what is important is to find the intersection between her self-expression and the expectations of the audience. When personal taste and internal motivation are equally as important as external factors, it is as if the self is considered an audience too.

**Respect and consistency**

The interviews also revealed the notion of respect for the audience in formal celebrations that take place in special settings. Women referred to the need to express their reverence for the audience by fulfilling the high expectations in these settings.

In a previous chapter, I discussed how women learned the norms of respect in the church setting. One woman’s comment illustrated how a carefully arranged appearance conveys respect for God: “When something is important for you, you dress for that occasion” (Soledad, more acculturated).

Other celebrations like weddings and baptisms also merited the same kind of reverence. Among women in this study, taking special care of the self-presentation was expected as an act of consistency with the significance of the event. The social contract was to play a fancy role in the fancy theater play. The following passage is how Celina (less acculturated) described the notion of respect when talking about weddings, graduations, baptisms, and similar events:

> It depends on where they take place. I’ve been in very elegant rooms. Those events deserve people dressing up. It is also a matter of respect towards the people who invite you. If they invite you to an elegant party and you go underdressed, that is wrong. They have spent all that money in preparing this fancy dinner. You are supposed to be consistent with that and respect the occasion. You must, even if financially you are not doing very well, you have to make the effort and the sacrifice to go decent and dressed up (Translation).[^10]

This account is an example of the intersection of different cultural aspects such as collectivism, other-orientation and power distance. Celina’s words depict the notions of respect, the need for maintaining harmony, the need to live up to social expectations, and the acceptance of personal sacrifices to save face for others.

**Becoming familiar with the audience**

Another pattern that emerged was the degree of familiarity with the audience and how it affected self-presentation. As I mentioned above, in the private setting of their own homes (backstage) participants felt free to be careless about their appearance.
Previously, I also narrated how some less acculturated participants became more casual or informal as they became familiar with the audience, for example with their colleagues at work or the people they encounter in the supermarket. For example, the familiarity with a certain group of friends allowed Jocelyn to randomly wear her pajamas to go to a local bar.

However, participants also described making special self-presentation efforts for familiar audiences. For example, Monica (more acculturated) said:

When I visit my family, well, I'm casual, but I try to look nicer. I would wear the bulky sweatshirt only if I was going to stay with her [grandmother] when I was going to bed, or hanging in the house. But when I wake up in the morning, I try to look nicer to my grandmother, because she does that. She makes herself nicer every day, she does her hair everyday, and so I'm not going to act like I don't care. I'm going to look nicer for my grandmother.

Elena (less acculturated) feels a nagging need to put herself together when she goes to visit her mother, because she was very demanding with her appearance. She had to make sure that her nails were perfect, wear nice clean clothes, and so forth.

This is consistent with the findings in Tseelon (1992). In this study it became clear that presentational efforts are not limited to unfamiliar others, but that they are also made when the audience is the self or familiar others. According to Tseelon’s study we care about our appearance “even when with familiar others whom we are not trying to impress” because “the feeling about oneself and one’s appearance is important” (p. 506).

For women in this study it was important to consider others and the audience but how they felt about themselves (the self as audience) was also manifested in the enjoyment they experienced putting outfits together, and in the importance of finding clothes that fitted their sense of self.

Play it safe. It also became clear that participants played it safe, presenting a conservative image in their professional role until they became familiar with their roles and their audience. As they started to feel relaxed they began to display more creative and original details.

I feel now that is it more important for getting approval from others, to have a simpler, formal style. More office-standard. Once they know you, you can start to change little by little. That is a clever way to dress the way you like. But at the beginning it is important to present an executive image (Elena, less acculturated. Translation)."
The more acculturated women also felt the need to be conservative when the audience was unknown and their role was not clear. For example, Belinda narrated an occasion on which she was going to a party hosted by people she did not know, so she got information and validation from her friends to make sure that “you didn’t have a girl wearing flip-flops and everybody else in a gown.” Also, Jocelyn covers her tattoos when she goes for work to doctors’ offices because “I don’t know how they are going to feel towards them [tattoos]. So I wear long sleeves, collar shirt and heels.”

Monica’s account below illustrates how this process of becoming familiar with the audience involves a mental dialogue. This conversation with the self is what allows for the reinterpretation of the symbols embedded in clothing according to the symbolic interaction perspective (Kaiser, 1997).

Sometimes I don’t know what to wear. If I am just dressed casually and I go to a place where people are dressed up, I look at myself and ask: “Am I not dressed up enough?”; but If I go to a place and I feel over-dressed, I'm like “Uh, oh”. So, I wear like neutral.

This section has presented the different aspects involved in the creation of roles, taking into account the audience. Women in this study showed that they were skilled in creating the right impression in a variety of social situations. They demonstrated having a communication competence through clothing by which they adapt their appearance according to the desired effect they want to create. However, this ability and need to comport social expectations was never in conflict with their personal tastes and sense of self.

The subsequent segment explains what tactics and strategies are behind the creation of roles.

**Strategies to create roles**

**Editing the wardrobe**

One of the most salient strategies that helped women in this study to create the different roles they performed was having a compartmentalized wardrobe.

To continue with the dramaturgical metaphor, women assigned “costumes” to specific roles. Overall, outfits for one role were not used for other roles. For example, most of the respondents reported wearing the clothes they wear for work; exclusively for
work or the clothes to go out, exclusively for going out. This was evident in both acculturated and less acculturated women:

I am like that with everything. I have friend to go out on Tuesday and another group of friends for Thursdays; I am like that with clothes too. This is a work skirt (Belinda, more acculturated)

I rarely wear skirts for work. The working clothes are just for working. I don’t use them for other occasions. My skirts are for going out (Norma) (translation).

The clothes I use for work, are exclusively for work. I don’t use them for other occasions (Norma, less acculturated. Translation).12

It is important to remember that two of the more acculturated women used uniforms for work. Monica was a vet technician and had to wear garnet scrubs, whereas Roxana worked for an airline and had different pants, jackets, skirts, and dress alternatives.

Having a uniform (a ready made image) had positive implications for the process of selection. It signified saving time and money:

Actually I like the uniform. It saves you the time to be thinking about what to wear, the time you spend shopping for new suits. It saves you time and money (Roxana).

What I really like is that I don’t have to worry about having to buy nice work clothes. If I worked in an office [I would have to worry] (Monica).

At the beginning I was like this is cool, I’m going to wear uniform. People are going to think I am important, but after a while it is boring to be wearing the same thing every day (Monica).

Using a uniform for work is a non-voluntary way of basic compartmentalization. However, Monica and Roxana were different in the way they used different outfits for different occasions. When not at work, Roxana has different attire that she uses for different contexts. For example, if she is going shopping she uses her Victoria Secret pants with a tank top. If she is going to the court or a charity event she may use one of the different line ensembles, whereas if she is going to go out for dinner with friends she wears jeans with one of her multiple colorful tops with embroidery or glitter.
Monica, on the other hand, used all of her clothes for all other activities outside work. She said: “I don't have outfits to do this or to do that, or to go to school, they [my outfits] all kind of go together.”

There are different explanations for this difference. One is that they both have very different lifestyles. Roxana lives in Miami and Monica in Tallahassee. Miami offers many alternatives for social and cultural events. Roxana has a stable position in a big company (American Airlines) so she is more likely to have a better salary than Monica, who works in a local veterinarian clinic. Roxana is almost 40 and twice divorced, whereas Monica is 27 and single. Roxana’s job allows her to travel around the world and have a more cosmopolitan lifestyle. Monica decided to go back to school and live in a small town. Even though they are both acculturated, they differ in this aspect. This suggests that for women in this study, lifestyle may be more important than the level of acculturation in determining certain clothing behaviors.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, working clothes were not the participants’ favorite outfits. Work clothes were more about communicating social affiliation than about self-expression. This may be why selecting clothes for the professional role was perceived as a need or an obligation, whereas shopping for clothes for other activities was perceived as more enjoyable.

It seems that those participants who did not need a uniform for work still created their own standardized attire with styles and elements that were proven to convey the desired image. The use of pants, skirts, jackets in mostly neutral colors like beige and black created the basis for constructing the less sexual, more uniformed image.

**What should I wear?**

On a regular day, participants showed two ways of actually deciding what to wear. The first one was a planned process through which the anticipated image is put together in advance, at least the night before. The other one was an unplanned, impulsive decision made at the very moment of getting dressed. Three of the acculturated women referred to some kind of planning, and two mentioned deciding what to wear in a spontaneous manner. It could be said then that less acculturated women were more likely to invest more time and attention into creating the desired image.
It is important to note than even if the outfits were planned in advance, there was room for change according to the mood and feeling of the day. How moods influence appearance management will be discussed later in this section.

Planning. Women in this study planned their outfits for special occasions in advance, for example, checking that the items they wanted to wear were cleaned and ironed. Some of them also planned their daily outfits at least the night before.

Some of the planning was done with physical actions and some was done mentally. Saving time in the morning was one of the reasons for planning and even trying on the next day’s outfit the night before.

I put together my work clothes the night before. I feel lazy waking up and thinking about it. If the clothes don’t need ironing, I’ll put them directly in my [gym] bag. If it wrinkles, I’ll hang it and put it in the bag at the last minute (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).\(^{13}\)

In order to save time in the morning, I always try something on the night before. The next day I dress up and that’s it. The night before I try it on, it is a process. Sometimes I don’t like how it looks the day after and I just wear something else. (Elena, less acculturated. Translation).\(^{14}\)

It is clear that morning time was much valued. As creating the right image was also valued it was not desirable to have it compete for time and attention with other morning duties. Planning ahead may help them guarantee that the image they are creating is thoughtful and that everything is going to be in order (clean, handy, and communicating the desired message). This reflects a way to avoid making mistakes in achieving the desired look in the rush of the morning.

In other cases the planning and rehearsal only happened in women’s minds. Their accounts revealed that they had a mental map with all the outfits and the image they wanted to communicate, so that the planned decision became a mental editing of clothing pieces. The following statements illustrate this process:

I usually have an idea of what’s clean. I already know what I’m gonna wear because I know everything I own. I can plan out outfits with no problem (Belinda, more acculturated).

The day before I prepare everything in my mind. I know everything I have, so I just think “what am I gonna wear tomorrow?” And I go to bed and I think about different combinations. I’ll form it in my mind. The next morning I like put it together and find the right shoes for it (Roxana, more acculturated).
Creating the desired image is so important that planning the next day’s outfit becomes an internal quiet dialogue by the end of the day.

Yet another aspect of the planning involved the ritual of integrating new items into the closet. Women described arriving home with a new clothing item and trying it on with other different pieces in their closet. This rehearsal allowed them to integrate the new item into the closet. The new component acquired meaning in relation to all the other items in the closet, taking different meanings according to the combination.

When I buy a new shirt, I try it with eight different things so that I already know how it looks and I don’t have to worry about it anymore. I can show you with what I would wear every shirt in my closet without even trying. It saves so much time. It’s only once in a blue moon that I say “I’ve never tried this before, let’s see how it looks” (Belinda, more acculturated).

Elena’s anecdote is another example of how the rehearsal helps prevent communicating the wrong image. Thanks to her routine Elena realized that something she had bought for work could convey the wrong image. She figured out how to solve the problem: “I bought this skirt thinking about wearing it for work. But later in my house when I tried it on I realized that it was too tight for work. I finally figured out that I can wear it with a large shirt on top” (less acculturated. Translation).

The following quote belongs to a pilot interview I conducted with a bicultural Hispanic woman. I decided to include the quote here because it illustrates an interesting case of image planning:

I line up in my closet the outfits I’m going to wear the next two weeks. This is what I am going to wear on Wednesday, this on Friday and so on. I also prepare alternative options in case the weather changes (pilot interview).

Fewer women in the study had an approach based on improvisation. This style of decision making was based on an impulse of the moment right before getting dressed. The impulse seems like an irrational connection between the woman and the closet. For example, in her account of how she decided what to wear on a typical day, Monica talked about her closet as an animated entity with which she dialogues:

I just wake up and look at the closet and I just see if there is something in my closet telling me to wear it. Sometimes I try something on and it is like “woaaaa” [sound of rejection] (…) then I’ll try something else on. I usually go for about two or three shirts. On a regular day I’ll just look in the closet and see if something happens, pull something out and wear it (Monica, more acculturated).
Another explanation for using improvisation was that mood with which one wakes up would determine what to wear each day. Jocelyn said: “I decide what I want to wear in the morning, depending on how I feel. I cannot decide in the night before, you don’t know how you are gonna feel in the morning.” This relationship between moods and clothing will be addressed later in this chapter.

**Matching.** Women showed a preference for matching color patterns. The assumption was that the overall look must be in matching or complementary colors, including shoes, bags, and belts. This need for matching shows a traditional and classic view of the dos and don’ts of fashion in which the colors of clothing and accessories must be in harmony. Roxana, for example, has belts and shoes in almost every color so that she can use, for example, the pink belt and pink shoes with a top that has pink details. Norma (less acculturated) referred to those she perceived as exemplary as women who always matched colors, purses, and shoes.

Matching colors is an ability that is desired and there are certain precautions that are taken to avoid mismatching.

On several occasions the matching included considering the skin color. For example:

I don’t use colors like bright turquoise and fuchsia, because they are too flashy. I look like a light bulb. People will see me from miles away. I would be uncomfortable because I think that the contrast [between my dark skin and the colors] would disturb people’s eyes (Norma, translation).  

Thus, it seems that the motivation behind matching colors is also to create an aesthetic image that is harmonious to other people’s eyes. This is a very interesting manifestation of the desire for harmony that is linked to the collectivistic nature of the Hispanic culture.

**Novelty and change.** The need for playfulness and novelty was another factor in deciding what to wear. Elena (less acculturated) said: “I love to mix and match and I always try new things with what I already have. I try to invent, to be creative with what I have” (Translation).

In Chapter 5, I explained that a change in looks was associated with femininity. Even those participants that wear a limited choice of colors can achieve controlled matching through accessories or change the way of wearing the same element to create
the illusion of change: “I wear [the same combination] with a necklace and it looks as if it is a different outfit. I transform it” (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).\(^{18}\)

Another tactic associated with the need for change and constant novelty was the regularity with which items or entire outfits were worn. This was in turn related to the consideration of the particular audience with whom one interacts. Women in this study made special efforts not to repeat the same image to the same audience. The participants in general felt that they had enough clothes so that they did not look the same everyday.

I might wear pants more than once, but not blouses or sweaters. I have in mind what I wear during the week and the week before. If I wore something [during that time] I cannot wear it again. I teach Mondays, Wednesdays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, so I have to remember [what I wore] so that I don’t wear the same outfit I did the week before. I think people don’t even notice, but I do. I have a student that wears the exact same thing every week. I find that horrible. I like to look different. I like to change. It is also about hygiene. I think it is like careless to wear the same. It may be practical because you don’t have to worry about it, you wear the same clothes all week long, and that’s it, like a uniform. But I do care. I may wear the same thing I wore two weeks ago. I don’t think they pay attention to that, but I do. I refuse to wear the same thing (Maria, less acculturated, translation).\(^{19}\)

The ideas in this quote point out that monitoring appearance is important even when one perceives that others do not care. This concern shows not only an individual’s enjoyment in appearance variation but also the maintenance of the Hispanic cultural value that expects personal care, particularly in females. The resistance to adopt an unvarying image (considered careless, unfeminine, and not hygienic) even if it is perceived as socially acceptable reveals the prevalence of those cultural values.

**Preserving.** The participants avoided wearing items that they considered special too often in order to prevent deterioration. One would think that favorite items would be worn more often precisely because the women liked them so much. Instead they “save/spare/control” them for their special life. This issue emerged in both acculturated and less acculturated women. They said:

I don’t wear it a lot because I like it” (Belinda, more acculturated).

This shirt is expensive. I don’t like to wash this type of clothing because it deteriorates. I wear it less because I don’t want to wash it often (Sonia, more acculturated. Translation).\(^{20}\)

Elena had two shirts that were pretty similar. One was polyester and cheaper, the other one was silk and more expensive. She said:
I wear the silk one less often because it is better quality and I leave it for more important occasions [important presentations at work]. For less important things, like going to a bar, people can spill something on you. If they do it on polyester, I don’t care. I wouldn’t wear the silk one because it could get ruined (less acculturated. Translation). 21

According to my observations, this desire to preserve clothing was related to items that were less fashionable or more classic, such as Elena’s silk button-up shirt. This is not unexpected because it shows an awareness of fashion that transcends trendiness. This awareness of what is out of style was also revealed when they discontinued the use of clothes even if they were still in good shape, for the sole reason that they were not fashionable anymore. Also, as clothes go out of fashion, their function changes as well. For example, Celina no longer uses her long soft white skirt to go out because it is out of fashion. She still keeps it because she likes it. However, its status in her closet has been downgraded. She only wears it when she goes on vacations to the beach.

How do I feel? The influence of mood

Besides the practical strategies used to select what to wear in order to communicate the desired image/effect, participants also considered their moods and feelings. Even though women in both groups stated that they decide what to wear based on their mood, there was a difference across the levels of acculturation. On one side, less acculturate women mirrored their moods in their appearance, and on the other side more acculturated women masked their moods through appearance, particularly moods that were perceived to be bad or negative.

Mirroring

The mirroring strategy consisted of a transparent communication of the feelings through clothing and appearance. On one hand, feeling good (happy, cheerful, excited) is communicated through the use of more and brighter colors. Being in a good mood makes the women in this group put more effort into creating their daily outfit. On the other hand, feeling bad (moody, tired or sick), is communicated through the use of dark colors, looser clothes, and through less effort in putting an outfit together. For example:

When I am very happy I want to wear every color. If I am a little down I wear black or brown. Well, for work I wear mostly black, but during the weekends I dress according to my mood. If I am not in a good mood I don’t feel like dressing [up], I wear workout outfits and that’s it. I take less time to decide what looks good, I don’t care, I wear whatever. (Elena, less acculturated. Translation). 22
The following account by Maria explains the logic of mirroring:

There are days in which I don’t feel like wearing red. For example if you are
down one day you won’t wear red because it doesn’t match. For you to wear red
you have to feel good (…) If I feel down I won’t wear red because I associate it
with calling people’s attention. I like bright colors and I used them, but some days
I don’t feel good in them so I change my clothes (less acculturated. Translation).23

If one is not feeling good, one does not want people’s attention, therefore it is
better to avoid wearing bright colors. In their minds, calling people’s attention should be
done only if one feels good. This is related to the value of harmony and avoiding
controversy, in alignment with the other-oriented Hispanic culture. Also, it is a way to
avoid being seen by others in a negative light. Moreover, there is a need for consistency
between how one feels and how one looks: “If you are down you are not going to wear
red because it does not match [with how you feel]” (Maria, Translation).24

Moods and feelings are not only communicated by colors, but also by certain
clothing items. Norma has a t-shirt for depression. It is a long, big t-shirt. She noticed that
the t-shirt had that meaning because she wore it when she was sad that her mother had
left after a long visit in the U.S. For Norma, the influence of her mood on her appearance
is so strong that, as she said: “If I am sad, or depressed or something like that I don’t feel
like arranging myself so I simply decide not to go out. I would rather not go out, because
I am not going out in flip-flops” (less acculturated. Translation).25

Another account revealed more of the symbolic meaning of colors in clothing:

I do tend to dress according to my emotions. There was a time in which I knew
how I felt because of the color I chose that morning. When I was relaxed and
fresh I wore white. It was mostly on Mondays. But when Fridays arrived, I wore
black. Why? Because it would hide all my problems! (Elena, less acculturated.
Translation).26

Elena’s words show that not only colors are used to reflect emotions but also that
colors are used to help in the understanding of the self. Moreover, this account shows that
the mirroring and the masking strategies are not mutually exclusive. Black masks
problems. This leads to the masking strategy.

**Masking**

In contrast to the mirroring strategy described by less acculturated participants,
the more acculturated ones used an active and controlling strategy. The masking strategy
consists of attacking or hiding the bad mood and not letting the audience perceive it. This
strategy gives more control to the individual over the appearance and the presentation of the self. Instead of letting the emotions lead the choice, there is conscious control. The result is that the women end up investing energy in looking good both when they feel bad and when they feel good.

Putting an extra effort into looking good when one feels bad is not only about masking the feelings, but also about getting compliments from others, which in turn helps one feel better. Here is how the women explain it:

If I wake up and I’m in a bad mood, or feel gross or I’m sick, then I will take a shower and dress up a little bit more to make myself look better. I think if I physically look better I will feel better. So I’ll dress up a little bit, wear heels, make up a little more. If I wake up and I’m in a good mood and feeling energetic I say “let me play with a new outfit” (...) I like to dress like my moods: play off the good mood, and if I’m in a bad mood try to wear something that is going to make me feel happier. I think clothes can do that if you look. When I feel bad I try to feel better by dressing up. Maybe you get more compliments from people, and it makes you feel a little bit better (Jocelyn, more acculturated).

When I am sad I take a shower and dress up. I would wear something elegant, something that I look at the mirror and feel good in. When I am happy I get less dressed up because I don’t need anything else (Roxana, more acculturated. Translation). 27

Sometimes, it’s about how I feel physically. If I feel horrible I’ll make the extra effort to look nice. If you feel horrible, and look horrible, there is nothing good about that. At least if I feel horrible, I look nice. When I feel sick I spend extra time so that I don’t look sick (Belinda, less acculturated).

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter is an extension of Chapter 5, and describes the strategies used by women in this study to decide what to wear. The topics here are related to RQ2: How do women use clothes and fashion to communicate differentiation, social affiliation, and social status? This theme emerged from the interviews as women discussed the practicalities involved in their decisions about clothing.

One of the important findings in this study is that women in this study had a very conscious way of dressing for the different roles that composed their identities. The women showed an awareness of their different roles and how each role requires a different outfit. Symbolic interactionism explains this by using the assumption that people act toward other people on the basis of what their appearance holds for us.
Similarly, people create images to have others act toward them on the basis of their appearance. In social psychology this behavior is explained by the concept of appearance management, which includes “the process of planning, thinking about, or assessing the social consequences of one’s appearance” (Kaiser, 1997, p.5). Finally, the symbolic consumption in its postmodernist approach also explains the division of the self: the self is not fixed but a changing entity, and individuals use products to create a range of self-images from which they choose one according to the situation (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Goffman, 1959).

Additionally, the dramaturgy approach (Goffman, 1959) in social psychology helps explain appearance management in a way that is compatible with symbolic interaction. This approach assumes that “people are dependent on one another for their identities; building up identities is a continuous, lifelong process--as is the more basic self-concept that subsumes these identities” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 190). The dramaturgy approach explains the self as a theatrical production that people present to the different audiences they interact with (Goffman, 1959). In this way, people use clothes and appearance to create the different identities and roles that they need to enact according to the setting and the audience they encounter. Individuals are actors that wear masks to embody roles for performances, and “our personae become our public self-presentations” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 193).

The women expressed a need to differentiate their private and public persona. In the more acculturated group some women expressed a degree of preference for maintaining a clear-cut division in terms of clothing between their private self and public roles. This difference may be explained by the fact that these more acculturated participants were among the youngest participants. They lived in a college town where it was socially acceptable to wear less casual clothes in public. However, cultural values would also explain the differences. Less acculturated women show a concern for their self-presentation in public because they are other-oriented and feel the need to make a positive impression and save face. In contrast, more acculturated women, particularly young and single ones, seem to have less concern for the reaction of others in certain situations, because they are driven by comfort, something typical of the Anglo individualistic orientation. Another cultural dimension that underlies this difference is the high uncertainty avoidance characteristic of the Hispanic culture. The need to separate
the public and private spheres is related to the need to give some structure to the world. De Mooij (2004) says: “Strong uncertainty avoidance makes people want to be well-groomed when they go out into the streets. It helps to structure an ambiguous world” (p. 170). The findings also show that women in this study had an audience in mind when they dressed. This is in alignment with the dramaturgical perspective which suggests that “when we dress, we also address some audience whose responses are essential to the establishment or our ideas about ourselves” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 200). Women in this study seemed to place a lot of attention in presenting themselves to others and follow the expected social schemata.

Overall, women in this study were high self-monitors. According to Peluchette and his colleagues (2006), self-monitoring is a personality trait associated with the extent to which individuals try to exert control over the way they present themselves to others. The authors further noted that:

Those who are high self-monitors want to behave in socially acceptable ways, are highly concerned about what others think of them, and are especially sensitive to cues about the appropriateness of their behavior (...) in addition, high self-monitors have been found to have rather large wardrobes with a diversity of styles and accessories, providing sufficient variety to choose from in their quest to present the “correct” or desired image (Peluchette et. al, 2006, p. 48).

Moreover, Schlenker (1980) suggests that high self-monitors have both “the ability to successfully control their expressive behaviors and the motivation to seek out and use cues that indicate what is socially appropriate” (p. 77).

Self-monitoring and appearance management are considered universal behaviors. All individuals engage in some form of appearance management on a daily basis (Kaiser, 1997). However, if cultural differences sometimes are a matter of degree of universal behaviors, it is possible to conclude that collectivist, other-oriented cultures are the highest self-monitors. Moreover, conveying the appropriate image is part of preserving group harmony, which is also a characteristic of collectivistic cultures (De Mooij, 2004).

The importance of the audience and the social feedback in relation to identity is explained by the concept of the looking-glass self introduced by Cooley (as cited by Kaiser, 1997). This concept refers to “the process of perceiving ourselves through our imagination of others’ impressions” (p. 165). In other words, the feedback that the
individual receives from the reflection of others’ assessments results in a decision of who one is (Solomon, 1983). Considering that the Hispanic culture is other-oriented and also oriented towards an external locus of control (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005), one can expect to find among Hispanics a strong orientation for self-definition through others’ definitions of them.

Both less acculturated and more acculturated Hispanic women learned to interpret the cues of the audience, whether familiar or unfamiliar to them. Among the participants there were no cases in which the situation and audience was new and the deciphering of the cues was related to cultural differences. Some of the encounters with new audiences, such as starting a new job or going to a new restaurant, and the understanding of that new role seem to be more age- or life-stage related than culturally related. Younger women, regardless of their level of acculturation, have to learn about the audience expectations when they start to work or when they start having more social experience in various settings. It is also important to remember that experiences for the middle class women in the U.S. and in Latin America may not be too different, making the acculturation process smooth.

The level of effort that they invest in dressing for the various roles reveals a high degree of knowledge about themselves, the situation, the audience, and how to create meaning through their appearance. Just as good public speakers have the linguistic competence to communicate the right message to a given audience, women in this study perceive that they have the competence to express the message that the audience is expecting.

Even if particular roles that women take on in the new culture may involve the use of new visual markers, for example, the use of less formal clothing for the “professional” role, it is difficult to conclude that role playing reflects cultural differences. Role playing seems to be a universal human feature that is related to the different stages in life (Solomon, 1983). As Hispanic women are high-monitors, they also invest more time, energy, and money in creating a repertoire of self-images. The different images they need to create depend on which stage in their lives there are in. This means that including variables related to life stage and life style in the creation of segmentation models is extremely important in order to understand the nuances related to the roles the women are playing.
In this chapter the different strategies that women used to select what they were going to wear on a daily basis have also been addressed. Important themes included the need for matching colors, repetition avoidance, and preservation of favorite clothes. The need to match reveals a preference for a classic traditional aesthetics. The need to match may respond to the idea of maintaining visual harmony. The need for change and variation are related to the perception of femininity. As explained in the previous chapter, women in this study associate femininity with constant change in one’s image. This was explained according to the traditional gender roles, in which women are expected to be more concerned with appearance than men are.

Another strategy that women in this study use to create images for their different roles was to have their wardrobe strategically compartmentalized. Compartmentalized closets are typical of self-monitors as they “have a rather large wardrobes with a diversity of styles and accessories, providing sufficient variety to choose from in their quest to present the “correct” or desired image” (Peluchette et al. 2006, p. 48) As mentioned before, self-monitoring as an effort to present a socially acceptable image appears to be an intrinsic characteristic of collectivistic cultures. Moreover, creating these divisions is a way of creating structure in their lives. This need for structure is typical of the cultures high in uncertainty avoidance, such as the Hispanic culture. This means that products and services can create a relevant emotional and practical connection with Hispanic women by providing them with the tools to create structure in their lives and to effectively express the repertoire of roles they embody.

Because changing images was so important for these women, they tend to have large wardrobes. They preferred not to repeat outfits too often. First, because they wanted to convey to their audiences the idea of infinite novelty that makes them more feminine and helps them convey their position in society. Secondly, because they liked to preserve some of their clothes. This desire for preservation shows that Hispanic women value the quality of clothing items. This need is also indicative of how objects people possess are considered part of their extended selves, as explained by the symbolic consumption approach (Belk, 1998). This tendency to “save” their clothes indicates that in some cases quality or emotional connection with certain clothing may be more important than style and being up to date. If taking care of clothes is important for middle class, professional Hispanic women such as the participants in this research, one could say that it is even
more important for less affluent Hispanic women. Because they may not be able to replace their favorite items very often, less acculturated Hispanics may become more attached to the clothes they already have.

The last theme that emerged in the topic of creating one’s image was related to the influence of moods in deciding what to wear. In addition to following the external indicators coming from the audience and the context, women in this study also followed internal indicators when deciding what to wear.

The finding in this area showed differences across the levels of acculturation. Less acculturated women tended to let the emotions and feelings drive the selection of colors as well as determine the time invested in putting together a look (the mirror strategy). There was an emphasis on matching how one feels and how one looks. When women in this group felt good (happy, excited, energetic), they would express it by putting extra care into their appearance. On the contrary, when they felt bad (angry, sad, sick) they would express it by not investing energy in arranging themselves, using dark colors or even simply staying at home.

It is interesting that more acculturated women were the ones that controlled their appearance with the masking strategy. Due to the collectivistic orientation of the culture and the social pressure to look good, the less acculturated women would be the ones expected to mask feelings. More acculturated women, on the other hand, would be expected to favor self-expression and individuality and therefore mirror their emotions in the way they dress.

These unexpected findings can be explained by saying that the Hispanic culture has a high tolerance and acceptance for the expression of feelings. This mirroring strategy appears to be contradictory to the communication competence and appearance management skills discussed earlier. I have argued that regardless of the level of acculturation, Hispanic women have the competency to manage and manipulate their appearance in order to create an image in harmony with the situational expectations. The fact that this group of women “loses” those management powers when they do not feel good emotionally seems to indicate that for less acculturated women there takes place a negotiation between expressing one’s feelings and maintaining harmony. In the case of extreme negative moods women surrendered and preferred to avoid social contact in order to maintain harmony. Hispanic cultures are thought to be high-contact cultures.
High-contact cultures tend to favor the full expression of emotions. Albert and Ha (2004) suggest that in terms of communication Latin Americans tend to be more satisfied than mainstream Americans when they can express their emotions freely.

For the more acculturated, the need to look good when they are feeling bad could be driven more by a need for feeling control and a sense of being able to change the situation than by the need for social approval and group harmony. Making an extra effort to look good when they do not feel good generates compliments. Getting compliments has the individualistic function of helping one feel better.

1 Cada etapa de mi vida ha estado marcada más bien por el rol que tengo que desempeñar. Y fui la estudiante, fui la periodista de periódico y me vestí como tal, fui esposa y me vestí como tal, me disfrecé para cada rol. Luego fui nadie, cuando llegue aquí, no tenia ningún tipo de rol ni de obligación a nivel social porque no era nadie , entonces como no era nadie ni nadie me estaba mirando, me vestía con las mismas faldas de siempre pero con menos acceso económico entonces me compraba versiones de mala calidad y baratas pues era lo que podía comprar (Elena)

2 Creo que es como que la ropa de la casa es para estar en la casa, y nadie afuera en la calle debe saber como uno se la pasa en la casa. La gente afuera no debe saber como uno esta en la casa, si se bañó o no se bañó, si tiene el pelo parado o no. Cuando uno sale ya tiene que tener otra imagen. En mi casa estoy con una fanela vieja, unos shorts, cosas más viejas. (Norma)

3 Hay veces que tienes que mostrar una imagen asexuada, una imagen de seriedad total, para que te asignen muchas responsabilidades y no te vean que estas pensando en pajaritos. Por ejemplo si estoy entrevistando una mujer, que es jefa y muy seria, o un jefe de una cárce y necesito proyectar algo super neutro (Elena)

4 ¿Cómo tú equilibras tu feminidad con las supuestas bolas que tienes que tener para ese tipo de trabajo? En un rollo. Por eso muchas de las mujeres que trabajan en esta area parecen hombres (Elena)

5 Cuando es para el trabajo no soy tan exigente, para el trabajo no me importe tanto. Y compro porque lo que necesito. Pero si es que realmente lo quiero para mí, que lo voy a disfrutar, si soy bien exigente. Tiene que gustarme mucho. (Sonia)

6 Estas blusitas son para el trabajo. No es que me gusten mucho pero es algo cómodo, rápido para cuando no he pensado mucho agarrar un pantalón negro o el gris con esto y ya. (Elena)

7 Mi ropa favorita es la que uso para salir a bailar (…) no es la ropa formal de ir a la Universidad, las chaquetas y eso. La favorita es la de salir en las noches. Por ejemplo restaurantes elegantes si requieren, hay personas que las ves con jeans, pero me gusta ir a restaurantes elegantes bien vestida. Además yo digo, la vida es muy corta y si a esos lugares bonitos que tú vas no te arreglas y te pones bonita y te vistes bien, cuando lo vas a hacer? Que me gusta hacerlo, lo disfruto también, porque es algo diferente al día, a lo cotidiano de todos los días. (Celina)

8 Cuando compro ropa yo pienso como la gente me percibe. Puede ser que vea algo en una tienda y piense que precioso esto pero luego pienso que pensara la gente ¡esta con casi 40 años, soltera, y se pone eso! que van a pensar. (Roxana)

9 Yo creo que yo busco la ropa que me guste a mi y además le guste a ellos creo que porque quiero que ellos se sientan bien al lado de mi. Quiero que salgan conmigo y se sientan bien saliendo conmigo como yo voy vestida. Que mi esposo se sienta bien pensando ¡que todo el mundo vea a mi esposa; pero me tiene que gustar realmente a mí también. También cuando estaba soltera y salía con mi papa me gustaba cuando mi papa me decia ¡que orgullosa estoy, que todo el mundo vea a mi hija, que bonita ¡creo que eso me gusta que se sientan bien al lado de mi. (Norma)

10 Depende del lugar donde sea, porque yo he ido a unos en salones muy elegantes. Esos ameritan que las personas se vistan bien, por un problema de respeto a la gente que te invita. Porque si te invitan a una fiesta elegante y vas mal vestido, está mal. La gente se ha gastado tu dinero en preparar toda una cena elegante, se supone que tu seas consecuente con eso y respetes la ocasión. Veo de muy mal gusto que alguien te invite a una fiesta de lujo y que te aparezcas muy mal vestido. Como que uno debe, aunque económicamente no estés muy bien tienes que hacer el esfuerzo y el sacrificio de ir decente y bien vestido a ese tipo de lugares. (Celina)
Siento ahora que es más importante para aprobación de los demás hacia ti, como persona nueva, pues estar más formal y más sencillo en cuanto al estilo, más estándar de oficina, después de que te conocen, poco a poco puedes cambiar, es una manera inteligente de cambiar y vestirte como tu quieras. Pero al principio es importante presentar una imagen ejecutiva (Elena).

La ropa de trabajar solo la uso para trabajar, no me la pongo para otras ocasiones (Norma).

La ropa de trabajo la arreglo la noche antes, me da pereza tener que levantarme y pensar. Casi siempre la saco en la noche. Si no se arruga la pongo en el bolso de una vez, si se arruga la cuelgo y al final la guardo. (Maria)

Para no perder tiempo en la mañana en las noches siempre me pruebo algo para dejarlo para el día siguiente. Al día siguiente me visto y ya. En la noche me lo pruebo, lo pienso, es un proceso. A veces al día siguiente no me gusta, me pongo otra cosa y ya. (Elena)

Cuando me compre esta falta pensé usarla para el trabajo, pero luego en mi casa cuando me la probé con varias cosas me di cuenta de que era muy pegada para el trabajo. Una vez la lleve pero me puse algo largo por encima. (Elena)

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Para no perder tiempo en la mañana en las noches siempre me pruebo algo para dejarlo para el día siguiente. Al día siguiente me visto y ya. En la noche me lo pruebo, lo pienso, es un proceso. A veces al día siguiente no me gusta, me pongo otra cosa y ya. (Elena)

Cuando me compre esta falta pensé usarla para el trabajo, pero luego en mi casa cuando me la probé con varias cosas me di cuenta de que era muy pegada para el trabajo. Una vez la lleve pero me puse algo largo por encima. (Elena)

Yo no uso turquesa brillante o fucsia porque es muy escandaloso. Parezco un bombillo. La gente me vería a kilómetros de distancia. Me sentiría incómoda porque creo que el contraste [del color de mi piel oscura y los colores de la ropa] molestaría a los ojos de la gente (Norma).

Me encanta ver combinaciones y probarme y siempre hago algo nuevo con las cosas que tengo. Trato de inventar o ser creativa con las cosas que tengo (Elena).

Me pongo un collar y se ve como si fuera otro outfit. Es como para transformarlo. (Maria)

Pantalones puede ser que repito, blusas o suéter, no. Yo me acuerdo que me puse en la semana y que me puse en la semana anterior. Si y me lo puse no me lo puedo volver a poner. Como doy clases lunes y miércoles y martes y jueves, entonces me tengo que acordar para no ir vestida igualita que la semana anterior. Yo creo que la gente ni se acuerda, pero yo si. Tengo una estudiante que va vestida igual todas las semanas, eso me da terror. Me gusta verme diferente, cambiar. También lo relaciono con higiene. Me parece que es como descuidado ponerte la misma ropa, puede ser que sea pratico porque no te tienes que preocupar, te pones la misma ropa toda la semana y ya, como un uniforme, pero yo si me doy cuenta y trato de acordarme. Trato de no ponerme la semana anterior, tal vez la de 2 semanas antes si. Yo creo que ellos ni se dan cuenta, ni se acuerdan, pero yo sí me rehúso a ir vestida igualita. (Maria)

Esta es cara. Es una ropa que no me gusta lavar muy seguido porque se deteriora. I would wear it less porque no me gustaría lavarlo tanto. (Sonia)

La de seda me la pondría mejor seguido, porque como es de mejor calidad la dejaría para ocasiones más importantes. Las cosas que no son tan importantes, por ejemplo si voy a un club, la gente va a estar tomando, te pueden regar algo encima. Si lo hacen en poliéster no me importa, pero no me pondría silk porque me lo van a malograr (Elena).

Cuando estoy muy feliz me quiero poner todos los colores encima. Si estoy medio down me pongo negro o marrón. Bueno, para el trabajo uso casi siempre negro, pero los fines de semana varía y depende del humor. Cuando no estoy de humor no me provoca vestirme, me pongo un mono y ya. Pero creo que es más que todos los colores, me tardo menos en ver que se ve bien, no me importa, lo que sea. (Elena)

Hay días que no me siento con ánimos de ponerme rojo. Por ejemplo un día que estás como apagada no te vas a poner rojo porque no va con la personalidad o con como te sientes. Para ponerse rojo tienes que sentirte bien Si me siento down y no me quiero poner rojo porque rojo lo asocio con llamar la atención, ese día no me la pondría. Hay cosas de colores llamativos que me gustan, me gusta toda la ropa, pero tal vez hoy me la veo horrible y me la quito (Maria).

Si te sientes mal no te vas a poner rojo porque no pega (Maria).

Cuando estoy deprimida, triste, lo que sea no me dan ganas de arreglarme, entonces decido no salir y ya. Prefiero no salir porque no voy a salir en chancletas (Norma).

Tengo mis tendencias a vestirme emocional. Hubo una época que sabía como me sentía por el color que me ponía en la mañana. Cuando estoy relajada, fresca me vestía de blanco, eso era casi todos los lunes, cuando llegaba el viernes me vestía de negro. Porque? Porque me tapa todos los problemas. (Elena)

Cuando estoy triste me baño y me visto bien. Me pondría algo elegante, algo que me mire al espejo y me sienta bien. Cuando estoy feliz pues estoy un poco mas desarreglada porque no me hace falta mas nada. (Roxana)
CHAPTER 7
DECIDING WHAT TO BUY
SOURCES OF INFLUENCE AND DECISION MAKING

This chapter is devoted to the understanding of Hispanic women’s consumer behavior, particularly the sources of influence and the buying decision-making process in the clothing product category. Here questions about the diffusion of fashion addressed by the literature will be answered, taking a look at how Hispanic women decide what to buy and which factors influence their decisions.

The theory of the diffusion of innovations suggests that mass media is the most effective channel to create awareness about innovations, whereas interpersonal communication is more effective in persuading. This theory also suggests that the adoption of innovations has certain steps and depends on certain aspects that facilitate the process (Rogers, 2003). Based on this, this chapter will address RQ4: What are the communication channels and characteristics of the social networks in which meaning is created and diffused?; RQ5: What are the aspects of clothing that facilitate adoption?; RQ6: The role of brands in adoption; RQ7: What is the decision-making process?; and RQ8: How are the above issues different according to the level of acculturation? Some aspects of the communication of prestige and social status (RQ2) are also covered here.

Based on the literature, it is assumed that less acculturated women consume more Spanish-language media than more acculturated ones. Furthermore, due to the collectivistic and other-orientation of the Hispanic culture, less acculturated women should be more influenced by friends and family than the more acculturated ones. The literature also states that less acculturated women prefer to shop for clothes with friends rather than alone. Moreover, less acculturated women are more likely to consume brands and products that highlight their economic success.

In terms of the communication channels, the findings in this study showed, as expected, that less acculturated women consumed more Spanish-language media than more acculturated women. However, it was found that the less acculturated women also consume English-language media. Similarly, English-dominant participants also consume some Spanish-language media as a language-maintenance/learning tool. However,
women in both groups consumed very little media related to clothing and fashion. For example, none of the participants subscribed to any fashion magazines, and the Internet was used in relation to clothing only occasionally to check for availability of a certain clothing item at stores. Participants explained that, for them, the Internet is not the best communication channel for clothing because it lacks the sensorial experience that is crucial when it comes to clothes.

Overall, they were not familiar with magazines targeting Hispanic women. Those who were familiar with these publications showed a negative attitude toward them. However, participants referred to Hispanic celebrities as role models or references in relation to their physical appearance and style.

For women in this study, interpersonal communication and observation seemed to be the most important factors in the awareness and persuasion stages of the decision-making process. One can say that the influence of friends and family resisted both time and distance. Friends and family members that are not physically close still seem to exert an important influence on the clothes that the women are willing to adopt.

Even if most participants can be considered late adopters, there were also participants that showed some attributes of opinion leadership, such as being sought after for advice and being able to reinvent clothing items in a novel way.

In relation to the various intrinsic aspects of clothes, less acculturated women tended to prefer more colorful clothes, with bold colors, and a greater variety of prints than their more acculturated counterparts. Also, they tended to wear and own more dresses and skirts.

When deciding what to buy, women in both groups considered the relationship of price and quality as the most important relative advantage. Fit to their body, to their sense of self, and the ability to conceal undesirable features of the body, were also main factors in the decision-making process. These factors were considered more important than being up-to-date and wearing the latest fashions. In terms of brands, the women only showed a preference for certain brands that offered good fit and quality. The use of brands to convey status and success was not relevant for women in this study.

Women in this study showed a preference for buying in discount stores. In addition to the economic advantage, discount stores also offer the advantage of surprise and uniqueness that seems to be important for them.
In terms of shopping behavior, there were several differences across levels of acculturation. Less acculturated women tended to see clothing shopping not only as a hunt for particular needed items, but also as an entertaining and enjoyable collecting adventure.

Another difference is that less acculturated women in this study preferred to shop alone in order to avoid other’s influence, and to control the amount of time they wanted to spend at the stores. Shopping with friends or family members was rather an unusual activity. Contrary to expectations, the women who preferred to shop with others were among the more acculturated women.

Other important aspects of decision-making features took place at the store. Women in both groups engaged in a sort of physical and mental rehearsal of different looks while trying on clothes. They considered the image they want to create, the versatility of the piece and how it would fit with the rest of their clothes.

There was another group of women who did not engage in a thoughtful decision-making process (rehearsal). They acted more as if driven by impulse. Other reasons not to engage in a rehearsal at the store were due to a lack of confidence in one’s ability to choose the right size and style or simply to frustration. In this last case, women conducted the rehearsal in the privacy of their own homes.

Sources of influence

In the diffusion of innovation approach Rogers (2003) distinguishes mass media and interpersonal communication as the two channels by which messages reach individuals. This section examines these means of information in relation to the participants.

Media

I asked women in this study about their media consumption in general and about fashion-related media in particular. Overall, as expected, less acculturated women tended to consume more Spanish-language media than more acculturated ones. However, less acculturated women also consumed English-language media, and more acculturated ones still consumed Spanish-language media, showing a retro-acculturation behavior. It is interesting to note that the reported media consumption was pretty low overall. Many of the women reported having little time to watch TV, and little interest in radio,
newspapers, and magazines. Only a few participants were familiar with media efforts targeting Hispanics other than well-known TV channels like Univision and Telemundo. Only a few of them had seen magazines targeted to Hispanic women. None of the participants subscribed to any fashion magazine.

**Less acculturated women and television**

Most of the less acculturated women reported not having enough time to watch TV on a regular basis. Only few of them reported watching TV programs or channels related to fashion or paying attention to what celebrities or fictional characters wear, and even this was done sporadically. Less acculturated women watched more shows in Spanish-language television than more acculturated women. However, they also watched different content in English-language TV. It is interesting to observe that 2 of the women in this group did not have cable. Elena decided not to pay for cable because she does not have much time to watch TV and needs to save money. Ana does not want to have TV in her house to protect her children from spending too much time watching programs that are not educational.

Of those who watched Spanish-language TV, most reported watching the news (mostly Univision) and *telenovelas* (Univision and others) from which they do admit getting clothing ideas. Norma, for example, said: “In Spanish-language TV I watch the news and the *telenovelas* and I see the clothes that they wear.”

I perceived an apologetic tone when the women mentioned watching *telenovelas*. They admitted that *telenovelas* have the power to entertain them but also noted that there is the danger that watching too often can become a vice that they do not have time for due to a busy lifestyle. Celina, for example, stated:

> I don’t watch a lot of TV, basically just the news in Univision at 6:00 pm or 11:00pm, and sometimes the *telenovela* [La fea mas bella], just to distract myself. Lately, I haven’t been watching a lot of them because you can become addicted. If you start watching one, you don’t want to miss it, and I don’t have the time (Less acculturated. Translation).¹

Maria was the respondent that watched the most Spanish-language TV. Because of her job schedule, she has free time during the day during which she likes to watch TV. She also turns the TV on as background noise when she is cooking or cleaning. Before she moved in with her boyfriend, she only had access to Univision. Now that they have
two incomes in the household, they can afford satellite TV with more than 30 channels in Spanish. She said:

I used to have only Univision, that was my only window to the Latino world. Now that I have satellite I have a big window. I watch CNN en español, a channel called Sur where sometimes I can watch news from Venezuela (…) I prefer HTV over MTV because I listen to a lot of music in Spanish (…) I also like a lot HBO Latino, Spanish-language movies from different countries. I watch a lot of telenovelas, my husband is addicted to them too. I’m watching La fea mas bella. A few days ago a new one started, El Zorro. I’m trapped now. Since I have satellite I almost never watch ABC or anything like that anymore.

The fact that she favored Spanish-language over English-language TV as soon as she could afford to have the choice reveals the importance of the connection with the language and content.

Nonetheless, Spanish-language television was not of interest for all of the less acculturated women. Some of the women took advantage of the media content available online, offering flexibility in scheduling and portability. As mentioned before, Ana did not have TV in her house. She watches the news in English at the gym. However, late at night she waits until the kids are sleeping to watch a favorite program of hers, Brothers and Sisters, online.

Elena is a journalist and watches the news in English at work. In Spanish she only watches Jaime Bayly’s show occasionally (a kind of John Stewart critical humor show on Mega TV). When she visits her mother she ends up watching telenovelas “but not because I want to” (pero no porque yo quiera). She also watches portable media. She said:

Currently I’m watching almost no TV. I download shows and movies into my ipod sponsored by Nokia, they are free. I like Sex and the City, I like what the women wear, but it is already old. When I had cable I watched a lot of fashion shows, when I felt like an idiot, I didn’t want to think, I didn’t have a job yet, I watched a lot of E! Entertainment TV. I also watched the Sundance channel (Translation).².

This comment also reveals that even if Elena enjoyed fashion and clothing, she associated watching fashion-related channels with an activity that people do only for superficial entertainment and escapism.
More acculturated women and TV

More acculturated Hispanic women also reported watching little TV. As expected, they preferred English programming. *Heroes, Desperate Housewives*, and *Grey’s Anatomy* were among the most popular shows in this group. None of them reported watching TV shows related to fashion or style.

As we can see in Jocelyn’s statement, she also watches TV shows online:

> I don’t have cable. I don’t really watch TV. I watch shows on my computer. The one show I watch right now religiously is *Heroes*. I go across the street every Monday, we have some wine. We get together about four or five of us. I like comedies. I like my *Desperate Housewives, Grey’s Anatomy*. I love *Law and Order*.

It is interesting to note that watching *Heroes* is for her and her friends a social activity. Remember that she is the youngest participant and, even if she has a part-time job, her current lifestyle is that of a student. According to my observations, meetings to watch weekly shows in somebody’s house are a common practice among American students. One would expect that this collectivistic behavior would be more noticeable among less acculturated Hispanics as well. However, that was not the case. For example, as I just explained, for Ana, watching her favorite show online was an individual pleasure.

Similarly to the less acculturated participants that watched the show *La fea mas bella*, Belinda (more acculturated) watches the English-language version, *Ugly Betty*, produced by Salma Hayek. *Ugly Betty* and *Grey’s Anatomy* are the only shows that she watches “religiously.” Any other show, she watches without commercials on abc.com.

Monica watches mostly English language TV. She never misses *Lost*. She is the only more acculturated woman who admitted watching a channel related to “style.” Her favorite channel is Style and her favorite shows are *Whose Wedding Is It Anyway* and *Married Away*. Monica watches the Style channel, but not for the fashion content, she said: “I don't really watch it for the fashion. Nobody wears that stuff that they show.” When she is at home she has the TV on the Style channel as background noise.

**No more Don Francisco.** By the way more acculturated women referred to Spanish-language TV shows; it seems that they feel the content is not relevant to them. Some of the reactions included making fun of the immortal Don Francisco and *Sábado Gigante* (Saturday’s marathon variety show). One woman remembered that she used to
watch a lot more Spanish-language TV when she lived with her grandparents but now she says: “I don’t really watch Spanish TV anymore; it is not on the top of my list of things to do.”

Belinda, on the other hand, watches Spanish TV as a language-learning tool. For example, she reported sometimes watching telenovelas reruns late at night. She sometimes uses the subtitles to better understand the dialogues. Her statement also shows that the content of most Spanish-language television is not relevant to her:

I don’t really like the programs a lot. There are very few shows that I watch on Univision. I don’t get the comedy as much because it’s a lot of double meaning (…). I don’t really get the dirty jokes because I learned Spanish from my mother and my grandmother. I don’t speak Spanish perfectly. With comedy you have to grasp the language to really get it. The telenovelas are so over the top. Sometimes I watch Casos de la Vida Real during my lunch break because it’s on. The lady is so crazy, and it’s so conservative: the young mother chose to get an abortion and now she cannot live with herself, and now she killed herself. See what happens when you get an abortion? See what happens when you have sex before marriage? [sarcastic tone], it’s so conservative (…) I can probably deal with that show probably because it’s only half an hour long!

This is a good example of how the values and beliefs of the younger generation of Hispanic have changed. They are less conservative than previous generations and these shows do not connect with them. On the contrary, they produce rejection in more acculturated Hispanics.

Radio and newspapers

For both less acculturated and more acculturated respondents, radio and newspapers were the least used media. When it comes to listening to music, CDs or mp3 formats were more popular than radio. Also, online news formats were more popular than the printed ones.

Few women in this study listened to the radio and when they did it was mostly in isolated circumstances. Of the less acculturated ones, only Norma reported listening occasionally to Spanish-language radio stations when she was by herself in the car. Jocelyn, a more acculturated participant, said: “I don’t listen to the radio unless I’m on a road trip.”

There was only one woman, a more acculturated one, who expressed a strong interest in listening to the radio. However, there is an alternative explanation for that, as she is a DJ: “I love the radio. I don’t always like the music that’s out, but I like to know
what’s out. Even if I don’t like it I have to listen to it at least once.” Her interest in music includes Hispanic music; in fact, she initiated a local radio show playing Latin pop and rock music.

Of the more acculturated Hispanics, Belinda was the one who showed more interest in Spanish-language media, which can be considered a sign of her retro-acculturation. She explained that once she moved out of her hometown to go to college and started meeting other Hispanics, her interest and appreciation for the Hispanic culture increased.

As for newspapers, three out of the less acculturated women reported reading the *Miami Herald* at least occasionally. As a journalist, Elena reads various newspapers in English and Spanish. She reads online versions of the main newspapers from Venezuela, her country of origin, the BBC, CNN, *El País* from Spain, and other international newspapers. She subscribes to the *NY Times* on Sundays and used to receive the printed version of the *El Nuevo Herald*. Similarly, Belinda’s interest in this particular media is explained by a professional need.

Only one woman in the less acculturated group referred to the use of newspapers related to clothes and fashion. Newspapers were the source of coupons and useful for monitoring sales:

[In the newspaper] there are promotions about sales. The promotions are not fashion, but about what is on sale in stores like Macy’s. I pay attention to them when I need something in particular; I look at them for several weeks until I find what I want (Ana. Translation).³

More acculturated respondents showed no interest in printed newspapers. Monica, a more acculturated woman, was the only one who mentioned any newspaper consumption: “I only read the Miami Herald every now and then.” Those respondents in both groups who were interested in reading the news generally used the Internet instead of printed media.

**Internet**

Except for one of the less acculturated woman (Monica), all the participants had Internet access from home. Regardless of the level of acculturation, all of them use e-mail and chat applications to keep in touch with their families and friends. As mentioned in the television section above, both acculturated and less acculturated participants reported watching TV shows online. The reasons for this were the convenience of the schedule
and avoiding of commercials. Other occasional uses of the Internet were movie previewing, research, and online games.

Less acculturated women used the Internet to check the news from their country of origin as well as international news. Moreover, one of the most acculturated Hispanic respondents also reported using the internet in order to get a sense of different political perspectives: “I read my news online, I get my media from CNN but also from Mother Jones, that has a more liberal standpoint” (Jocelyn). This illustrates that participants are actively using the Internet to find sources of news that are more culturally or ideologically relevant for them than the mainstream news in English language media.

Three of the more acculturated participants, compared to only two of the less acculturated ones, belonged to virtual social networks such as Facebook or Myspace. One thing that this more acculturated group has in common is that they are or were all students until recently. The fact that they are students, together with the fact that they were the youngest participants, may explain their more frequent use of these social networks that women with husbands and children probably do not have the time to explore.

Belinda, a more acculturated respondent who is a marketer in the department of health, in addition to being a communication student and a DJ, admitted she spends a lot of time on the Internet:

I love the Internet; I love Youtube, Myspace, Facebook. I love looking at people’s pictures; I love to see what they are wearing, if they are having fun. I also love not having to call people. You can just make an event on Facebook and invite your friends. I don’t have to talk to them, it saves it a lot of time and you are sure you don’t forget anybody.

Content creation was also one of the reported uses of the Internet. Elena, the less acculturated journalist, has her own blog in which she publishes her creative writing, which is mostly in Spanish. She is a regular reader of several blogs on literature and alternative culture, both in English and Spanish.

The Internet and clothing. The importance of the senses. For participants in this study, the Internet was not an important source of information about clothes and fashion. On the contrary, buying clothes through the Internet was seen as inconvenient and problematic. Because clothes are so close to the body, the sensorial experience of actually seeing and touching them was considered crucial. The participants also perceive
this same problem when buying clothes from a catalog. When it comes to clothes, most women in this study wanted to try them on before buying, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

A few women mentioned occasionally checking clothes on the Internet. However, this seems to be just an information seeking practice that helps them to monitor what the stores have or what is available on the market. Checking clothes on the Internet did not replace the significance of actually seeing oneself with the clothes on:

If I see something on the Internet I might find it beautiful but it won’t have the impact that it would have if I saw it for real. Because sometimes I see something that I don’t like that much, but when I try it on, I love it (Elena, less acculturated. Translation).  

I like to go to the store and see things personally and touch [feel] the clothes (Celina, less acculturated. Translation).

This speaks of the importance of the sensorial factor when it comes to clothes.

Previous negative experiences were another reason not to purchase clothes online. Ana, a less acculturated woman told me about her bad experience with clothes that did not fit:

I’ve done it [buy clothing on the internet] but I haven’t had a good experience. You see something that fascinates you but then when you try it on you don’t like how it looks on you (Translation).

As explained in a previous chapter, fit is a very important quality for Hispanic women in this study. In most cases, participants prefer to make sure that the item is going to fit before they buy it, rather than buying it and having to return it.

Soledad (more acculturated) also told a story of negative experience with an Internet purchase. She found a catalog in her mail that belonged to the previous owner of her house. She decided to buy some leggings. When she received the order, she was extremely disappointed because the leggings did not fit and the quality of the fabric was not what she was expecting. The cotton was too thin, as it stretched it would lose its shape. She felt the catalog was deceiving (engañoso) and she would never again buy clothes online or from mail catalog.

The only participant who regularly buys clothes on the Internet was Roxana, one of the more acculturated women. She buys underwear and pants from Victoria’s Secret because she already knows that their sizes fit her well, making it a less risky purchase.
Again, fit is such an important feature in clothes that when women find a brand that offers the type of fit they like, chances are they will remain loyal to that brand.

These findings indicate that the direct sensorial experience and the perception of fit are more important than the shopping convenience that the Internet offers.

**Magazines**

Overall, participants did not buy or subscribe to any fashion magazines. Most participants reported reading magazines mostly in casual places such as the gym, the doctor’s office, the supermarket, or at the bookstore. None of them had a particular interest in fashion or women’s magazines. Only a few of them were aware of magazines targeting Hispanic women in the U.S.

In general, however, it can be said that less acculturated women showed greater interest in magazines than more acculturated women. Interestingly enough, the magazines the less acculturated women bought and read were English-language magazines specialized in their hobbies or interests, or magazines of general interest such as *National Geographic* or *Time*. For example, Ana, the pediatrician that loves to cook, subscribes to *Times, Fine Cooking*, and *National Geographic*. As for fashion magazines, she reads *Vogue* and *Elle* only when she is on the treadmill at the gym.

Elena, the journalist and blogger, subscribes to *The Economist* and *Foreign Affairs*. She also buys *Rolling Stone* fairly often. She does not subscribe to any fashion magazine but loves to flip through *Vogue* every time she sees one. She would subscribe to it, but her budget only allows her to subscribe to magazines that she needs. Elena, however, was the only participant who reported being directly influenced by magazines. She got ideas for skirts and bags from a Marie Claire magazine that ended up in her hands. She liked the fashion articles there, especially because they show fashion items in the range of $25 to $100 and compare them with high fashion brands and models.

Maria, the English professor, got her subscription of *The Week* as a Christmas present. She was the only participant who reported buying or reading a magazine in Spanish, and she said: “Sometimes I buy *Vanidades*, but only if I see it by chance in Target. This year I’ve bought like three of them” (Translation).  

Of the more acculturated women, Soledad (scientist) was the only participant who had a subscription to a magazine (*National Geographic*). Other than that, she only buys scientific journals. Monica reported reading the reptile magazines to which her boyfriend
subscribes. Jocelyn (an office assistant) only reads magazines when she goes to Borders and she usually prefers craft and architecture magazines. Roxana works at the airport and she does not need to buy magazines because she always finds magazines left behind by travelers.

**The controversy of Latina Magazine.** Besides occasional references to magazines such as *Vanidades* or *Cosmopolitan en español* there was little awareness of other magazines in Spanish targeting Hispanic women. However, women in both groups referred to *Latina Magazine*, a magazine mostly in English targeting Latina women. What is interesting is that those participants who had read it had a negative attitude towards the magazine. They identified both language and content issues. For example, Jocelyn, who has lived most of her life in the U.S. said:

The only magazine targeting Latinas that I know is *Latina* and I don’t really like it. Yes, it is targeting us, but I feel any woman can pick it up and read it. I don’t think it does a great job of targeting Latinas. I haven’t read it recently. I read it when it made its debut. My parents got it for me and my sister. At first, I thought “it’s kind of cool,” but then, I didn’t like that it was in English because I wanted to read in Spanish. I haven’t read it in a while, though.

Jocelyn’s expectations from media targeting Hispanics are that it should work as a language-maintenance tool.

Other allusions to the magazine revealed a negative perception about the bicultural effort of the magazine. Elena had once subscribed to *Latina Magazine* by mistake. Here is what she had to say about it:

I didn’t like it. It was neither this nor that. I didn’t identify with it. It was not like *Cosmopolitan* that I could read because it makes me laugh, I can make fun of it. It wasn’t like *Vogue* that is super pretty. Instead it was like an evil breed. But there was something that did call my attention. They had fashion adapted to different body types, for chubbies, short women. I thought that was very constructive. But I didn’t feel identified (Less acculturated. Translation).

Elena did not identify with *Latina Magazine* perhaps because she is less acculturated. The fact that she felt the magazine was “an evil breed” suggests that she does not identify with the bilingual/bicultural content that *Latina Magazine* carries.

Maria’s experience with *Latina* also speaks of a cultural disconnect between the content of the magazine and her expectations. The last time she was at the airport she bought *Latina*. She was looking for inspiration for her recent hobby, making jewelry. She
assumed that in a magazine for Latina women she would find a lot of models to copy. Here is her reaction:

What a frustration! Look at this. I bought it because it was cheap and I thought I would find earrings to copy. I thought I was going to find a lot of them. Sometimes I copy the earrings from the news anchors in Spanish-language TV channels, I get ideas to do things. I thought it was logical that I would find a lot of earrings in Latina Magazine (...) I was laughing to death, look, there are no earrings! I told myself “they don’t wear earrings” [amazed] (Translation). 9

These findings suggest that Hispanic women look for culturally relevant content in magazines. In Chapter 5, I explained how ingrained earrings are in the Hispanic culture as a means to convey femininity. Latina magazine failed to connect with both more acculturated and less acculturated readers at any level of bilingualism. In the case of Maria, the magazine missed the opportunity to captivate a creative consumer that could create a lot of buzz for the magazine since she is a sort of opinion leader on earrings.

The reactions of these women reflect the complexity of the language/culture debate that constantly occurs among communicators.

**Media roles models**

The last aspect of media that should be discussed in this section is the role of celebrities as aspirational models. When asked about the celebrity they feel identified with or admire because of her style, most of the respondents had a hard time relating to one. Part of the problem could be rooted in the way the question was articulated. Participants were somehow defensive, as if it were important to show that they are unique and independent in their decisions about style. However, some insights were gained from those respondents who did answer the question or addressed the issue spontaneously during the interview.

Less acculturated women had both Hispanic and non-Hispanic celebrities as reference for styles. For example, Elena, a less acculturated respondent, referred to the style of Gwen Stefani, an American rock singer and fashion designer. Roxana, one of the more acculturated women, thinks about how Jackie Kennedy would have dressed when she needs to dress for a special occasion. She admires her simplicity and elegance.

Two respondents, one more acculturated and one less acculturated, referred to Hispanic celebrities that are also very popular in mainstream media. The reasons for
perceiving these celebrities as models were identifications with physical characteristics such as skin color and body type, and regional pride. One respondent said:

I love Salma Hayek and her style. She is classy, she never shows too much, [I love] J-lo too, that sounds silly, but now more than when she was younger. Stuff that Salma wears I think is stuff that would fit on my body. She is short, I am short. Stuff that Fergie [singer] wears would never in a million years look good on me. I think I identify myself more with Hispanic stars especially because they have skin like mine, hair like mine. They are going to be automatically wearing colors that I can wear (Belinda, more acculturated).

One of the reasons why I like New York and Company is because Patricia Velazquez is in their image and she comes from the same city I come from (Norma, less acculturated, Translation). These findings suggest that Hispanic women may have non-Hispanic women as style reference groups. This confirms some of the ideas about reference groups and social learning discussed by Korzenny and Korzenny (2005). The authors suggest that because individuals imitate behaviors of people they admire “it is not unlikely that many Hispanics adopt role models and reference groups that are not Hispanics.”

As can be seen, the influence of media on decisions about style and clothing seems to be limited, at least among the women in this study. The following section will discuss the influence of the interpersonal communication channel.

**Interpersonal influences**

Interpersonal communication is the other important channel by which innovations are transmitted (Rogers, 2003). Since the Hispanic culture is a collectivistic culture, decision-making may emphasize others’ opinions. Moreover, in the previous chapters it became clear that women consider the audience for whom they are going to perform. The assumption would be, then, that interpersonal influences are more important for less acculturated women than for more acculturated ones, because the latter group values individualism and individual expression more than conforming to the group and maintaining harmony, as is common in collectivistic cultures.

**Mother/ Husband/ Friends:**

In Chapter 1 it became clear that the influence of the mother figure was crucial in learning the norms and values related to clothing and appearance. For those participants whose mothers still made clothes, their mothers acted as innovators to a degree because
they actively perceive what is fashionable and recreate what they see. The power of the mother’s influence did not seem to fade with the years or distance. Women in both groups mentioned considering their mothers’ opinions when deciding what to buy.

Partners—husbands or boyfriends—also had a strong influence in regards to clothing and appearance. In this sense, it is important to note that of the women interviewed, four of the less acculturated women were married and one divorced, whereas in the more acculturated group only one participant was married, one divorced twice, two had boyfriends and one was currently not in a relationship.

There are a number of ways through which husbands exerted their influence. Women described how their style changed according to who their significant other was at the moment. For example, Elena (less acculturated) narrated how her style changed from hippie to a designer look when she got married to a man whose family preferred that look. Roxana (more acculturated) also changed from stylish to casual to formal according to her husband (she is twice-divorced).

Norma, a less acculturated participant, cherishes her husband’s opinion when she is buying something. He has an active influence on her. She said: “My husband tells me ‘buy this’, or ‘this color is good for your type of skin’ or ‘don’t buy that, it would never good look on you’” (translation). Her husband’s influence is active even if he is not there in person. When they do not go shopping together she often calls him to ask his opinion:

When I am at the mall by myself I call him and I tell him “I’m considering buying this’ he tells me ‘buy whatever you want, but don’t buy work clothes.” And he asks me about the color and the fabric (...) when I doubt too much he tells me “buy it and we’ll see it at home” (Translation).

The majority of the participants would consider Norma very lucky because her husband gives her such feedback. This experience differed from the more common complaint of other participants about their husbands or boyfriends hating shopping or avoiding making comments about their clothing decisions. Soledad, for example, said that she does not ask her American husband about clothes because she will not get real feedback: he always says that everything looks good on her.

Some accounts suggest that friends act as opinion leaders or influencers because they introduce the women to media about fashion or new styles. This was valid for both less and more acculturated participants.
Celina (less acculturated) reported learning about new fashions through her friends that “always dress in the latest fashion.” Celina revealed that she never buys fashion magazines:

I don’t spend money on them because every time I go to my friends’ houses they have them, the last bag in the market, they have it. Maybe it is not the original brand, just a copy. I learn about new fashions through them. From my circle of friends I am the one who is the worst dressed. I am the one who is most behind (Translation).  

Influence from the south. One interesting finding is that the influence regarding clothes and fashion can also come from friends in their countries of origin. For example, Soledad (more acculturated) was influenced by some friends from Paraguay who come and visit her in the U.S. relatively often:

When they come we go shopping together. I love the way they dress. They are more aware of what is fashionable than I am. We go shopping together and I say “wow, this looks pretty” and they say: “of course, that is the latest fashion.” I didn’t even know.

This finding confirms that, in fashion, reference groups and interpersonal influence do not necessarily come from women of the same level of acculturation. In addition it suggests that the influence can be occasional. However, calling this occasional behavior opinion leadership can be a stretch. According to Rogers (2003), opinion leadership is influence exerted with relative frequency.

The power of the eye. Simple observation of what friends, coworkers and people on the street wear appears to be an important factor in the awareness stage of adoption for all the women in this study. For example, Norma and Elena (less acculturated) adopted the use of polo shirts after observing that people and co-workers in Miami used them on a regular basis. Using the polo shirt became a way to convey social affiliation: “When I came to Miami, I hated polo shirts. But I knew I had to buy one because I saw that it was like the uniform in Miami” (Elena, less acculturated. Translation).  

Ana (less acculturated) describes how learning about new fashion and styles is a combination of observations, media influence, and interpersonal influence passed through the filter of personal taste:

[Learning about new fashions] has a lot to do with what you see, what other people use, what your friends wear, what you find pretty of what your friends wear, what you see on TV and in magazines. Sometimes you see new fashions
and you think: ‘I would like to look like that, I would like to have something like that.’ So you look at what you like, what calls your attention, what you think is appropriate for you, because there are also things [clothes] around you that you don’t like (Translation).\footnote{14}

**Who gives them advice?**

The discussion about interpersonal influence leads to the nature of opinion leadership. The assumption here is that Hispanic opinion leaders would be polymorphic, meaning that certain individuals exert influence in different spheres rather than in a single area (monomorphic leadership).

In order to understand who the opinion leaders were for the participants in this study, I asked them about whom they would ask for advice in different areas of their lives, including advice in fashion and clothing, financial and emotional issues, etc.

When it came to opinion leaders in fashion, some participants referred to past experiences. For example, Roxana (more acculturated) noted that during her first years in the U.S., she had an American friend in New York who was the one she looked to for advice in clothing:

She was always talking about fashion. I would pay attention to what she was wearing, how short the skirt should be, how she wore her suits, the shoes. She influenced me big time. For example, she was the one who asked me “why do you use your hair blond? It looks horrible on you, it’s like cheap. Why don’t you use your natural color?” (Translation).\footnote{15}

It seems here that the influence is more through observation than through overt discussion about fashion.

In the conversation about who their advisors in different areas are, relatively polymorphic opinion leaders emerged in interviews with both less acculturated and more acculturated women. Women talked of their mothers, sisters, boyfriends and husbands as the people to whom they look for advice on “almost anything,” including financial decisions, even if they are not in the U.S. Of those relatively polymorphic opinion leaders, two of them were American (Sonia’s husband and Jocelyn’s friend), and the rest of them were Hispanics living in the U.S. or in their country of origin or in some other country.

Mothers and sisters were sought for advice on fashion and clothing in many cases as well as for emotional issues. Boyfriends and husbands in many cases gave advice on financial and career decisions.
Boyfriends’ and husbands’ parents or family members were also important in giving advice on finances, housing, and cars. This applied to Norma (less acculturated) and Monica (more acculturated) as shown in the following accounts.

Norma’s husband’s uncle and aunt have lived in Miami for more than 20 years. The aunt is one of the few female friends that Norma has in Miami and she is one of her fashion opinion leaders, even if she is much older than Norma. This aunt always gives her recommendations about the current styles that would look good on her. The aunt was also the person who helped Norma and her husband find an apartment when they moved to Miami. She actually went with them to see places, help them analyze the convenience of the location, price, etc. Norma and her husband also went to the aunt and her husband for advice when they recently bought a new car. Even more interesting, Norma was recently faced with a visa situation because in her current job they could not extend her contract anymore. Her husband’s aunt and uncle were instrumental in analyzing the situation and understanding the different options for this immigration issue. In Norma’s words:

They have offered us a lot of direction (…) with them we talk about the attorneys, how much they are charging us, how much we pay for the car, our insurance. She helped us find the place where we live now. She came with us to see several places. When we saw this one she told us: “It is good for that price, take it.” Every time we are going to do something important we ask them [for advice] (Translation).16

For those participants who do not have a lot of friends in the places where they currently live (most of the less acculturated and one more acculturated woman), opinion leaders were their husbands or boyfriends or family members who lived in other cities or countries.

Opinion leaders and innovative behavior

Self-designation, together with observation and the sociometric method are the most common methods to identify opinion leadership (Rogers, 2003). Several participants revealed a degree of opinion leadership themselves. This was the case in three of the less acculturated and one of the more acculturated women.

Maria, for example, makes jewelry. She has friends that come to her house to buy pieces that she makes for them, and she also gives her jewelry as gifts. She also sells necklaces that a friend of hers makes in Venezuela and sends to her. Apparently both her
and her girlfriend’s accessories have been very successful. It can be said that she is introducing new fashion items into her social network, and that the women who are buying them consider her as an opinion leader or an expert on the topic: “My friends come to see what I’m selling and we discuss what it can be worn with. They call me all the time to see if I have new stuff” (Translation).17.

Norma acted as an opinion leader for a couple of friends, at least until she left for Miami. On her advice, a friend bought Capri pants for the first time. She also introduced the fever of what she called “sexy necklaces,” which are short or long necklaces worn close to the neck, to her group of friends. Another aspect of her opinion leadership is enacted in tandem with her mother in Venezuela. They are continuously monitoring new trends in the stores. Her mother can replicate or modify models that Norma suggests to her from what she has seen and bought and recreate them for Norma’s cousin in Venezuela. Potentially, she could introduce styles with a certain degree of novelty because she is exposing other people to unique and creative clothing articles. This is one of the methods through which fashion trends emerge and fashion is diffused from subgroups to the mainstream.

Another way trends emerge is from reinvention (Rogers, 2003). Reinvention is when people combine or wear the fashion piece in a different way than originally intended. In this sense Elena (less acculturated) and Jocelyn (more acculturated) are innovators. From their accounts and my own observations, it was clear that for these two respondents, for whom creativity and change in appearance was very important, enjoyed coming up with new ways of using old clothes. They came up with ideas that include recycling items, finding second-hand retro items, and creating unexpected combinations. Elena and Jocelyn had items that were used differently than originally intended. Elena, for example, cut the sleeves off of a sweater and wore them by themselves. Jocelyn uses pins on the back to change the shape of her jackets.

These changes may seem small, but according to their perception, and the perception of others, there is a degree of novelty and creativity in the way they dress. Elena, for example, was wearing a top that had a sort of turtle neck the day of the interview, but it was also open on one side, leaving the shoulder uncovered. About that top she said: “I like to wear asymmetrical clothes, or clothes that are not the norm” (Me gusta la ropa asimetrica, o que trata de salirse de la norma). She also has a varied
collection of stoles that come from different countries that she uses in Miami when it gets
cooler, which makes her stand out because it is not usual. She bought several of her
favorite unique pieces in sales with the “leftovers that nobody else wants to buy”
(Translation).\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Type of adopter. Not the fashionistas}

Besides the behaviors related to innovativeness just described, comments about
how important it is for them to dress in the latest fashion suggest that most participants
are somewhere between the categories of early adopter and late adopter (Rogers, 2003).

In their own words:

My priority is to dress well, pretty, not old fashioned, but not super trendy either.
I have other priorities [daughter, family, profession]. I don’t leave fashion behind
but it is not my number one priority (Celina, less acculturated. Translation).\textsuperscript{19}

It is not important at all to me to be at the latest fashion. I just pick and choose
(Jocelyn, more acculturated).

It is not my priority to wear the latest fashion, but I don’t want to see myself
wearing white pants in the winter. For example, right now I am not yet used to the
skinny jeans. Maybe in one year I’ll wear them. In the beginning, when the
fashion is new, I don’t care. Maybe later when everybody is used to skinny pants
you have to change and update. I take it easy (Roxana, more acculturated.
Translation).\textsuperscript{20}

This is important because it has been said that Hispanics are very fashion-
oriented. However, it seems that participants in this study have an interest in clothing in
general, which is different than an interest in the latest fashion. As will be explained later,
the reasons why women in this study adopt clothes go beyond whether the clothes are
fashionable or not.

\textbf{Network of friends}

To gain an understanding of the composition of the network of friends and how it
affects interpersonal influence when it comes to fashion adoption, I asked participants
about their friends and what they usually do together.

The most salient insight on this topic is that less acculturated participants tended
to have a smaller circle of friends in the U.S., particularly in the cities where they were
living at the time of the interview. That may explain why, in some cases, husbands and
mothers had such an influence. Less acculturated women have usually been in this
country only for a few years, and in some cases they have not lived in the same city for long. Often they haven’t nor had enough time to create a true network of friends.

Ana’s social circle is also reduced. The people she sees most often are her brother and sister-in-law, who moved to Miami two years ago. The other person she sees relatively often is a Venezuelan friend from high school who is temporarily living in Miami. Other than that she does not feel she belongs to any group:

For good or for bad we live a somewhat isolated life (…) we have social relations but it is not that we become part of that group. Of course we belong to the group of parents in our children’s school [they are multicultural]. With some of them you get along well and you invite them to eat or they invite you, you do activities together with the children, but nothing beyond that (Translation).

Elena also felt isolated at the beginning. Her first group of friends was a group of Hispanic women older than her, mostly foreign-born but that have lived in Miami for many years. Lately, as she recently joined a literature group, her network of friends coming form different countries has been growing. This network of friends is composed of writers from the U.S., Canada, England, and Latin America. Her first network of friends was instrumental for her in Miami even though she now feels less identified with them in terms of lifestyle, professional and intellectual interests. However, she feels gratitude towards them. As time goes by, Elena has been able to develop a more complex network of friends.

Of the less acculturated women, Celina was the only one who has a larger network of friends and a very active social life. All of her friends are Hispanic (she has lived in Miami since she came to the U.S.) though her social life has changed over time. She used to go out with friends for dinner or dancing almost several times a week. Now that she has a two-year-old daughter, however, she goes out with friends once a week or less.

It appears that, in most cases, the close network of friends of less acculturated women is smaller and composed mostly of Hispanics.

The network of friends of more acculturated women appears to be more diverse. It is important to acknowledge that three of the more acculturated participants were part-time students. This means that they are exposed to the diverse population of the university. Martha’s, Jocelyn’s and Belinda’s friends were a mix of non-Hispanic Whites,
African Americans, and second-generation Hispanics. However, they noted that before
going to school they did not have a lot of Hispanic friends.

Roxana reported having mostly American friends until she moved to Miami,
where she inevitably met a lot of Hispanics. She said: “I hadn’t spoken Spanish in like 20
years. I was married to Americans. Now [that I am in Miami] I speak Spanish with three
of my friends, one works for American Airlines, another for a travel agency and the other
is a realtor.”

Of the more acculturated participants, Soledad was the only one who also felt
isolated. She has been living in Tallahassee for two years, but before that she lived in
Tampa:

I haven’t had the time to build a social life or a social circle. The social circle is
reduced to the mothers of my children’s friends and my husband’s friends. I do go
out sometimes, but not a lot. I work a lot. After 5:00 pm I don’t feel like seeing
people from work any more. I have little contact with the people in Tampa
(Translation). 22.

An important aspect in the understanding of networks is that “individuals tend to
be linked to others who are close to them in physical distance and who are relatively
homophilous in social characteristics. Individuals from the network links with
neighboring and homophilous partners are relatively easy and require little effort”
(Rogers, 2003, p. 341). However, low effort links are less likely to bring new
information.

In this study, most participants seemed to have a homophilous network of friends,
in the sense that they share social characteristics such as profession, interests, hobbies,
and/or economic status with them. In terms of race and ethnicity, less acculturated
women tended to have a network of friends composed mostly of Hispanics and some
people from Europe and Asia. More acculturated Hispanics tended to have mostly
American friends but they showed a mix of non-Hispanic Whites, Hispanics and African
Americans.

It is important to note that most less acculturated women (and one more
acculturated one) had been living in their current city for relatively short periods of time.
This means that they have had less opportunity to develop strong links with people close
to them. Many times their strong links are not in the same town or country and are family
members and friends.
This suggests that strong networks and homophilous links (like the one with a close friend who still lives in Latin America) could also introduce new ideas because the context of being in different countries or cities makes more likely the exposure to different ideas. This is also a manifestation of what is happening nowadays in a global world where virtual social networks are easily accessible. During the process of acculturation, close-physical-distance networks can be instrumental, as in the case of Elena, who joined a group of friends with whom she did not have a lot of ideas and interests in common. Networks can be simultaneously homophilous and heterophilous depending on the context and the location. With the use of Internet and virtual social networks, the distinction between homophilous and heterophilous groups gets both more fragmented and specific and more difficult to analyze.

The following section will address another aspect of adoption, which are the intrinsic aspects of the innovation that facilitates adoption.

**Clothing choice criteria**

This section will discuss the intrinsic aspects of clothing that facilitated adoption. For this section I relied on my observations together with the analysis of the pictures. Also, I asked participants to comment on new fashions they have observed, what they like and do not like, and what makes them buy a new clothing article.

According to my observations and participants’ accounts, there were some differences between less acculturated and more acculturated women in terms of materials and colors, both intrinsic aspects of clothes. It is difficult to talk about differences due to acculturation because differences in colors, materials and styles could be explained by personal tastes as well. However, it is possible to assume that less acculturated Hispanic have a preference for brighter colors and a larger variety of prints and patterns due to the indigenous, African, Spanish, and Asian influences in the Hispanic culture.

Participants can be divided in two groups according to the type of clothing that was more prevalent in their closets. Most of the less acculturated women belong to one group, whereas most of the more acculturated ones belong to the other group.

**The colorful and elaborated**

Three of the less acculturated participants and two of the more acculturated had clothes in a great and bright variety of colors and prints. Their clothes had, for example, bright greens, orange, purple, reds, and yellows. This group also had more skirts and
dresses than the other group. They also had more ethnic clothes such as Chinese shirts and Indian skirts. Moreover, they had shoes in a greater variety of colors. Their shirts and tops had more variety in sleeves and collars.

**The simple and basic**

The other five participants (two less acculturated, three more acculturated) had more clothes in black, white and pastel colors. They tended to have less prints, embroideries, and glittery items. Their shirts and tops were simpler in terms of design, sleeves and collars. They also had more pants than the other group, especially jeans.

This can be explained by the fact that less acculturated Hispanics grew up in Latin America where color and prints are prevalent not only in clothing but also in houses, plants, and the general landscape. Also, as discussed before, Latin American women tend to use every color every season. American classic style tends to have more neutral colors such as kaki and pastels. It is difficult to know if a preference for a certain color palette and styles is due to acculturation or just to personal styles. Less acculturated women that prefer the simpler styles may have always preferred that style, even before coming to the U.S.

In the previous section, we saw that women used observations in stores and streets to learn about new styles and clothing articles. According to the diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 2003), innovations that are observable are more likely to be adopted. Innovations in fashion are essentially observable because people wear them in public, stores display them, and media advertise them. This is how women articulated their understanding of how observation works in the process of adoption, attitude change and self-persuasion:

There are things you find horrible but then when you see that everybody else is wearing them, you may think that they are not horrible after all (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).  

What is curious about fashion that you don’t like is that when you start to see it in people and magazines, you feel like wearing it. For example, wide leg pants. For a long time it was taboo and nobody would wear them because they were horrible. Last year, I think they came back and people started wearing them again, then you see them and say: “gosh, they are pretty!” Now I own a pair of them for parties (Ana, less acculturated. Translation).  

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This last example acknowledges various aspects of fashion adoption. There is the influence of media as a communication channel and the observability of the innovation that creates style awareness. Also, this account illustrates two of the steps in the innovation decision (Rogers, 2003). Ana had knowledge about the pants but initially she had a negative attitude towards them. Then, after being exposed to them for a period of time, she formed a positive attitude toward the innovation (persuasion stage) and finally she adopted it (implementation stage). The adoption/buying decision-making process will be discussed later in this chapter.

**Hunting the right price**

For the majority of participants in both groups price and value were major aspects of clothes that influenced adoption. The stories about where and how they bought their clothes included many times finding them at sales. In diffusion of innovation terms, an innovation available at a price perceived as low has a *relative advantage* compared to those innovations with perceived high prices. As will be discussed later, participants had a strong preference for shopping in discount stores. It seems that finding something that they like at a good price was more important than adopting the latest fashion. This supports the idea discussed before that these participants were not early adopters.

The following remarks illustrate the importance of the economical relative advantage for both acculturated and less acculturated women:

I choose things that are in the price range that I like. I may like a lot of things, but if a shirt costs $150 I won’t buy it. Now, if the original prices are $100 and it is on sale for $50, or $40, it makes me like it better, of course if it fits me (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).\(^25\)

I started going to outlets after I learned the lesson of buying things at very high prices and shortly after seeing them 50% or 75% off (Soledad, more acculturated. Translation).\(^26\)

Usually I won’t buy stuff the first time [I see it in the store] unless it is on sale (Ana, less acculturated. Translation).\(^27\)

Less acculturated Hispanics, however, reported a more intense monitoring of sales. They reported that when they fall in love with a particular piece they engage in a patient-waiting act until the price seems accessible for them. None of the more acculturated women described this type of patient follow-up with clothes they like:
I monitor the specials. I buy in Caché a lot because they send me discounts and coupons. I have never paid full price for anything there (Celina. Translation).  

I wait for sales pretty often (Maria, Translation).  

I buy only what I think has the right price, and for me that means cheap. But it has to be good quality. If I go to the store and see something that I like but the price is not right, I don’t buy it. I come back later. I know that I like it then I go to the store one month later or so, until I find what I want (Elena. Translation).  

I’ve named these shoes “the most beautiful shoes of my life,” because I love them (…) I saw them when they just came out but they were $100, that was too much for me. I waited and waited and waited until one day they were half the price (Norma. Translation).  

The relative advantage of low price can also provoke buying multiple items at the same time. Regardless of their level of acculturation, the women reported occasionally buying the same clothes in different colors, lengths or color combinations. The main reason for doing this was that the clothes that they liked a lot were on sale. Norma said:  

I had never done that before …buying two similar things in different colors (…) I liked this one a lot and it was on sale, so I tried on the brown one. I fitted well. Then I saw the turquoise one on another stand and it was also on sale (…) Then I said to myself “If I find the matching skirts I will buy them.” I found two matching skirts and I bought them (less acculturated. Translation).  

Other reasons for having variations of the same theme were related to other relative advantages of the selected styles. For example, Roxana has Victoria’s Secret pants in every possible color because of the way they fit her slim body. Also, Norma has polo shirts in multiple colors. For her, the advantage of this type of shirt over button-up shirts is convenience. Polo shirts are not like button-up shirts that may open and reveal her bra, calling the attention of her students.  

Another relative advantage of having an item in the same style but different colors is that it allows women to match colors and create variation at the same time. This leads the discussion into the next theme, the importance of fit in adoption.  

De la moda lo que te acomoda. (Take from fashion only what suits you)  

Another insight that emerged from the discussion of the intrinsic aspects of clothes that influences adoption was the importance of fit. Women expressed the importance of fit at different levels. First, fit was associated with how clothes adapt to the
shape of one’s body. This was particularly important for those participants with curvier, pear-shaped bodies, and also for those who were used to having clothes tailor-made for them. Then, fit was associated with clothes that make the body look closer to an ideal body image, concealing what is perceived as negative in one’s body. Finally, the concept of fit also referred to what is compatible with one’s sense of identity. The importance of fit in all its forms emerged in the interviews with both less acculturated and more acculturated women. It is difficult to identify a difference between them. However, according to my observations, the less acculturated women seem to talk about fit with more engagement than their counterparts, as if they had thought about it and talked about it before.

The following excerpts illustrate the different aspects of fit in the adoption of new clothing:

**Adapting to one’s body shape:**
I always try to buy low-rise pants because if not it is like the hips and waist are two different sizes. [If it is not low rise] it fits in the hip but then the waist is too big (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).  

**Concealing**
[Talking about triangular silhouette, wide shoulders, tight pants] I don’t like them for me...I am short and I have to try to wear stuff that doesn’t make me look shorter (Jocelyn, more acculturated).

[Talking about using belts below the breast] I like how they look on other people. I don’t know if I would wear it though. It would emphasize the shape of my body too much. My hips would look bigger. The visual effect I am looking for is that they look smaller (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).

**Sense of identity and personal taste:**
[Talking about leggings] My husband’s aunt told me “you should buy those, they would look good on you.” I know that’s the fashion right now but I am not going to wear them just because it is the fashion. If I like it, and it fits me, then I’ll buy it. I like to wear new fashions, but I am not a slave of fashion, I’m not going to wear everything that is fashionable (Norma, less acculturated. Translation).

Like with leggings, they are coming back, people look great in leggings; I would never, ever wear a pair of those. It’s just not me. (Belinda, more acculturated)

[Talking about skinny jeans] I would not wear them. I like the way wide leg pants look on me better. I don’t care if they are not fashionable now, but [I feel] I shouldn’t wear the skinny jeans. Like they say: “From fashion, only what suits you” (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).
Another trend showed a certain level of resistance to becoming too vulnerable to fads. Two of the more acculturated Hispanics emphasized the importance of acquiring clothes with styles that last:

I like to buy more classics, things that you can wear for several years. In the long run it saves you time, and money and energy. You always would look nice, and nobody is going to look at you when you go into a room like you are crazy (...) I would never buy a jean that has a million sequins glued on it. You cannot wear that five years from now. I like to buy things that are gonna last and that you can wear day to day (Belinda).

Most of the clothes I have, I have had for a long time. I have had this for four or five years. When I get things, I get to keep them for a long time, not just for now and then get rid of it. I don't like to spend a lot of money on clothes that I won’t use, so when I buy something I really want it to last a long time (Monica).

Brands, fit, and quality

A common assumption among Hispanic marketers is that the Hispanic consumers have a preference for brands that denote prestige. Therefore, it is assumed that they are likely to adopt brands that emphasize their economic success (Valdez et al., 2005). However, the findings in this research suggest that brands and the prestige they could evoke were not a critical factor in the adoption process. In fact, fit (in the broad sense explained above) had more importance than the meaning of brands. This suggests that symbolic aspect of clothing as expressed in brands is not as important as the physical aspect of fit to the body. The symbolic communication of identity and fit to “who I am” seemed not to be related to brands, but rather to even less tangible aesthetic aspects of clothing. In the few cases in which participants manifested brand preferences, it was associated with fit.

A few women complained about American brands such as Old Navy and GAP because they do not fit: they are not made for their body type. Those less acculturated women who had a curvy, pear-shaped body particularly stressed this frustration:

[Answering to the question what is your favorite brand and why] I don’t have a favorite brand. Perhaps I haven’t found the brand that I will say always fits me well (Maria, less acculturated. Translation). 37

I don’t go that much for brands, but for what fits me well. I won’t wear something just because it is a certain brand. In the U.S. I like the store New York & Company because their pants are more latinized (latinizados). By that I mean
wider in the hips, not straight. For example the pants from Old Navy rarely fit me. If they fit my hips, they are too big on the top [waist]. They are [made] for straighter bodies, for gringas (Norma, less acculturated. Translation).38

This is a good example of how brands can connect with Hispanic women. Apparently NY&C has understood the need of women with body fuller body shapes to the degree that this woman felt that the clothes are more like her, while other brands are not. She also said:

I’ve tried to buy [famous] brand stuff, and I try on a lot of things and I don’t buy anything because they don’t fit me (Translation).39

Some respondents were willing to have alterations made to their clothes to make them fit. For example, Roxana, one of the more acculturated women, has a problem that the brand Victoria’s Secret understands:

Because my legs are long, here [waist] I am petite, and here [legs] I’m tall. The only pants that fit me are the ones from Victoria’s Secret. In Victoria’s Secret you can choose [for length]. They have 32, 33, and 34. I am 34. The pants from Jones New York and Ann Klein, I need to modify the length because they are too short here [legs] (Roxana, more acculturated. Translation).40

Other respondents simply did not buy anything that did not already meet their standards of fit.

For example, if I try on pants that are too long, that I cannot even wear with heels, I won’t buy them. Just because they don’t fit me. Maybe my mother or my grandmother would think “I can fix it.” But as for me, I like clothes to fit my exact size (Maria).

Because I have a pear-type body they [pants in the U.S.] are always too big in the waist area. I don’t like to alter the waist because they lose their shape (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).41

It is interesting to note that those participants who were not willing to have alterations done were two of the women whose mother or grandmother made clothes for them. Maybe if they still lived close to them or if alterations were more popular in the U.S., these respondents would consider buying clothes that needed alterations.

Respondents also identified quality in terms of durability as a motivation for selecting certain brands. Women are willing to pay a more for items they want to last.
The following also reflects that women place value in the price-quality relation. Their interest in clothing has made them knowledgeable and selective:

These pants are Express. To me, Express is expensive but the quality is good. I feel the same with Ann Taylor, that it is expensive but I buy work clothes there because they last and if you take good care of them, they really last (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).

Brands are important, but not for showing off. What is important is that clothes fit (…). It depends on the quality and not on the brand. As time goes by you look at things and you know what good quality is. Just looking at it, looking at the finishing. I pay attention to all the details. For example, I may see something pretty at the store, a cheap store. You try it on and it fits horribly. The price is $15. If you go to Caché and the price is $120, and you try it on and fits beautifully. But it is not the brand; it is the quality (Roxanna, more acculturated. Translation).

**Status**

Despite the observation that fit and quality were more valued than the symbolic meaning of brands, there were a few comments that revealed that participants associate brands with status. One statement came for a more acculturated woman talking about Caché, her favorite brand. This brand symbolized for her *exclusivity* in the sense that it is accessible only for those who have a slim body (the ideal body image discussed before). The exclusivity in this case literally means belonging to the group of women size 0 to 10, leaving out those whose bodies are perceived as undesirable. Status does not mean financial power, but rather image/beauty related power.

Caché is very exclusive. Their sizes are small; they have up to size 10. If you buy Caché you won’t see any 200-pound women wearing the same outfit that you have. They are more exclusive. It is a little bit discriminatory [apologetic] (Roxana, more acculturated. Translation).

For Roxana, the brand Caché gains value due to the fact that it helps her emphasize the difference between her and bigger women.

The following comments reveal that brands are also associated with financial status. These participants projected into the future how they would dress if they had no financial limitations, revealing their aspirational images:

[If I had the money] I would like to have something by Stella McCartney or Dolce & Gabanna, or a good jacket by Moschino, or a delicate blouse by Chloe (Elena, less acculturated. Translation).

If I had more money my style would be a little bit different. I would be wearing nicer stuff. Still funky but nice, like Anthropologie, which is the higher end of
Urban Outfitter. They still look professional to wear them to the office but still would show my style. I would look nice and put together but still kind of funky. I would have more room to play with (Jocelyn, more acculturated)

These examples are evidence of the brands’ symbolism in the sense that participants associate them with exclusivity and achievement. However, these statements will not be sufficient to suggest that participants in this study have preference for designer or status oriented clothing. Moreover, according to my observations, participants did not have any clothes with visible labels or logos. This suggests that women did not tend to communicate wealth and social status by the use of conspicuous labeling (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). In fact, there is evidence of the contrary. The following statement shows a negative attitude to the display of brands to convey status:

Cuban girls like to dress with brands, but they don’t look nice. Wearing brands and dressing nice are different things. [What they do is] posing in Lacoste, with a Coach bag (Elena, less acculturated. Translation).

There were several brands that generated contradictory statements. For example, it is interesting to contrast Norma’s frustration with Old Navy (example above) against Monica’s fascination with the same brand:

Old Navy is more casual clothes, more relaxed. If I went to GAP, I feel I don't fit there. It’s too fancy for me. But Old Navy is very casual. If I know I have to go shopping for clothes I'll go there first. I'll work my way from there.

This difference might be explained by the fact that Norma likes pants that fit closer to her body and create a more defined figure, whereas Monica prefers looser clothes that do not emphasize her curves. This variation exemplifies a different cultural preference and orientation: less acculturated Hispanic women tend to emphasize the feminine figure in order to maintain the traditional gendered-coded appearance. More acculturated women, on the other hand, tend to place more value into comfort than into gender differentiation as a consequence of the American culture tendency toward gender equality.

Discount stores — Finding treasures

In the discussion about brands and preferred clothing stores, the majority of women manifested a strong preference for shopping in discount and retail stores like Marshall’s, TJMaxx, Target, and Ross. As expected, the main reason for buying in these stores is lower prices. The second major reason was the variety of styles, models, brands
and items that the women can find in those stores. Finally, another motivation to go to
discount stores was the idea of finding unique clothes and one-of-a-kind pieces. This
interest for uniqueness came along with enjoyment of the exploration, adventure, and
surprise. This theme about the interest in exploration in discount stores emerged in both
less acculturated and more acculturated women.

I like Marshall’s and TJMaxx because they have variety (Jocelyn, more
acculturated).

TJMaxx has clothes that you’ve never seen before and you’ll never see again. I
don’t like Dillard’s that is brand separated. In TJMaxx I literally work my way
down the side. It is much more convenient than going to the mall and having to go
from rack to rack (Belinda, more acculturated).

I shop in Marshall’s a lot. You have to be lucky. But for a collector like me [that
is perfect]. I just go to see what they have and I’m not going to find two of the
same thing (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).47

I buy all my clothes in outlets. I don’t go to regular stores because I find that they
don’t have what I want (…). I prefer to go to Marshall’s and then I search…and I
find. One day I may find pants and I buy them, another day I might find the
perfect shirt or the perfect jacket (Sonia, more acculturated. Translation).48

I like discount stores such as Marshall’s, Ross, TJMaxx. They have different
brands and styles and a lot of options to buy something special in contrast to a
store like GAP that has a single style and it’s very boring (Elena, less
acculturated. Translation).49

The value placed on variety matches the need to have a compartmentalized closet.
Variety in styles allowed the women in this study to manifest their various roles in
different private and social contexts and achieve the desired effect of novelty explained in
previous chapters. The excitement felt in going to the store to discover the unknown and
unique treasure suggests that shopping is generally entertaining and amusing experience.
Moreover, the less acculturated women in this study showed that they have acquired the
skills and knowledge necessary to make their money work for their interests. Clothing is
a basic need, so one can imagine that consumer socialization in the category of clothes
takes place as early as it happens in other basic categories such as food and
transportation.

Another aspect related to stores and brands emerged from the women living in
Tallahassee. They expressed their frustration when trying to find unique items in the
stores in town. The women explained that sometimes they prefer to go shopping to Orlando or Miami because they have “things that you won’t see here. You know by heart what the stores have here and it is less fun” (Maria, less acculturated translation).^{50}

Soledad (more acculturated) added: “When I travel to Miami I am more in the mood to shop because I think that I am going to find things that are different. Maybe in the same stores [that we have here] but things that don’t arrive here but go to bigger cities” (Translation).^{51} This stresses once again the need for novelty, uniqueness, and variety in clothing.

**Shopping and decision-making**

So far, this chapter has explained different aspects that influence the adoption of new styles, including aspects of the style itself and how individuals in this study gained knowledge about and form attitudes towards them. But what happens in the final stages of adoption? What are the shopping and buying processes? The following section elaborates the themes that emerged from participants’ responses when addressing how they shop for clothes and how they decide what to buy. This segment addresses RQ7: What is the adoption decision-making process?

**Main motivations**

Women’s accounts about what motivates them to go shopping for clothes revealed two main reasons: satisfaction of a particular need or the pleasure of shopping for the sake of shopping itself.

**Hunting what is needed.** Women in both groups reported making special shopping trips when they have a particular need. The main circumstances were: special occasions (new job, date, weddings, etc.), when a beloved piece of clothing falls apart, changes in their bodies, new season, or the desire to create a particular look. Here are some examples:

I went out shopping because I needed work clothes. I was desperate because I had gained weight and I started the job that I have now. At that time I went shopping for like two weeks and a lot of those things are the ones I have now (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).^{52}

Sometimes I go shopping with something in mind. For example, with my turtleneck shirt. I had one that I wore so much that it fell apart. I wanted another one. Then I went and bought [a new] one (Elena, less acculturated. Translation).^{53}
I have to go shopping soon for summer work clothes. I know what I want. I want pants and matching shirts, but not the traditional things that you find here. I want something different (Soledad, more acculturated. Translation).

Sometimes I go with the idea of how I wanna look, if pretty, or punky. I know how I wanna look and I try to find something in that area (Jocelyn, more acculturated).

When it comes to going to the store, some women preferred to make a few special shopping trips in which they buy numerous clothing articles. These women act more like “hunters” that have a specific goal in mind. They enter the store with a clear idea of what they want and need. This “hunter’s” shopping style is not only a matter of shopping style, but it is also due to restrictions in money and time.

I go maybe four times a year. Then I buy what I can [affordable] (Jocelyn, more acculturated).

I don’t go to stores a lot, but when I go, I buy a lot. Maybe I go every three or four months. I like to go shopping, I enjoy it a lot, but it is actually difficult to get into the car and head to the store. That step is not easy for me. Some women love to go to stores everyday, not me. I don’t have a lot of time [to do it] (Celina, less acculturated. Translation).

Collecting and shopping for the sake of shopping. Most participants admitted shopping for clothes for special occasions. However, among less acculturated women, there was also a tendency to go shopping just for the sake of shopping:

If I have to go to a very nice place and I don’t have the proper clothes then I go shopping specifically for what I need that day. But in general I go shopping just for shopping. Without thinking, I look for what I like (Celina, less acculturated. Translation).

One woman offered an interesting explanation for this shopping style. According to her, shopping without a goal in mind somehow becomes an action related to an archetypical view of males and females:

They say that men are hunters and women are collectors. Men go to the store and leave when they find what they wanted. Not us, the collectors. We go from store to store, buying stuff, what we wanted to buy, and what we didn’t plan to buy. I go around collecting all year round. (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).

These types of unplanned shopping trips that do not have a specific goal can also serve for finding less urgent clothing by chance:
It happens to me a lot that I say “I need this” but I don’t look for it. Instead when I see it, it calls my attention and I go and get it (Elena, less acculturated. Translation).\textsuperscript{58}

Another interesting aspect of the shopping behavior was that less acculturated women who had a limited budget for clothing seem to avoid going to the mall or to stores in order to stay away from the temptation. While having economic constraints they manage their time and money but look forward to go shopping again:

I’ve gone through periods in which I don’t go to the mall because I don’t have money and I decide not to go. Then I save money for a specific day and then I’ll go [shopping] (Elena, more acculturated. Translation).\textsuperscript{59}

I promised myself not to go [shopping] for a couple of months. My husband is not working right now and actually I have enough clothes (Norma, less acculturated. Translation).\textsuperscript{60}

These quotes also exemplify the relationship that less acculturated women in this study have with credit. Instead of just using their credit card to purchase what they want, these women prefer to wait until they actually have the money to go shopping. It is known among Hispanic marketers that Hispanics do not use credit cards with the same ease that their Anglo counterparts do. Among Hispanics, there is a negative cultural perception towards debt (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005).

The “collector’s” shopping style was usually more spontaneous (in contrast to the planned style of the “hunters”). Collectors go to the store anytime because shopping also serves as distraction, exploration, observation, comparison, or to find the perfect item when something is needed. Women with this shopping style felt that they did not have the pressure to buy a lot of clothes at one time because they had a variety of clothing options for every role and occasion. It seems that once basic needs are covered, shopping becomes more of a pleasure than a functional activity. Participants revealed that they go shopping when they feel bored or when they want some distraction. One participant reported that shopping without any expectation was less stressful than shopping with a specific goal:

What I usually do is that I go [shopping] and if I like something I buy it. It is not that I spend $200 or $300 and I don’t go shopping again. I am more [the type that shops] little by little. Usually I go shopping just to see what they have, but I am not necessarily looking for something in particular (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).\textsuperscript{61}
I was looking for a pair of black boots because mine were too old. Maybe two months ago I went shopping and I saw what they had them. It wasn’t that I went out with the idea of “I am going to buy my boots today.” I tried them on and said “No, this one is too tight, this one is too high.” I didn’t buy them. I kept looking (Soledad, more acculturated. Translation).

[When I go shopping] I distract myself going from store to store for clothes, shoes, home supplies. The chances that I end up buying something are high, but it might also be that I don’t buy anything, because I didn’t go to buy something in particular. I don’t have the pressure that I have to buy something (Norma, less acculturated. Translation).

Shopping — A social activity?

Research conducted by Cotton Inc. (2005, 2006) suggests that Hispanic women perceived shopping for clothes as a social experience. This is a result of the collectivistic mindset, in which decision-making is done considering the group more than the individual. The assumption here would be that the more acculturated the women are, the more they will prefer to shop on their own. However, the interviews revealed a different conclusion.

Most participants in this study preferred shopping alone. Participants mentioned different reasons for doing so.

Avoiding others’ influence. One reason why women preferred to do so was because they do not want to lose their individuality because of others’ influence:

When I go shopping I go by myself. I don’t like going with friends because they want to pass on to you their own taste. I have to go by myself (Roxana, more acculturated. Translation).

I don’t like shopping with my girlfriends. Most of them would try to get me to buy something too short or something I wouldn't wear (Monica, more acculturated)

I go by myself, I don’t need anybody to tell me what to buy. On the contrary, it bothers me (Elena, less acculturated. Translation).

Shopping alone becomes a strategy for resisting interpersonal influence and loss of identity.

Controlling one’s time. Another reason to shop alone is to be able to manage one’s own time without hurries or delays:
I always go by myself. I like to go by myself. I don’t like going with my husband because men are always in a hurry. I don’t like to go with my friends because I am very fast at shopping. I don’t spend two hours looking at something. I enjoy shopping fast. I look at a lot of things and a lot of stores at once. If I go shopping for shoes, I look quickly, if don’t like any of them I just leave. If I see something that I like I buy it without thinking twice (Celina, less acculturated. Translation).

As mentioned before, the network of friends of some of these women is reduced to their husbands or boyfriends, which means that even if they wanted to go with other people, they could not. In these cases it is only natural to think that they would go shopping with them, if with anyone. However, as in the example above, participants complained about their husbands’ impatience when it comes to shopping. For example, Maria said, “I go shopping by myself. I like shopping with other people, but I end up going alone. My husband has no patience for these things, like most men” (Translation). Soledad takes advantage of those days when her husband is out of town to go shopping after work: “That day I go shopping, and I like to go by myself because I like to look and search, I don’t give up. If I go with my husband…just imagine” (Translation). It seems that in this sense the only lucky wife was Norma. Her husband liked shopping and helped her actively in finding clothes. She even calls him on the phone from the store when she is indecisive.

A day for me. The third reason to shop alone is that going shopping also functions as a sort of ritual in which women connect to themselves. For example, one participant said that the day of that shopping trip was “a day for me” and everybody knew she would not be available. “When I do it [shopping] I say ‘today is a day for me, I am going to dedicate myself to shopping’.” (Soledad, more acculturated. Translation).

Shopping with friends and family. It is necessary to acknowledge that participants also narrated episodes in which they went shopping with friends or family members. However, these episodes seem to be situational. For example, less acculturated women mentioned shopping with their mothers when they come to visit from their countries of origin. Another woman mentioned shopping with her husband when they go on vacation. A more acculturated woman referred to going shopping together when she visits her mother. Another referred to shopping with friends from abroad. In these cases, shopping with friends and family seems to be part of the unusual frame of vacations and
visits from abroad. Interestingly enough, and contrary to expectations, these were two of
the more acculturated Hispanics.

I definitely [prefer] go shopping with friends. I am very indecisive and not very
confident. I need outside opinion. They come to the dressing room with me. If I
go by myself I usually don’t buy anything. I start thinking is this too small is this
too big? My friends will tell me “No, it doesn’t look good” and then I usually ask
“You don’t like it because it is not your style or because it doesn’t look good on
me?” If they say “Because it is not my style” I ask “How does it look on ME?”
(Jocelyn).

This statement also indicates that Jocelyn uses others’ opinion as a way to
reinforce her identity as seen from the outside. Belinda also prefers to shop with friends:

I like to go shopping with friends. But I don’t have the time to go with friends, so
I usually shop alone. I prefer to shop with friends because…somebody to talk
with, somebody to keep your energy up with (…) If you shop with somebody who
is shopping you can help each other, there is like an exchange.

It became clear that among participants, shopping for clothes tends to be an
individual rather than social activity. Participants shopped by themselves in order to
avoid interpersonal influence or interruption of one’s own rhythm. Shopping alone can
also be a result of lack of time, a reduced network of friends or even impatient husbands.

Rehearsal and analysis. Participants in both groups also narrated what happens
and what goes through their minds when they are already in the store deciding what to
buy. Here, two different styles emerged. One style of decision-making involved the
physical rehearsal of trying on clothes at the store. The second one was a mental rehearsal
of considering what one already has in the closet. The mental rehearsal functions to avoid
repetition and ensure matching, to guarantee that the item will actually be worn, but also
as self-persuasion. In the respondents’ words:

If I see something I like, I try it on and I think about what I already have and if I
have something that matches. If I don’t, maybe I won’t buy it because I know that
I won’t wear it. If I see something that requires buying the whole outfit together, I
don’t buy it (Norma, less acculturated. Translation).\textsuperscript{70}

Most of the time, I ask myself if it matches with something I already have,
particularly if there is an issue with price. In that case [expensive item] I think a
lot: what will I wear it with, what do I have at home, like to convince me that I
should buy it. If the price is not too expensive I’ll just buy it (Soledad, more
acculturated. Translation).\textsuperscript{71}
Trying on clothes at the store serves to make sure beforehand that they actually fit and that the person really likes them. Respondents reported both trying on only things that they liked, but also trying on clothes that they were not sure about. The result in this case can be that clothes undergo a positive transformation on their bodies which produces the final persuasion. It can also happen that the woman does not like the item a lot but still buys it because she considers that she can make it look better with by combining it with clothes she already has.

Generally I try clothes on in the stores. Because I buy a lot in outlet stores they have variety but not variety in sizes. I choose [to try on] those clothes that fascinate me, but it is really a matter of luck. I try on maybe 20 or 15 [clothing items], because my purpose is to buy. Those that I don’t like too much [when I try them] I wear with other things that I already have and make them look better (Soledad, more acculturated. Translation).

Looking around in the store I saw this dress that seemed a little bit weird. I did not know if I was going to like it. I tried it on and I loved it. I always pick a lot of things, try them on and then I choose what I like. I am not the type of person who only tries on what they like; I try on a lot of things (Elena, less acculturated. Translation).

This evidence is also connected to the “shopping for the sake of shopping” idea. It seems that once respondents are in the mood for shopping, they really want to buy something even if it is something that they do not like that much.

**Impulsive shopping.** In contrast to the rehearsal which involves high consciousness and risk avoidance, another style of decision-making at the store was the impulsive one. Women in this group went into the stores with shopping in mind, or just by chance, and bought anything that they liked and could afford. For example:

If I see something in the store and I like it, I buy it. If I happen to be close to the store I go in and I buy and buy everything that I like. I don’t think about if things [styles] are going to last or stuff like that. I am an impulsive buyer. I buy three or four things and I wear them only once. Sometimes the model goes out of style and I never wore it (Roxanna, more acculturated. Translation).

This tendency that Roxanna manifested may be explained by the fact that she is financially stable, so that buying clothes that she is not necessarily going to wear does not have a meaning of risk. In that sense, the chances that she adopts new styles, just because of her purchasing power and risky behavior, are greater.
The following statement also indicates that one reason to engage in impulsive buying is being unwilling to miss the opportunity to purchase something that she really likes.

If I try something on and I like it, I have to buy it. Because I think that if I don’t buy it right at that moment, when I come back it won’t be there and I won’t ever find it again. It has happened to me. For example I see a pair of shoes that I love, and they are expensive and I decide to wait and save money. When I go back they are not longer there, or they don’t have my size. That has made me a compulsive buyer. I put it on the credit card (Elena, less acculturated. Translation).\(^75\)

**No rehearsal. Good eye for buying.** Another way in which women behaved at the store was buying without trying clothes on. One reason not to try on clothes at the store was the confidence in one’s assessment. This confidence was a manifestation of a developed competence that reveals an understanding of the body and the nature of clothes:

Generally I don’t try clothes on. I pick things up and just buy them. Very few times I’ve returned what I have bought. I have a very good eye for buying. I can look at you and know your size and what you like. I have a good eye for sizes. I am almost never wrong (Celina, less acculturated. Translation).\(^76\)

**Rehearsal at home.** Another reason not to try clothes on at the store was to avoid frustration. These participants preferred to try things on in their houses where they could feel more comfortable and safer than in the fitting room at the store.

I don’t try clothes on. If I see something that I like, I buy it without trying it on. If I don’t like how it fits, I just return it. [I do this] to avoid the frustration if it doesn’t fit, if it doesn’t pass beyond my hips. If you try clothes on at home you are more comfortable (Maria, less acculturated. Translation).\(^77\)

I rarely try things on at the store. I go to the store. If I have a doubt about the size I may try it on. If I have the time…I have to be in the [right] mood. I am not in the mood to put clothes on and take them off very often. That is why I buy all the clothes [that I like] and I try them on here, then I return [what I don’t want] (Ana, less acculturated. Translation).\(^78\)

Trying clothes on at home guaranteed that one had the time and was in the necessary frame of mind required to make a thoughtful selection.

**Summary and Conclusion**

To review, this chapter has discussed the different aspects related to the adoption of clothes by Hispanic women. The research questions answered here are related to the
diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 2003), particularly to the communication channels, intrinsic aspects of innovations that facilitate adoption, and the adoption process. The research questions were: RQ4: What are the communication channels and characteristics of the social networks in which meaning is created and diffused?; RQ5: What are the aspects of clothing that facilitate adoption?; RQ6: What is the role of brands in the adoption?; RQ7: What is the decision-making process?; and RQ8: How are the above issues different according to the level of acculturation? Additionally, some aspects related to the communication of prestige and social status (RQ2) were addressed in the discussion about brands.

**Communication channels**

*Media.* This section has analyzed media and interpersonal relations as communication channels through which women in this study learn about clothes. This addresses RQ4: How are the communication channels and characteristics of the social networks in which meaning is diffused?

Overall, women in this study reported being too busy to consume a lot of media for entertainment. They reported watching a few hours of TV a week and using the Internet for social networking and portable content. Also, they reported using specialized media according to their professional interest and hobbies, but none of them for clothing and fashion.

Women in this study did not seem to be high TV consumers. Less acculturated participants reported watching news and *telenovelas* on Spanish-language TV and other series on English-language TV. This suggests that participants find relevant informational and entertainment content in both languages. More acculturated participants preferred English-language programming. They felt that the content on the traditional Spanish TV channels was not relevant to them. However, they use the Spanish language as a tool for language learning and maintenance.

Women in both groups reported watching programs available online. This suggests that they value the convenience of watching shows on their schedule and without commercials.

Despite some references to Style TV and clothes used by news anchors and celebrities, it becomes clear that the women did not use television as an information source to learn about new styles and clothing.
Participants in this study use the Internet as a daily tool for getting information, social networking, entertainment, etc. However, they did not use the Internet for clothing related activities. Only a few reported checking online for availability in stores and maybe browsing what is new in clothing, but they did not have an interest in purchasing clothing online. The main reason for this lack of interest is that desired fit and sensorial experience are highly important in the adoption process. Also, certain negative experiences affected the participants, making them resistant to this method. Positive experiences that met the expectations of fit and quality resulted in brand loyalty.

Considering the media consumption of participants in this study, they do not seem to be among the opinion leaders group, as they do not consume fashion specialized media.

**Interpersonal influence.** Friends have an influence in exposing participants to fashion and to fashion-related media. Participants seem to value most opinions and feedback from mothers, husbands, and friends. This is in alignment with the theory of diffusion of innovation. Rogers (2003) suggests that mass media have an important role in the creation of awareness, curiosity, and interest about the innovation, whereas interpersonal communication is more effective in persuading the individual, particularly late adopters.

Participants in this study are not *fashionistas* in the sense that they do not adopt clothes driven by the novelty of the styles available, nor are they exposed to fashion specialized media. However, some participants showed signs of being innovators and opinion leaders among their close friends, for example because they create their own accessories.

The findings of this research confirm that women in this study have a homophilous network of friends. Women tended to interact more closely with people with similar background, hobbies, and professional interests. In terms of ethnicity, less acculturated women had smaller networks of friends and they were composed mostly of Hispanics. More acculturated women had bigger networks of friends composed of Hispanics, Anglos and African Americans. The fact that less acculturated women have mostly Hispanic friends is understandable. The fact that they live in Florida—a highly Hispanic-populated region—allows Hispanics to interact only with other Hispanics if they want. However, research has shown that Hispanics are more likely than non-
Hispanic Whites to interact with groups that are culturally different (Korzenny et al., 2006). It would not be unreasonable to imagine that less acculturated women in this study would have a more culturally diverse group of friends as they stayed longer in the country.

**Intrinsic and symbolic aspects of clothing**

Women in this study showed that both intrinsic and symbolic aspects of clothing are important for them when it comes to adopting new clothes. The relative advantage found in the relationship price/quality seems to be the most decisive factor in the moment of adoption.

The importance of fit in its different forms can be explained by the concept of compatibility (Rogers, 2003). Compatibility refers to the degree to which the innovation is consistent with existing norms and values. Clothes that do not meet the standards of adapting to the body are not likely to be successful among these women, especially among those who grew up with tailor-made clothes. Fashions that are not compatible with the desire to get closer to the ideal body will not be successful either. As discussed in Chapter 5, the image of the ideal body seems to be influenced by media portrayals of models and celebrities: slim, without curves, tall, and so forth. Finally, those clothes that are not compatible with the concept of self and personal taste, those who make the wearer feel that this is “not me” are less likely to be adopted.

These findings suggest that women are concerned with controlling their appearance by achieving a balance between being modern and up-to-date without becoming a fashion victim or someone who is vulnerable to fads to the extent of violating the individual norms and values related to clothes. It could be argued that adoption resistance involves a concern for maintaining control through choices that help in the construction and maintenance of one’s identity (Wattanasuwan, 2005).

Some of the more acculturated women seemed to have less interest in new styles because they prefer classics. From a cultural perspective, the fact that more acculturated women were the ones that prefer classic and simpler styles may suggest that they purchase these clothes with a future-oriented idea. Instead of just letting themselves be seduced by the trends that are present today, these women strategically choose the classic and durable styles which last through time. The fact that these women prefer classic
styles does not mean that they would not be open to adopt style innovations that become classics, or innovations in terms of materials.

Overall, women in this study look for the combination of price/value/fit as the desired relative advantages when shopping for new clothes. The importance of fit over brand is indicative of the need for a sense of physical and aesthetic matching between the clothes and their sense of self that goes beyond the symbolism of brands. In a way, adopting clothes that are compatible with their individual identity is more important than the symbolic meaning of brands. There was an intuitive way of knowing if a new style matched their personal taste (“it is not me”). These findings partially support the study conducted by Pasarell (1995) in which Caribbean women showed a preference for quality and price over fashionable attributes such as style and brand.

**Shopping**

Discount stores were the place where women in this study preferred to go shopping for clothes. Not only did they find good prices/quality there, but stores such as Marshall’s and TJMaxx also represented an unknown territory in which they ventured with the hope of finding unique clothing items that would allow them to communicate their individuality in all its roles and forms.

Less acculturated women in this study showed particular shopping behaviors that the more acculturated ones did not. First, less acculturated women went shopping not only to satisfy a particular clothing need; rather shopping for them was perceived, rather as an experience with a level of adventure in which they collected clothes as if they collect opportunities for displaying desired images for their roles and audiences.

Also, contrary to expectations, less acculturated women in this study preferred to go shopping alone so that they could have control over the time they spend and avoid the undesired influence of somebody else’s taste. Going shopping was also lived as a ritual for being with oneself. It is important also to notice that less acculturated women had a smaller group of friends and little time to go shopping, which means that the actual opportunities to go shopping with somebody else were not abundant. The collectivistic nature of the Hispanic culture is not manifested in this aspect of shopping behavior. The manifestation of the collectivistic orientation, however, is exposed in the desire to meet social expectations of appearance.

Those women who preferred to shop with friends were among the more
acculturated ones. The fact that these more acculturated participants behave differently than expected may be a function of age. Younger people are more susceptible to interpersonal influence because they may be less knowledgeable or feel more pressure to belong to a group. Also, their individual tastes, self-esteem, and sense of identity are more vulnerable than in older individuals (Kaiser, 1997; Solomon & Rabolt, 2004).

Once at the store, the differences of behavior were no longer related to the level of acculturation. The differences here were related to the mental and physical investment dedicated to the analysis of how the piece fits into the whole wardrobe and how it can help create the desired image. Some of the women preferred to “rehearse” their styles at the store, whereas others let their knowledge, impulse, intuition, or frustration-avoidance guide the experience. Women in this group preferred to try clothes on in the privacy of their homes.

Overall, the clothing consumer behavior of women in this study shows that they are not fashion victims that neither follow blindly the trends in the market, nor are they great innovators who set their own trends in style. In terms of diffusion of innovation, these women are rather late adopters who wait until the mass merchandising or obsolescence of the style in the fashion cycle the new styles. However, these women seem to be very aware of the way they choose from what is available in the market in order to achieve the image they want to create. Fashion adoption seems to be highly influenced by a combination of need for expressing the self and a need for creating the expected image, all on a budget. In diffusion of innovation terms, those clothes that fit the sense of self as well as the perceived socially desired image offer the relative advantage of compatibility with the value system. To say it one more time, the value system in the Hispanic culture favors the orientation towards others.

In terms of symbolic interaction, the fact that women in this study adopt styles that allow them to manage both their individual taste and their public image is an example of how people create their own realities by managing their appearance (Kaiser, 1997). Through appearance we let others understand who we are at an individual and social level. The selection of clothes among the available options is similar to the selection of vocabulary when creating a verbal message.
No veo mucho TV, lo que veo son las noticias en Univisión la de las 6pm o 11pm. Alguna que otra novela, solo para despejarme, últimamente no estoy viendo novelas porque te envíases, cuando empiezas a verla no te la quieres perder y no tengo tiempo. (Celina)

Ahorita casi no veo TV. Bajo programas y películas a mi ipod promocionados por Nokia, gratis. Me gusta Sex and the City, me gusta como se visten las mujeres, pero ya ese show esta viejo. Cuando tenía cable veía los desfiles de moda, cuando me sentía idiota y no quería pensar y no tenía trabajo. Veía E Entertainment Televisión. También el canal de películas de Sundance (Elena).

Allí hay propagandas de sales de las tiendas, pero no es de moda, sino lo que está en oferta en tiendas como Macy’s. Yo la reviso cuando necesito algo en especial, entonces lo reviso por varias semanas hasta que consigo lo que quiero. (Ana)

Si veo algo en internet puede ser que me parezca bonito, pero nada que me impacte tanto como verlo, tocarlo, probárselo. Porque a veces veo cosas que no me gustan, pero cuando me las prueba me encantan. (Elena)

Me gusta ir a la tienda y ver las cosas en persona y tocar la ropa (Celina)

Compro ropa por Internet si lo he hecho, pero no lo he hecho buena experiencia. Igual te pasa en las tiendas, ves algo que te fascina y cuando te lo mides no te gusta como se te ve. (Ana)

A veces compre Vanidades, solo si la veo por casualidad en Target. Este año por ejemknife comprado como 3 (Maria).

No me gusto la revista. No es ni fu ni fa. No me identificaba. No es como Cosmopolita que por lo menos me podía reir, que me gusta como burla para reírme. No era como Vogue que es bellísima, sino es un engendro diabólico. Pero si tenía algo que me llamó la atención que era la ropa de última moda adaptada a los cuerpos de gorditas, bajitas y me pareció muy constructivo eso. Pero no me sentí identificada (Elena)

¡Qué frustración! Mira esto. La compre porque estaba barata y pensé que iba a ver muchos zarcillos para copiar. Pensé que tendría muchismos. A veces me copio los zarcillos que usan las narradoras de noticias de los canales en español. Pensé que era lógico que fuera a encontrar muchos en Latina Magazine. Así me muero de la risa, mira, ¡no hay zarcillos! Me dije ‘es que no usan zarcillos’ (Maria)

Una de las razones por las que me gusta New York and Company es porque Patricia Velásquez es la imagen de ellos y ella es de la misma ciudad de donde yo vengo (Norma)

Mi esposo siempre me dice, ¡cómprelar eso! o ¡este color te queda bien con tu tipo de piel! o si ve algo i mira me gusta eso para ti o ¡no te compres eso porque nunca te va quedar bien! Si voy al mall sola lo llamo y le digo “estoy pensado a comprar esto” y el me dice “cómprelar lo que quieras pero que no sea del trabajo” “comprarte cosas que sean para ti, Y me pregunta de que color que tela. Si dudo mucho me dice “cómprelaloro lo vemos en la casa,” (Norma)

Yo no compre revistas de moda, yo las veo en su casas, yo no gasto dinero porque se que siempre que voy sus casas ellas las tiene. Entonces la ultima cartera que salio, ellas la tienen. A lo mejor no la comprar original sino fake. Yo me entero de la moda por ellas, Del círculo de amistades de nosotros la que peor viste soy yo. Yo soy la que mas atrás esta en la moda (Celina).

Cuando vine a Miami odiaba las polo, pero supe que tuve que comprar una porque vi que era como el uniforme de Miami. (Elena)

Tiene que ver mucho lo que ver lo que ves, lo que usa la otra gente, lo que usan tus amigas, lo que te parece bonito en lo que usan tus amigas, lo que ves en revistas y television. Cuando hay modas tu ves, tu piensas ‘me gustaría verme así, me gustaría tener algo así” Pues ves lo que te gusta y lo que te llama la atención y lo que crees que puede ser apropiado para ti, pues también hay muchas cosas por ahí que no te gustan (Ana)

Siempre hablaba de moda. Yo le ponía atención a lo que ella se ponía, que tan corta se ponía la falda, como se ponía los trajes, los zapatos. Ella fue una gran influencia. Por ejemplo ella fue la que me recomendó “porque llevo rubio? Se te ve horrible, es cheap, Why don’t you use your natural color? (Roxana)

Pero ellos nos han orientado mucho. Con ellos hablamos de abogado, de cuánto me está cobrando el abogado. También de cuánto estamos pagando por el carro, por el seguro, ella nos ayuda a conseguir este lugar para vivir, fuimos a ver varios y ella vino y nos dijo este bien por el precio, por el área, tómenlo” cuando vamos a hacer algo (Norma)

Mis amigas vienen a ver lo que estoy vendiendo y hablamos de cómo ponérselas. Me llaman todo el tiempo para ver si ya tengo cosas nuevas (Maria)

Lo que queda que nadie mas compra (Elena)
Mi prioridad es vestirme bien, bonita, que no esté pasada de moda, pero tampoco el último grito, mi prioridad son otras cosas, la moda no la dejo atrás, pero no es #1. (Celina)

No es mi prioridad estar a la última moda, pero tampoco Quiero encontrarme en una situación de ponerte un pantalón blanco en invierno, Ahora no me acostumbro a los skinny jeans, pero de repente en 1 año los uso Al principio no me importa, cuando recién entre la moda. Pero de aquí a 1 año, cuando todo el mundo se acostumbra a ver los tubos pues uno tiene que cambiar y estar al tanto. Lo tomo de a poco (Roxana)

Para bien o para mal vivimos una vida un poco aislada (…) Tenemos relaciones sociales pero no nos incorporamos a ese grupo. Claro que pertenece a grupos, al grupo de los padres de los niños en la escuela. Con algunos de los padres te las llevas mejor y los invitas a comer o ellos te invitan, haces actividades juntas con los niños, pero más allá de eso, no. (Ana)

Aquí no tengo amigos. No he tenido el tiempo de construir una vida social o un círculo social. El círculo social se reduce a la mamá de los compañeros de mis hijos y los amigos de mi esposo. Si salgo pero no mucho, trabajo mucho. La gente del trabajo no me provoca verlas después de las 5. Tengo poco contacto con la gente de Tampa (Soledad).

Hay cosas que te parecen horribles pero cuando lo empiezas a ver que todo el mundo las está usando, piensas que tal vez no eran tan horribles. (Maria)

Lo que es curioso de la moda que no te gusta es que cuando las ves en gente y las revistas, te provoca usarlo. Por ejemplo los pantalones de bota ancha. Por mucho tiempo fueron tabú y nadie los usaba porque eran horribles. El año pasado, creo que regresaron y la gente los empezó a usar otra vez. Y tu los vez y dices “cóchale, son bonitos.” Ahora tengo un par para fiestas (Ana)

Empecé a ir a los outlets después de que aprendí la lección de comprar cosas por precios muy altos y después encontrarlo al 50% o 75% off (Soledad)

Normalmente no compro cosas la primera vez, a menos que este en oferta (Ana).

Eso sí, vigilo los especiales. Compro Caché porque ellos me mandan mucho por correo descuentos y cupones pero nunca he pagado el precio completo de una ropa (Celina)

Yo espero mucho las ofertas (Maria)

Pero yo para comprar tiene que ser el precio correcto, y para mi correcto es barato. Pero tiene que ser de calidad. Yo voy a las tiendas y hay algo que me gusta y el precio no esta correcto, no lo compro, vuelvo después. Yo se lo que ya me gustó, entonces visito la tienda al mes, mes y medio hasta que consigo lo que yo quiero.(Elena)

Estos zapatos lo he denominado los zapatos mas lindos de toda mi vida, porque me encantan, son se cocuiza y tiene esto, son Steve Maiden y yo los vi cuando salieron y costaban 100$ y era mucho para mi. y entonces espere, espere y espere hasta que estuvieron en oferta, cuando iba al mall miraba y un día que fui estaban a mitad de precio (Norma)

Yo nunca había hecho esto, comprar 2 cosas iguales de diferentes colores(…) pero con esta me gustó mucho. Estaban en oferta. Me probé la marrón, me quedó bien. Luego vi la turquesa que estaba en otro stand, y vi que también estaba en oferta y pensé ‘si consigo una falda que combine me la compro’, entonces conseguí 2 faldas que combinaban y las compre (Norma).

Yo trato casi siempre de comprar low raise porque sino casi siempre la cadera y la cintura son 2 tallas diferentes. Entonces me pongo una tela en la cadera y si el material es rígido la cintura me queda ancha. (Maria)

Me gusta en otra gente, yo no se si me lo pondría porque se vería muy exagerada la forma del cuerpo. Se me verían mas anchas las caderas, el efecto visual. El efecto que busco es que se vean menos. (Maria)

La tía de mi esposo me dijo ‘cómprate unos, seguro te queda bien’. Yo se que esta de moda pero no me lo voy a poner, no porque de moda lo voy a poner. Si esta de moda y me gusta y me queda bien, me lo compro. Me gusta estar a la moda pero no soy una esclava, no me voy a poner todo lo que este de moda (Norma)

Yo no me los pondría por la forma de mi cuerpo, no porque no me gusten. Me gusta mas como me quedan los de bota ancha, no importa que ya no estén de moda, pero yo no me tengo que poner el skinny jeans, Por ahí dicen ‘de la moda lo que te acomoda’(Maria)
No tengo una marca favorita. Tal vez no he conseguido una marca que diga que siempre me va a quedar bien (Maria)

No voy mucho con marcas sino lo que me quede bien. No porque sea de una marca me lo voy a poner, si me queda bien me lo pongo. Aquí me gusta la tienda NY&C porque los pantalones son mas latiniados, es decir son mas anchos abajo, no estrechos. Por ejemplos los pantalones de Old Navy casi nunca me quedan, si me quedan bien en la cadera arriba me quedan anchos. Son para cuerpos mas recto, de gringa. (Norma)

Yo he ido a buscar cosas de marca y me pruebo muchas cosas y no compre porque nada me queda (Norma)

Como soy alta de piernas, de acá soy petite (cadera), de acá soy tall (piernas), los únicos que me quedan son VS. VS tienes la elección de 32, 33, 34, yo soy 34. Los de Jones New York y Ann Klein tengo que mandarlos a alargar. Porque si me quedan de aquí (Roxana)

Entonces por ejemplo un pantalón que me quede largo, que ni con tacones me queda, no me lo compre, porque no me queda. Tal vez mi mama o mi abuela piensen “lo corto, lo arreglo,” pero a mi me gusta que la ropa me quede a la medida. (Maria)

Los pantalones que viste son de EXPRESS. A mi Express me parece caro pero es de buena calidad. También me pasa eso con Ann Taylor que es caro pero compre ropa para trabajar pero dura y si la cuidas te dura mucho (Maria)

Las marcas son importantes no para demostrarlo, lo importante es que me quede bien. Depende de la calidad y no de la marca. Después de cierto tiempo uno mira las cosas y sabe lo que es la calidad, simplemente mirando o viendo la terminación. Yo miro todos los detalles. Por ejemplo, tal vez vea algo lindo en la tienda, en una tienda barata. Te lo pruebas y te queda horrible. Cuesta $15. Si vas a Caché, te va a costar $120, y te lo pruebas y te queda lindo. No es la marca, es la calidad (Roxana)

Caché es bien exclusivo, las medida vienen hasta 10 y son tallas pequeñas. Si te compras algo de Caché no vas a ver a alguien de 200 libras vistiendo el mismo outfit que tu tienes. Son más exclusivos, mas estilizado, es un poco discriminatorio (Roxana)

Me gustaría tener algo de Stella McCartney o Dolce Gabanna, o una buena chaqueta de Moschino o una blusa bien sutil Chloe, (Elena)

La chica cubanas que llegan se viste con marcas, pero no se visten bien, es muy diferente vestirse con marcas que vestirse bien. Lo que están es marcando un pose de Lacoste, con cartera Couch. Es muy diferente. (Elena)

Compro mucho en Marshalls, hay que tener suerte, pero para una recolectora como yo [es perfecto] Voy a ver lo que hay, y no voy a conseguir 2 iguales. (Maria)

Toda mi ropa la compro en outlets. No voy a los regular stores básicamente porque pienso que no tienen lo que me gusta. Prefiero ir a Marshalls y ahí busco...y encuentro. Puede ser que un día encuentro un pantalón y lo compro, otro día voy y encuentro la camisa perfecta o la chaqueta perfecta (Sonia)

Me gustan las tiendas de descuento como Marshall’s, Ross, Tjmax. tienen varias marcas, diferentes estilos y muchas opciones para comprar algo especial, vs una tienda como GAP que tiene un solo estilo muy aburrido. (Elena)

(cuando me compre la última ropa de trabajo) fue a Miami y Orlando. A mi me gusta comprar ahí porque vas a los outlets, es mas barato, y hay cosas que aquí no vas a ver, aquí las tiendas ya te las sabes y ya has visto lo que hay y no es tan divertido. (Maria)

Cuando estoy de viaje estoy mas en el humor de ir a comprar, pienso que voy a conseguir cosas que sean diferentes, que aquí no lo haya , tal vez es la misma tienda pero aquí no llegan, llegan mas a ciudades mas grandes como orlando, Miami. Hay más variedad. (Soledad )

Fui a comprar ropa porque necesitaba para el trabajo. Estaba desesperada porque había aumentado de peso y empecé en este trabajo que estoy ahora. Esa vez salí y busqué como por 2 semanas las ropa para trabajar y mucha de esas cosas son las que tengo ahora. (Maria)

Otras veces si cosas en mente y voy con eso en mi cabeza. Por ejemplo con la franelita cuello de tortuga, tenía una que la use mucho y me rompió y quería una. Entonces me fui y me compré una (Elena)

Tengo que ir de comprar para el trabajo de verano y se lo que quiero, pantalones, y camisetas que combinen, pero q no sean tradicionales como el estilo de acá, quiero algo diferente, algo raro. (Soledad)

No voy mucho a las tiendas, pero cuando voy compre mucho, tal vez voy una vez cada 3 o 4 meses y compre bastante piezas. Me gusta ir y el día que voy lo disfruto mucho, pero el hecho de montarme en el carro y decir voy a la tienda, me cuesta mucho dar ese paso. Hay mujeres que yo se les fascina ir a las tiendas todos los días, no es mi caso. Además no tengo mucho tiempo (Celina)
Si es un lugar muy fino y no tengo ropa adecuada entonces voy específicamente a comprarme lo que quiero para ese día. Pero generalmente compro por comprar, sin pensar, miro lo que me gusta (Celina)

Dicen que los hombres son cazadores y las mujeres recolectoras. El hombre va y quiere comprar un pantalón y una camisa y se va cuando las consigue. Nosotras las recolectoras, no. Nosotras vamos de tienda en tienda, comprando cosas, lo que queríamos comprar, lo que no íbamos a comprar. Yo voy por ahí, recolectando todo el año (Maria)

Me pasa mucho que digo “necesito tal cosa” y no voy a buscarla sino que cuando lo veo, me acuerdo, como que me llama y entonces voy y lo compro. (Elena)

Dicen que los hombres son cazadores y las mujeres recolectoras. El hombre va y quiere comprar un pantalón y una camisa y se va cuando las consigue. Nosotras las recolectoras, no. Nosotras vamos de tienda en tienda, comprando cosas, lo que queríamos comprar, lo que no íbamos a comprar. Yo voy por ahí, recolectando todo el año (Maria)

He tenido tiempo en el que no voy al mall porque no tengo dinero y entonces decido no ir. Entonces a veces ahorro para un día y luego si voy (Elena)

Hice una promesa de no ir por un par de meses. Ahora mi esposo no trabaja pues esta estudiando, y realmente tengo suficiente ropa. Hice la promesa, tengo 4 meses que no voy (Norma)

Usualmente lo que hago es que voy, y su me gusta algo lo compro. No es que voy y me gasto $ 200 o $300 $ en ropa y compro y no salgo a comprar. Soy más de poquito a poquito. Yo veo algo lo compre. Casi siempre salgo con la intención de ver que hay, voy a las tiendas a ver que hay, pero no necesariamente estoy buscando algo en particular. (Somos)

A veces sí, por ejemplo estuve buscando unas botas negras porque las mías ya están viejas. Entonces pase como 2 meses que salía y veía aquello que había, no fue que salí con la idea “voy a comprar mis botas hoy” entonces me medía unas y decía, “no, esta está muy apretada, esta está muy alta” y no la compraba y seguía buscando. (Soledad)

A veces me distraigo yendo de una tienda a otra, de la zapatería, veo ropa zapatos, tiendas de casa. Hay altas probabilidades de que lleve con algo, pero puede ser que no, porque no salí a buscar algo en específico. O puede que me haya gustado algo pero como no me quedo, lo dejo. No tengo la presión de “tengo que comprar algo.” (Norma)

Cuando compro voy sola, no me gusta comprar con amigas porque quieren darte el gusto que ellas tengan. Me tengo que ir sola. (Roxana)

Yo voy sola, no necesito que nadie me diga que comprar, mas bien me molesta (Elena)

Siempre voy sola, me gusta comprar sola, con mi esposo no me gusta porque tás sabes, los hombres siempre te están apurados. Con amigas no me gusta porque yo soy rápida comprando, yo no soy de meterme 2 horas para mirar algo. Soy muy rápida comprando. Disfruto de esa forma. Disfruto comprar así y miro muchas cosas de una vez y muchas tiendas de una vez, voy a comprar zapatos y miro rápido y si ninguno de los zapatos me gusta, me voy rápido. No me gusta perder mucho tiempo mirando. Si veo algo que me gusta lo compro sin pensar 2 veces. (Somos)

A veces voy mas de compras sola. Si me gusta salir a comprar con gente, pero termeno yendo más sola. Mi esposo no tiene paciencia para esas cosas, como la mayoría de los hombres. (Maria)

Yo usualmente voy de compras después del trabajo. Si mi esposo esta de viaje ese día voy de compras, voy sola pues me gusta mirar, y buscar, como don’t give up..si voy por algo, lo busco, si voy con mi esposo...Imagine. (Soledad)

Cuando voy de compras me tomo el día para mi, me digo “hoy me dedico a comprar” (Soledad)

Si yo veo algo que combine me pruebo las 2 cosas o pienso si ya tengo algo que me combine, sino no, tal vez no lo compre porque se que no me lo voy a poner. Si veo algo que necesito comprarme todo porque no tengo con que ponérmelo no lo compro, pero luego si no tengo nada no me la compro porque se que no me la voy a poner. Si veo algo que necesite que compre toda la combinación no me lo compro (Norma)

Casi siempre cuando me pregunto si me pega con algo, pero casi siempre es si hay un issue with price. En ese casi si me pongo a pensar con qué me lo pondría, qué tengo en la casa que ya me pudiera poner, como para convencerme de que I should take it. Pero si el precio no es tan caro I’ll buy it. (Soledad)

Generalmente me pruebo las cosas en las tiendas. Como compro mucho en outlet stores pues hay variedad en cosas pero no variedad en talla. Escojo lo que realmente me fascina, pero no es mucho, es cuestión de suerte. Escojo cosas y me pruebo como 20 o 15, pues es que voy de compras. Las que no me gustan muchísimo, las combino con otras cosa que yo tengo y las mejoro. (Soledad)

Viendo y viendo vi el vestido, me pareció un poco extraño, no sabía si me iba a gustar, me lo probé y me encantó. Siempre agarro un montón de cosas, me las pruebo y después elijo lo que me gusta. A veces no me gusta nada, pero por lo general me gusta algo. No soy de las personas que solo se prueban lo que les gusta, me pruebo muchas cosas (Elena)
Si lo veo en la tienda y me gusta lo compro. Si estoy cerca de la tienda entro, pero nunca salgo para comprar. Estoy pasando y entro. Pero cuando voy y compro, compro en cantidades, todo lo que me gusta lo compro. (Roxana) (…)No pienso en cosas que me van a durar, no pienso en eso, como soy compradora impulsiva me compro 3 o 4 cosas y me las pongo 1 sola vez. De repente pasa el estilo y nunca me lo puse (Roxana)

Si me pruebo algo y me gusta como me veo, me lo tengo que comprar. Porque pienso que si no lo compro en el momento cuando regresé ya no va a estar o alguien ya se lo llevo y no lo voy a encontrar más nunca. Y me ha pasado. Por ejemplo yo he estado caminando en el mall y veo un par de zapatos que me encantan, y son muy caros y digo que voy a esperar, ahorrar, y cuando regreso ya no están o no tienen mi talla. Eso me ha hecho una compradora compulsiva y lo pongo en la tarjeta de crédito. (Elena)

Generalmente no me mido, agarro y compro y ya. Muy pocas veces he devuelto algo que he comprado. Tengo muy buen ojo para comprar, ahora te miro a ti y si tengo que comprar una ropa yo se que talla y que ropa escoger. Tengo buen ojo para las tallas, casi nunca me equivoco. (Celina)

Si veo algo no me lo pruebe. Me lo compro y si no me gusta lo devuelvo. Para no probar, para evitar la frustración de que no te va a quedar, que no te pasa de las caderas. Si te lo pruebas en tu casa estás más cómoda. (Maria)

No me pruebo nada en la tienda. Es muy raro que me pruebe algo, voy a la tienda, si tengo dudas con el tamaño puede ser que me lo pruebe, si tengo tiempo. Tengo que estar en el modo. Son pocas las veces que estoy en el modo que quitarme y ponerme la ropa. Entonces me compro toda la ropa, me la pruebo aquí y devuelvo después. (Ana)
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, FUTURE STUDIES

The purpose of this exploratory research was to understand the meaning of clothes for Hispanic women in the following areas: norms and values learned about clothing and appearance, the communication of individual and social status through clothing, and the adoption of new clothing items or styles. The goal was to gain understanding of how the process of acculturation influences the meaning given to clothes and appearance by Hispanic women. By comparing more and less acculturated Hispanic woman and their relationship to clothes, I tried to understand which cultural aspects manifested in clothing are maintained, resisted or adopted in the process of contact between the Hispanic and U.S. cultures.

In this chapter, I summarize and discuss the main findings as related to each research question. Then, I discuss the contributions to theory, methodological issues, and suggestions for future studies. I present recommendations for marketers in Appendix F.

Norms and values learned. Similarities based on the prevalence of Hispanic cultural values

The first major objective of this study was to understand the social forces that influence the way Hispanic women communicate their individual, social and cultural identities through clothing. The research questions that guided this area of the study were: RQ1: What are the norms and values learned through social interaction as related to clothing and fashion? and RQ8: How are these different according to the level of acculturation?

To address these questions I employed a theoretical perspective taken from the symbolic interactionism and acculturation studies. Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969b) explains that meaning is derived from social interaction and that we understand the world based on the norms and values learned through human interaction. The studies in acculturation argue that the way people interpret the meaning of clothing (and many
other material objects) may change as they have contact with a different culture (Berry, 1998, Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005).

The evidence of this study shows that there are more commonalities than differences between less and more acculturated Hispanic women in regards to the norms and values learned through social interactions. These commonalities arose from the influence of the Hispanic culture on the women, regardless of how much interaction with the U.S. culture they had. The norms and values learned during the enculturation process related to clothes and appearance were transmitted to them by their Hispanic mothers and grandmothers and are deeply engrained in their lives.

Interestingly, women born outside the U.S. learned some new norms and values related to the American culture when they came to the United States. Instead, those women born in the U.S. become more familiar with the norms and values typical of mainstream culture as they leave their parents’ home and become independent. As a result of their bicultural lives, these women’s identities contain elements from both the Hispanic and the Anglo cultures. In the course of their lives, they are able to select the aspects of the Hispanic culture that they want to maintain and the aspects of the Anglo culture that they want to incorporate. The argument here is that—in the realm of clothing and appearance—women in this study tend to gravitate towards Hispanic cultural values.

One of the major findings of this study was that, in relation to clothing and appearance, Hispanic women are highly influenced by their mothers. This may not sound unique to the Hispanic culture. It is safe to say that in most Western societies mothers are the main educators and role models for their daughters. However, there are some elements of the relationship between Hispanic mothers and daughters in this study that are explained by unique traditions, norms, and values characteristic of the Hispanic culture.

**The mother’s influence leaves an enduring imprint**

First, regardless of the level of acculturation, women in this study learned from their mothers the importance of differentiating private and public images, based on the other-orientation typical of the Hispanic culture. This emphasis on the separation of these two spheres is also related to the need for formality and hierarchy.

Second, women developed sensitivity to clothes stemming from the hands-on, direct experience that they had with how clothes are made. Many participants’ mothers or
grandmothers were seamstresses or made clothes themselves. In Hispanic culture, particularly for the generation of these women’s mothers, sewing was a way of life and an accepted occupation for women to make a financial contribution to the household. This occupation allowed them to work from home and take care of the family at the same time. Moreover, making clothes for members of the family, just like cooking from scratch, is seen as a symbolic way to show love and care for them. As noted by Korzenny and Korzenny (2005) “[mothers] find reconfirmation in their identity as a mother when their children love the things they provide for them” (p. 187).

Third, the findings in this study showed that the emotional connection between mother and daughter symbolized in clothes is a long-lasting one. Some women wear clothes that their mothers have recently made or bought for them. They still ask their mothers for advice in terms of styles and fit. Shopping together for clothing and interchanging ideas and designs helps keep their relationship strong even if they live far away from each other. This durable relationship between mother and daughter characterizes the culture. In the Hispanic culture, the emotional connection between generations of mothers and daughters is more pervasive than it is in the Anglo culture, which in contrast favors independence early in children’s life.

Another finding is that, mothers who were seamstresses influenced their daughters’ expectations of fit and quality, as well as the perceptions of their own bodies. Because these women grew up wearing clothes custom-made by their mother or grandmother, they have developed high standards of fit and quality. This high expectation oftentimes leads to frustration when they are not able to find clothes that fit their tastes and body types in the U.S.

Finally, mothers transmit to their daughters, through their relationship with clothes, values related to the public and private selves. This is discussed later in the chapter.

These findings imply that the influence of the mother, at least for first- and second- generation Hispanics, will continue to be strong in the way women relate to clothes, appearance, and perception of their bodies. The continuous and long-lasting interchange between mother and daughter about clothing has also implications for the daughter’s acculturation process. The maternal influence manifested itself in clothing items with strong emotional symbolism. Furthermore, the frequency of conversation and
ideas about clothes with their mothers represents an ongoing source of “Hispanicness” that impacts the acculturation process.

In terms of communication, this means that messages addressing the role of the mother as a continuous emotional and cultural source may prove effective for product and services beyond the clothing industry. For example, understanding this relationship is particularly relevant for health and wellness services that want to communicate with Hispanics. It is important that marketers realize the degree of influence that mothers have in their daughters’ perceptions of self, both in positive and negative ways.

In addition to these values from the Hispanic culture, women in this study also learned norms and values from the Anglo culture. The more evident norms and values coming from Anglo culture were ones that women born in Latin America had to learn when they came to the United States. For example, these women had to learn the norms dictated by the fashion industry, which may reflect the importance of novelty and self-expression typical of the Anglo culture. Also, as less acculturated women interacted in different contexts in the U.S., they learned that formality and hierarchy in dressing was not as important as it was in their country of origin. Additionally, there is a need for more clothing products that match the high expectations Hispanic women have in terms of fit and quality. Today, more and more clothing lines are taking Latinas’ preferences and body types into consideration in their designs, but there is still a need for more clothes that suit this group’s preferences and desires.

**Institutions as socialization agents**

Women in this study learned other norms and values related to clothing and appearance through their socialization in church, school, and work. This does not seem to be different from the socialization process that most Western women experience. However, there are a few aspects that are relevant to the discussion of the acculturation process, which should be mentioned.

**Church.** Contrary to expectations, women in this study were not heavily influenced by the way the Church and the Catholic religion. Most of them did not attend mass or go to church on a regular basis, in fact some of them stated that they were not religious at all. However, the conservative and modest way in which they dressed if they went to church communicated reverence and respect for God or for the person with whom they were going, a spiritual connection with God, and a sense of celebration.
Church and religion may have not heavily influenced these women’s values related to modesty, decency, and morality, as one might have expected. However, their behavior showed evidence of underlying orientations that characterize the Hispanic culture. For example, women conferred the powers of spiritual protection to their clothes. Also, they dressed in what they perceived to be simpler and more serious ways when going to church, in order to maintain harmony with the group. The need to express the hierarchy and the distance between themselves and God is expressed by the thoughtful consideration of what to wear to church.

**School.** Also, participants pointed out how they learned to communicate group membership through clothing when they went to school (in their countries of origin and in the U.S). This process seems to be similar to what Anglo women may experience in their own socialization process at school. However, Hispanic women’s experiences differ in aspects that influence their acculturation process. For example, some Hispanic women went to school in Latin America, where the image they wanted to conform to was inspired by American brands and style. This means that they were exposed to and learned stylistic and symbolic features of clothing and appearance which brought them closer to the Anglo culture even before they moved to the U.S. In terms of consumer behavior, it means that they may continue to be loyal to certain brands with which they are already familiar.

Another cultural learning demonstrated by several participants is the resistance to mainstream dominant consumerism and the adoption of autochthonous clothing items to convey that opposition. Several participants stated belonging to groups at school that had a political stand against mainstream consumerism, and they showed it by the way they dressed. This resistance also has implications for their process of acculturation. When exposed to critical thinking and political views, women learn to feel pride in their ethnic identity and therefore want to manifest it in their appearance. This value for ethnic affiliation may be retained as they come to the U.S. The need for differentiation may be manifested by the use of more ethnic clothes, but it may also convey other kinds of attitudes and behaviors such as political activism and involvement in social issues related to the Hispanic community.

In terms of consumer behavior, women holding these values may feel more interested in brands and designs that appeal to their desire for ethnic differentiation.
the other hand, they may feel rejection for brands and designs that convey conformance to the mainstream and to consumerism.

**Work.** Finally, women learned values and norms in their social experience in the institutions where they worked. During the first experiences in the work place, these women shaped their understanding of their social environment and the roles they played in it. In some cases they learned how the hierarchy of their role and position could be symbolized in a uniform. In other cases women learned explicit or implicit rules and dress codes that helped them construct the meaning of their own realities. For example, women learned that their professional appearance needed to convey a relatively neutral image in terms of gender and age, in order to communicate credibility, professionalism, and intellectual ability. This suggests that as women take on new roles in their lives, they also gain the ability to create a new image consistent with the role. The importance of roles and their individual appearance for Hispanic women is discussed in a separate section of this study.

These findings support the ideas of the symbolic interaction approach. They demonstrate that social interaction—in the context of institutions—creates a set of symbols with meanings that are common for that group (Blumer, 1969b). Social interaction within religious groups, classmates, and work colleagues created codes over time that these Hispanic women learned and carried on.

These findings are important because they show that the norms and values learned by less acculturated and more acculturated women, and the role of agents involved in the socialization process are very similar in many aspects. It is possible to say that nowadays the function of big institutions in the Hispanic and Anglo cultures is similar in fundamental ways, at least as the institutions influence the socio-economic group of these women. It would be interesting to see how social interaction, norms, and values differ among Hispanic women of different socio-economic groups. Future studies need to consider a closer look to this phenomenon by adding socioeconomic variables into the equation.

**Communicating identity**

The second major area of exploration in this study focused on how Hispanic women use clothes and appearance to communicate individual and social identity in
terms of gender, age, ethnicity, and class (RQ2). The discussion about the basic function of clothing was interwoven in this section, answering RQ3: How do Hispanic women perceive the basic functions of clothing in terms of protection, modesty/immodesty and adornment? I also addressed how these issues differ across levels of acculturation (RQ8). In this portion of the study, concepts from social-psychology, symbolic interactionism, consumer behavior and acculturation helped explain the use of clothes to create and communicate different aspects of their identity.

The findings showed that there were more similarities than differences across levels of acculturation. Moreover, in most cases the similarities can be explained by the dominance of underlying Hispanic values and beliefs.

**Traditional gender categories**

Generally, women in this study manifested a preference for clothing and appearance that are traditionally associated with feminine characteristics, such as dresses and skirts, embroideries, ruffles, collars and sleeves, soft colors, tight and silhouette defining clothes, etc. This evidence supports the idea that adornment serves to symbolize identity (Sproles & Burns, 1994). It also demonstrates that women use their wardrobes as a language (Barthes, 1983) from which they select different elements to create semantic content. In the grammar of clothes, adornment equals “female.”

It can be said that these gender-coded features are mainly due to a need to maintain a clear dualistic differentiation between the gender categories (male, female). This dualistic differentiation is a manifestation of the traditional gender roles that characterize the Hispanic culture. For example, participants related femininity with being “put together.” This association is common in traditional cultures such as the Hispanic culture in which women are expected to be attractive and invest more effort in looking beautiful than men do. In contrast, the tendency in the Anglo culture is towards gender equality, meaning that the expectations tend to be similar for both males and females.

Most women in this study seemed to reject the idea of gender equality as it related to clothing and appearance. However, some participants showed a level of resistance towards traditional views. These women emphasized the importance of other qualities such as education and self-empowerment in defining femininity beyond appearance and physical attributes.
It is important to realize that one major problem of embracing the traditional female appearance is that it might lead to stereotyping. When Hispanic women come to the U.S. with a marked outlook on gender differentiation, they may misread other people’s appearance when they are not in compliance with their expectations. For example, as seen in the findings, women holding traditional views about gender appearance might mistakenly categorize other women who do not wear earrings as lesbians. This dualistic perception of gender and the potential negative attitudinal and behavioral consequences that may come along may impact the process of acculturation and the process of social integration.

It is important that Hispanic women understand how different cultures use clothing and appearance, and how these material aspects are related to cultural values and beliefs. During the process of acculturation these women may or may not restructure their traditional dualistic perception of gender. According to the symbolic interactionist theory (Blumer, 1969b) if these women socialize in a context where gender and appearance tend to be more complex and nuanced (as in the Anglo culture), they will reinterpret their experience and restructure their perceptions and attitudes toward gender and appearance.

**Attractiveness**

The concept of femininity was closely related to the concept of attractiveness. The evidence shows that women in this study tried to find a balance between being attractive while not looking sexually available. This finding shows that clothes serve as protection from unwanted attention. From a cultural perspective it may indicate that looking sexually available is indicative of indecency and can be associated with a lack of class. From the symbolic interactionism perspective, this search for balance is part of the constant interpretative process individuals experience in order to create and discover meanings (Blumer, 1969b). However, there is not enough evidence in this or in previous studies to explain cultural values related to appearance and sexual attractiveness. The evidence in this study suggests that women’s sense of modesty seems to be more related to individual psychological factors such as self-esteem and body perception than to cultural variables such as shame or guilt. There is a need for research that investigates the relationship between cultural values, body image and self-esteem.
Perceptions of age

In reference to how clothes communicate age, women in this study showed a resistance towards displaying signs of aging and a favorable attitude towards a youthful look. Youth was related to the use of more revealing clothes, for example wearing shorter skirts and showing the torso. Maturity was related to the need to cover aging skin and flaccid bodies. This means that women used clothes to protect themselves from being seen as older and therefore as no longer attractive.

Participants in their late 30s revealed a sense of pride for having younger looking bodies than American women their age do, therefore they feel they are entitled to clothes that—according to the social standards—are for younger women. In this sense, there was a discrepancy between their perceptions about what women their age should wear, and the designs, sizes, and styles that the American industry offers by age category. Women felt underserved by the American fashion industry. They perceived that the clothes available for their age category were boring and old. On the other hand, they felt the clothes for younger categories (Junior’s/Misses) offered designs that were more attractive to them but that the materials from which the clothes were made were not the ones they desired.

This dilemma is a clear trend with implications for the fashion industry. There is a clear opportunity for creating clothing lines that better serve these women by combining youthful and fresh designs and colors with more resistant and sophisticated materials. Furthermore, it is important to understand culturally based perceptions of age according to different product and services in order to create better segmentation models and communication that is relevant to each group. Hispanics may have perceptions of age that might affect their behavior related to financial or health services. For example, Hispanic women may believe that they are too young for certain medical exams, or for saving for retirement.

Finally, it is important to note that favoring youth over maturity and the stigmatization of physical aging signs is not absent from the Hispanic culture. There is infinite evidence of the enormous efforts that Americans make in order to maintain a youthful appearance. However, it seems that in mainstream America there are more efforts to raise public awareness about the potential social problems that this bias can bring. It is necessary to make similar efforts among the Hispanic community.
Being Hispanic

Women in this study also communicated ethnic identity through clothing. Regardless of their level of acculturation, they created meaning by selecting clothing elements that helped them differentiate themselves from the style used by Anglo women, which they considered careless and boring. The elements women selected to communicate ethnicity were not authentic ethnic clothes coming from their countries of origins, such as the ones Indian women might wear. The codes they used, instead, were the same codes that communicate femininity: adornments, details, and a general put-together appearance that is always changing. It seems that these elements have the double function of communicating both gender and ethnic identity. Thus, they are more likely to be maintained in the clothing language of Hispanic women. One conclusion that can be drawn from the double function of these elements is that, for Hispanic women, ethnic identity is closely related to gender identity. There is an implicit perception that the Hispanic sensibility is what makes them feminine.

In terms of acculturation, the saliency of these symbols and the values they convey position these women closer to the Hispanic-dominant quadrant in the acculturation model (Berry, 2003; Korzenny and Korzenny, 2005). Another element that positions Hispanic women in this study closer to the Hispanic-dominant quadrant is the fact that they defined themselves through their separation from the American culture, at least as related to clothing and appearance. Hispanic women in this study, regardless of their level of acculturation, seemed to enact in their communication through clothing a variation of what Berry (2003) called the separation strategy. The separation strategy in this case implies that members of a non-dominant group prefer to preserve their original culture and avoid behaviors that are associated with the mainstream group. The desire for separation or at least strong differentiation from clothing aspects considered part of Anglo culture does not seem to have negative consequences in the social performance of these women. This is in part due to the fact that both clothing codes are very similar, and the difference between them does not imply deeply opposing values that could lead to social discrimination or marginalization. Hispanic and Anglo clothing preferences seem to simply be stylistic variations of the Western culture.
**Communicating status**

Women in this study also used clothes to communicate achievement, power distance, and social hierarchy. The findings in this topic partially support the industry assumption that Hispanics are status driven. This supports the “we are what we have” symbolic consumption approach (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992). However, participants seemed not to make their clothing purchases based on the status symbolized by brands or styles. In contrast, variety, quality, fit and uniqueness seem to be the features that communicate their accomplishments. Moreover, there was a difference across levels of acculturation in the way these women perceived achievement and power. On one hand, less acculturated women focused on achievement as a result of an improvement and showed a sense of satisfaction and gratitude. On the other hand, more acculturated women focused on success from a power related perspective, defining their achieved status by comparing themselves with women in lower social strata. This contrast may be explained by cultural differences related to the value of “success.” For less acculturated women success maybe something to be thankful for, whereas for more acculturated women success may be something that they merit because they have achieved something that others have not.

**Deciding what to wear**

The findings presented in Chapter 6 are an extension of the discussion related to how Hispanic women communicate their identity. This section focused on the practical considerations and strategies women in this study used at the moment of selecting the clothes they were going to wear.

The main finding in this area showed that women, regardless of the level of acculturation, perceived themselves as having complex identities performing different roles for which they need different “costumes.” This evidence is compatible with the symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969b; Kaiser, 1997) and symbolic consumption approaches (Elliot & Wattanasuwan) which suggest that people have different levels of the self from which one chooses one to express according to the situation. Women in this study described their decision-making process in dramaturgical terms talking about “roles” and “costumes,” which supports the dramaturgical metaphor in social psychology to explain appearance management (Goffman, 1959). The creation of different roles, their
associated appearances, and the consideration of the audience revealed their expertise in self-presentation strategies.

**Hispanic women are high self-monitors.** The basic differentiation that influenced deciding what to wear was the consideration of the public versus private settings, the point being that one needs to look “put together” or “presentable” if one is going to be seen by some other person. Then, within the “public” context, women made decisions considering other factors such as type of activity, perceived expectations of formality, familiarity with the audience, and their mood.

Women in both groups maintained the basic public vs. private opposition, and the clear differentiation between the costumes for each role and occasion. However, more acculturated women showed a tendency to blur the distinctions between events and occasions creating a somewhat unified appearance. It might be the case that less acculturated women were younger and therefore more influenced for current predominant fashion trends that favor unpolished and relaxed looks for every occasion. This tendency towards the casual look may indicate that more acculturated women may be less concerned than less acculturated women about creating and reflecting the structure of their world in the way they dress.

Overall, women in this study were high self-monitors, meaning that they tried to exert control over the way they presented themselves to others. It seems that what is described as a personality trait by social psychologists (Peluchette et. al., 2006) also describes a cultural characteristic among Hispanic women. From a cultural perspective, self-monitoring is a need because there is a social pressure that dictates how women should look according to the situation.

In practical terms, women created tactics and strategies that helped them “perform” the roles they wanted and needed. These strategies included having a large closet, and organizing it in ways that facilitate the demarcation of roles and occasions; designating clothes to particular roles; planning outfits in advance; rehearsing the desired looks before actually performing the role; and rotating clothes to create a sense of infinite novelty.

Finally, the last strategy used to decide what to wear was based on mood. Less acculturated women used a “mirror” strategy in which they selected clothes that they perceived to be consistent with their moods. Interestingly, when they felt bad, they
preferred not to be seen in public. This behavior is based on the Hispanic tendency to prefer harmonic situations and avoid the negative impressions and comments that one might cause in others when one is not looking as expected (put together). In contrast, more acculturated women used the “masking” strategy. This means that when they were not feeling good they selected clothing that helped camouflage the negative emotions. Culturally, this difference reflects that, for less acculturated women, the need to express their emotions may be more important than the need to control others’ impressions and reactions. Accordingly, it seems that more acculturated women use their appearance management competence to help them feel empowered and in control, even if they are not feeling good.

**Deciding what to buy**

The last component of this study was related to the adoption of clothes. The objective was to understand different aspects of the diffusion of innovation model and how they applied to Hispanic women across levels of acculturation. The questions that guided this chapter were RQ4: What are the characteristics of the communication channels and characteristics of the social networks in which meaning is diffused? RQ5: What are the aspects of clothes that facilitate adoption?; RQ6: What is the role of brands in adoption?; RQ7: What is the decision-making process like?; And RQ8: How are the above topics different according to the level of acculturation?

**Media and interpersonal influence.** In terms of communication channels, the evidence showed that women in this study do not use media as a source to learn about new fashions. Generally, it was confirmed that less acculturated women consume more Spanish-language media than more acculturated ones, but the programming they watched was not directly related to fashion. Also, despite having a negative attitude toward Spanish-language media, more acculturated women admitted using them as a tool for language maintenance. Finally, even if participants stated extensively using the Internet for multiple purposes related to communication, information and entertainment, they did not purchase clothes online. It became clear that the sensorial experience, actually seeing and touching the clothes, was more important than the convenience or any other attribute that online shopping could offer.

This media consumption behavior indicates that marketers need to carefully consider the media channels in which they advertise products and services related to clothing. For
example, it seems that TV commercials may not necessarily be effective because Hispanic women may be looking for their clothing ideas from somewhere else: their female friends and family, and people they observe on the streets.

The findings showed that interpersonal influence was more important than media in the adoption of clothes and styles for both groups. This, together with other factors, indicates that Hispanic women in this study were not early fashion adopters. According to the diffusion of innovation approach (Rogers, 2003) women in this study are late adopters because they are more susceptible to be persuaded by other individuals than to be persuaded by media messages directly. However, some of the participants could be considered fashion opinion leaders in their social networks because they were asked for advice and showed a tendency to creatively reinvent clothes and styles.

The evidence in this study supported the diffusion of innovation ideas about communication channels, interpersonal influence, and type of adopters. What this means for marketers is that following the principles of diffusion of innovation may lead to effective communication campaigns of fashion products targeting Hispanic women of different levels of acculturation. Identifying opinion leaders is important because they are the ones that influence the late adopters, including most of the women in this study. However, they also need to create promotions that increase the visibility of the clothes they want these women to adopt.

**The importance of fit and the sense of self.** In reference to the aspects of clothing that facilitate adoption, women in this study were driven by the relative advantages of price, quality, and fit, regardless of the level of acculturation. The importance of fit illustrates the concept of compatibility introduced by Rogers (2003). Women in this study favored clothes that were consistent with their norms and expectations of fit. Because many of the respondents grew up wearing tailored clothes, they were less likely to adopt clothes and styles that did not fit their bodies and their sense of self.

Women in this study were not “fashion victims.” They showed a resistance to adopting new styles just for the sake of fashion. They seemed to want to find a balance between feeling up-to-date and using clothes that were compatible with their idea of self. This evidence supports what Pasarell (1995) found in her study about Caribbean women. This study found that women preferred the attributes of price and quality to style and brand. Also, the evidence in this study and Pasarell’s study contradicts some of the
industry evidence presented in the literature review. Women in this study did not seem to “jump into a trend” as suggested by Kim Kitchings (Cotton Inc., 2005). A reason why the findings may be contradictory is that Cotton Inc. was in fact using early adopters as participants, whereas participants in the current study were mostly late adopters. This difference suggests that marketers need to include in their segmentations variables that help identify the type of adopter, in addition to acculturation variables.

**Shopping is an individual experience.** Another factor considered in order to understand the adoption of clothes was shopping and buying behaviors. Contrary to expectations, participants went shopping by themselves. In some cases women went shopping alone, not because they preferred to do so but because they did not have another choice because of the lack of time or small network of friends. However, the trend was that women preferred to go shopping alone in order to avoid other people’s influence in the decisions. Also, shopping was considered a personal activity, “a day for me.” These findings also contradict the findings in the study by Cotton Inc (2005) that show that 60% of participants in the study felt better when they get a second opinion about clothes. It could be argued that the preference for shopping alone contradicts the other-orientation and the importance given to the audience emphasized throughout the findings in this study. However, it can be said that the way these Hispanic women manage their appearance involves a balance between the desire to create a positive impression on others and the need for self-expression.

**Contributions**

This study helped contribute to the understanding of culture through tangible objects. The findings show that the combination of approaches selected in the literature review was an appropriate theoretical framework to understand the attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors of Hispanic women in the U.S. in relation to clothing and appearance. This cross-disciplinary approach could be useful for the exploratory study of other categories.

This study contributed to the theoretical development of acculturation in different ways. First, it exemplified the dynamics of how Hispanic cultural values and beliefs are maintained through the material aspects of culture. Although Hispanic women live in the U.S. and interact at different levels with the Anglo culture, the values they hold in
relation to clothing and appearance come largely from the Hispanic culture and are maintained over time. The preservation of Hispanic cultural values is not only due to the fact that they are deeply internalized, but also because these values are constantly being nourished by continuous contact with Latin America and other Hispanic women in the U.S. Moreover, the maintenance of these values as related to clothes and appearance is a conscious choice Hispanic women make because holding on to these values does not represent a major problem in their integration into mainstream America. Within the dynamics of acculturation, this study also illustrated the role of the mother in the enculturation process and her part in the cultural maintenance of Hispanic cultural values.

Second, this study has added to the debates about acculturation by validating the bidimensional aspect of the acculturation model (Berry, 1998; Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005). Hispanic women in this study displayed attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that indicated different orientations in their identification with the Hispanic and Anglo cultures, in domains including clothing and appearance, language, and media preference.

This study also exemplifies how clothes, as material objects, crystallize a collection of values characteristic of the Hispanic culture. By analyzing Hispanic women’s relationships with clothes this study was able to gain insights into the interconnection of the collectivistic orientation, the need for harmony and structure, the value for respect and spirituality, and the dualistic perception of gender.

Moreover, this study provided a validation of the language-only acculturation measure through the use and preference of tangible material products such as music, literature, and food. However, this research also pointed out to some of the limitations in using the concept of acculturation to explain behaviors related to clothing and appearance. Evidence in this study suggests that variables such as social class, lifestyle, and life stage may be more indicative of the motivations behind choices related to clothes.

Finally, the findings revealed interesting cases of mother-daughter role reversal. Role reversal took place in two different ways: the first case was a second-generation daughter who seemed to embrace a more conservative role than her mother did. This is different than what was expected because first-generation mothers are assumed to hold traditional values whereas second-generation daughters are expected to hold less conservative views due to the influence of the Anglo culture. The other case of role
reversal illustrates a common situation in which the daughter knows more about the values and practicalities of the U.S. system because the mother arrived to the country several years later than the daughter did. In this case, the daughter is the one helping the mother in terms of appropriate appearance (fashion) as well as consumer socialization issues (where and when to buy). Understanding role reversal is important in order to understand the dynamic between the agents involved in the process of acculturation. It is necessary to identify the flow of cultural influences in the different stages in life.

Certainly, Hispanic women in this study were highly influenced by their mothers during the enculturation process, but later in their lives, they may be the ones influencing their mothers.

This research showed that the study of clothing could lead to an understanding of both cultural and universal human characteristics. It has been shown that clothes are not merely aesthetic or practical things, but they are expressions of our value system and act as resources for reflecting who we are.

This study also contributed to the theories of symbolic interactionism and symbolic consumption in different ways. First, this study exemplified how the meaning of objects is socially constructed (Blumer, 1969b). The evidence showed that it is through human interactions that Hispanic women learn to symbolically communicate individuality, gender, social class, and the different levels of the self through clothing and appearance.

Second, it was shown that it is through human interaction in the context of both cultures that women learned to reinterpret meanings linked to clothes. For example, women coming from Latin America learned that in the U.S. formality is not as important, but following the colors of the seasons is.

Finally, this study showed the premise of symbolic interactionism that states that people act towards others based on the meaning of their appearance (Blumer, 1969b). For instance, women with traditional gender views may interpret that woman who do not wear earrings are lesbians and may act towards them accordingly.

This study also contributed to the theory of social psychology of clothing by exploring the concepts of appearance management and self-monitoring (Peluchette et. al, 2005; Schlenker, 1980) and how they apply to the Hispanic culture.
One of the major findings of this study points out that the idea of “control” is key to understanding the meaning of clothes for Hispanics. In this study I revealed that women learn how to communicate their individual, social and cultural identities, and also to control the impressions they create on others. It is through monitoring their environments, their bodies and the clothes available to them that women in this study control others’ perceptions. Being high self-monitors and monitors of the environment gives them tools to convey a certain image that balances the social expectations with their individual taste. Specifically for Hispanic women, clothing gives them a sense of agency that allows them to control how they communicate their femininity, attractiveness, age, achievements, sense of respect and harmony, and their emotions.

This control also reflects a need these women have to give structure to their lives. By managing their appearance, Hispanic women in this study showed their understanding of the world. For example, through clothing they controlled what they want to show about themselves by organizing their identities (roles), and they controlled their social experiences by separating the public from the private sphere and constructing hierarchies and mental models for occasions, places, and people. As related to acculturation, this control provided women with the competency to easily read the environmental cues in both cultural contexts. Moreover, their appearance management abilities helped them to have control over the norms and behaviors related to clothing and appearance they decided to adopt, resist or maintain.

Finally, this study has added to the theory of diffusion of innovations. First, it revealed the difficulties of studying fashion as an innovation in the context of a globalized fashion industry.

Second, this compilation of case studies illustrated the interplay of the different aspects of the adoption process in a group of late adopters. It was shown that in the process of adoption, interpersonal influence was more important than media. This not only supports the concept of homophily (Rogers, 2003), but also the findings about the importance of interpersonal influence in Hispanic consumer behavior introduced in the literature review. It was also shown that, for Hispanic women, compatibility in the form of fit (physical and psychological) was the most important aspect in adoption, and that this is due to the influence of their mothers, who for many women in this study were opinion leaders.
A third way this study contributes to the diffusion of innovation approach is by exploring adoption in the light of acculturation. For example, the study shows that the adoption of U.S. norms and behaviors by less acculturated women is situational. For example, women adopt the casual and relaxed look that they relate to the Anglo style only for certain occasions. This situational adoption suggests that the change is only behavioral and that the values are not internalized.

**Reflections on methodology**

The choice of in-depth interviews seems to be the best method for this exploratory research because it led up to discussions relevant for generalization-producing studies. Also, the use of interview guides allowed both the conversational tone and the discussion of all the topics relevant for the researcher. Moreover, it is important to note that the informal conversations that I had on the phone with the respondents prior to the interview allowed me to create a rapport previous to the interview. In-depth, semi-structured interviews also facilitated probing. Finally, interviewing women at their houses allowed me to have a broader understanding of their lifestyle and tastes. Meeting the participants in the context of their home gave an ethnographic flavor to the data collection.

**Limitations**

It is necessary to acknowledge that this study is not without limitations. The first limitation is that the data was based on the experience and accounts of only 10 Hispanic women. This convenience sample is not representative of the overall Hispanic female population. However, it is necessary to remember that this study was not aiming to generalize but rather to explore.

Second, the sample of Hispanic was biased to Venezuela. From the 10 respondents, 4 came from Venezuela, leaving out women from more than 20 Latin American countries.

Third, participants belong to the middle class. This may have affected the findings because the middle class across cultures displays more commonalities than differences.

Fourth, the interviews were conducted in Florida and many of them in Miami. This represents a limitation because the influence of the Hispanic culture in this area is prevalent. Also, the tropical weather dictates or limits many of the choices related to clothing.
Fifth, globalization and democratization of fashion homogenize styles across the globe. This makes it difficult to understand the cultural differences in tastes and fashion choices.

In terms of data analysis, it is important to discuss that I lost time because of the inadequacy of the analysis strategy I selected. Originally, I intended to use grounded theory to see categories emerging from the data with the least influence of predetermined theoretical categories possible. I intended to analyze the data with open, axial and selecting coding, the three stages of coding suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998). However, after open and axial coding of the first 3 interviews, I realized that the patterns that were emerging from the data gravitated around concepts that were very similar to the ones already identified in the literature. Microscopic coding seemed to introduce an unnecessary complexity. After realizing that this coding was not productive, I reevaluated the analysis strategy and decided to go back to the research questions, which were created around basic theoretical concepts in the study of clothing and fashion.

Grounded theory seems to be adequate for research in which the researcher approaches the phenomenon and the field without predetermined research questions, categories, and theoretical perspectives. That was not the case of my research. First, I went to the field with research questions in mind. Second, the questions in the interview guide constituted an organizing principle created prior to the data collection. And finally, I based my research on theoretical frameworks coming from symbolic interactionism, social psychology, acculturation studies, symbolic consumption, and diffusion of innovations. However, it is important to emphasize that even if the findings gravitate around concepts, categories and theories established a priori, the voices of the participants and the themes that emerged from their accounts are also represented here. In this sense, this study constitutes an interplay between the etic (theoretical categories established a priori) and emic (indigenous categories created by the participants in the study) perspectives.

This study has another methodological limitation. The fact that I am myself a less acculturated Hispanic woman may have caused possible cultural and language biases. Also, language barriers made it more challenging and difficult for me to work with the interviews in English.
Directions for future research

While the research findings provide some interesting insights, I am faced with just as many puzzling new questions.

A potential area for future studies is the comparison of Hispanic women to non-Hispanic, African American, and Asian women. A cross-cultural approach seems promising to better understand similarities and differences based on cultural variables.

Other areas that need more exploration are acculturation and biculturalism as related to other objects and product categories. Longitudinal studies may reveal more insights about the dynamics and agents that affect consumer behavior during the different stages of the acculturation process.

Possible areas for future research may also include the study of variables related to socio-economic levels, lifestyle, and life stage. Moreover, the study of the meaning of clothing and appearance among Hispanic men seems promising and necessary.

In addition, studies that include the concepts of self-perception, body image, and attractiveness may be useful in the exploration of other cultural variables related to clothing.

The industry would benefit from an understanding of how Hispanic women categorize and understand different current and past styles. This would help identify a segmentation scheme based on cultural taste that may be more relevant than segments solely based on level of acculturation.
APPENDIX A
SCREENER

Name ___________________ _____________ Age ____________ interview code ___________
Employment/occupation ______________________
Contact information _________________________

1. When you explain your cultural background or origin to others, how do you identify yourself? (for example, Latina, Cuban, etc) __________

2. How much attachment (affection) do you feel for that culture?

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3. I feel most comfortable speaking:

1 ____Spanish 100% of the time
2 ____Spanish 75% of the time and English 25% of the time
3 ____Spanish 50% of the time; and English 50% of the time
4 ____Spanish 25% of the time, and English 75% of the time
5 ____English 100% of the time.

4. Which language do you prefer to speak with friends?

1 ____Spanish 100% of the time
2 ____Spanish 75% of the time and English 25% of the time
3 ____Spanish 50% of the time; and English 50% of the time
4 ____Spanish 25% of the time, and English 75% of the time
5 ____English 100% of the time.

5. In which language do you think?

1 ____Spanish 100% of the time
2 ____Spanish 75% of the time and English 25% of the time
3 ____Spanish 50% of the time; and English 50% of the time
4 ____Spanish 25% of the time, and English 75% of the time
5 ____English 100% of the time.
6. At home, which language do you speak?
1 ___ Spanish 100% of the time
2 ___ Spanish 75% of the time;
3 ___ Spanish 50% of the time;
4 ___ Spanish 25% of the time,
5 ___ English 100% of the time.

7. My interest for fashion and clothing is

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<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tr>
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APPENDIX B
INTERVIEWS REFERENCES

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<td>Norma</td>
<td>Miami, FL/ January 25, 2007</td>
</tr>
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<td>Celina</td>
<td>Miami, FL/ January 26, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>Miami, FL/January 27, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Tallahassee, FL/February 26, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roxana</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soledad</td>
<td>Tallahassee, FL/ March 12, 2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction. Debriefing about research. General topics to get into the conversational mood. Ask for permission to record and read consent form.

Warm up.

There is no right or wrong answers; I am interested in your point of view and your experiences. Examples and details are fine.

- Tell me about your clothing; for example, tell me about what you are wearing today.
- Tell me about how do you choose what you are going to wear
- Tell me about your favorite outfits.

RQ1: norms and values learned
How did you dress when you were a child? Teenager?

- Do you remember who (people, family, media) helped you learn what you should or should not wear for certain occasions? Tell me how it happened
- Also, there are many opinions about what you should wear for certain occasions: tell me, how do you feel about it?
- Tell me about how you dress, or how do you think you should dress to: work, stay home, go out dancing, dinner, meeting, vacation, celebrations like Christmas, etc.

Is there any other occasion/situation that you think needs special dress?

- Tell me about the rules you know about dressing. For example, I recently learned that you should not wear white pants after Labor Day…
- When you started working, did you have to change your way of dressing? How was that? Who helped you understand what you should/should not wear?
- Is there any (other) particular event that influenced/changed the way you dress?
- Who helped you understand this?
- When you came to the United States, did you find something different in the way women dress? Did you have to change the way you dress? How and why? Who helped you with this?
• Tell me about the last time you talked about fashion with other women. Where were you? How/why did the conversation start?

RQ3: basic functions of clothing
• Tell me about your accessories.
• Do you have any tricks to downplay or accentuate features that you dislike/like in your body? Tell me more about it. How did you learn these tricks? (aesthetic pleasure, prestige, self-esteem, differentiation, membership, increase height, look thinner)
• Tell me how you think your mood can affect the way you dress on a certain day.
• Do you have any clothes that you have used as an amulet? Tell me about it.
• What are the parts of your body you feel you need to cover/show, and why?
  (Religion, parents, work, being a mother, age, professional)
• Do you have any rituals with your clothing, or the way you dress?

RQ2: communicate individuality and social affiliation, and social status in terms of prestige, age, gender, and ethnic affiliation?
• Tell me about the elements in your closet that you can say “this is so me.” Describe them and tell me how they make you different.
  o Have you been in a situation in which you had to show prestige or reputation? What did you wear? How did you feel?
  o How do you feel about your age and the clothes you use? Do you sometimes feel you want to dress more youthful, or more mature?
  o How do you feel about being a woman and the way you dress? Tell me how your clothes are feminine/masculine.
  o Do you have/ had / want to have anything in your closet that screams “I’m Latina”?
  o If you had all the money & access, whom would you like to dress like?

• How do you feel you are unique in the way you dress?

RQ6: role of brands/ STORES
• Tell me about your favorite brands in clothes. What do you like about them? Why?
• Are you aware of brands of clothes targeting Latinas?

**RQ5—RQ7: aspects of the new styles or clothing items that facilitates adoption.**

**Decision marking process**

• Think about your closet and what you have. What are the things that you feel you need now to complement your closet? What you do feel you need to have that you don’t have now?

• Is it important for you to wear the latest fashion? How do you feel about the new fashions that you see on TV, in the stores, in other people? What are the things that you like/dislike about them? Why?

Tell me about the last clothing item you bought. Why and how did you buy it?

Tell me everything from when you saw it, until you bought it.

• How do you learn about new fashions?

• Tell me a little about your habits in TV *(watching, magazine readings, internet.)* What are you favorite shows? Do you look for fashion online? Do you watch any fashion TV show? Do you read any fashion magazine? *(Spanish/English)*

• ARE YOU AWARE OF MAGAZINES FOR HISPANIC WOMEN? LATINA MAGAZINE, SIEMPRE MUJER?

• How do you feel about shopping second hand/ Internet?

**RQ4: social network. Opinion leadership**

• Tell me about other women in your group of friends, or family. Who are the ones that you consider the advisors in terms of fashion clothing? Why?

• Do you consider her for advice in other aspects of your life such as work, family, legal issues?

• Tell me about different things you have in common. What aspects are different?

• Tell me about the last time you asked them for advice about clothing

**Acculturation validation**

• How many years have you been in the United States?

• Tell me about your food, what do you eat on a regular day? Do you cook?

• Tell me about the music you like and why.
Tell me about your favorite books/literatures.
Tell me about your network of friends, what they do, are they Whites, Hispanics, African American?

Thank you.
<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Respondent:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Date:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Observations notes</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>General description of setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of space arrangement and organizations in the room/closet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is she wearing for the interview?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotions, attitudes and non-verbal communication of the respondent when talking about their clothing, experiences</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Silhouette, design details, materials, brands of the element</td>
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APPENDIX E

APPROVAL LETTER FROM HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE
AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I am Maria Gracia Inglessis, a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Felipe Korzenny in the Department of Communication in Florida State University. I am conducting a research study to explore Latina women and fashion.

Your participation will involve a conversational interview in your house where you will also show me your wardrobe. The process will last approximately two hours. The interview will be recorded and the tapes will be used only for obtaining what was stated in the interview. Also, I will take pictures of your closet. Those pictures will be used only to corroborate my notes.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. All the material used for this study will be kept confidential and identified by a code number. Your name will not appear in any of the results.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts if you agree to participate in this study. If you have any questions concerning this research study, please contact me or my advisor.

Maria Gracia Inglessis. Phone: (850) 222 6070, e-mail: mgi03@fsu.edu

Dr. Felipe Korzenny. Phone: (850) 644 8766, e-mail: Felipe.Korzenny@comm.fsu.edu

* * * * * * *

I give my consent to participate in the above study.

_______________________________ (signature) _______________________ (date)
APPROVAL LETTER FROM HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE

Florida State UNIVERSITY
Office of the Vice President for Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-5740
(850) 644-8875 fax (850) 644-4352

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 1/30/2007

To: Maria Garcia Legasse
MC 1531

Depl. COMMUNICATION

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
Making Meaning Through Fashion: The Meaning of Clothing Among Hispanic Women of Different Levels of Acculturation

The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Exempt under 45 CFR 46.110(b) 7 and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefits. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals which may be required.

If the project has not been completed by 11/28/2007 you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. Also, the principal investigator must promptly report in writing any unanticipated adverse effects resulting from research on human subjects.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairperson of your department and your major professor were notified that helping to conduct the proposed research involving human subjects in the development and should review protocols of such investigations. We often as needed to assure that the human use is conducted in compliance with our institution and DHEHS regulations.

This institution has an assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The assurance number is IRB0000346.

Cop: Dr. Felipe Kozaryn
FSU 2007 1025
APPENDIX F
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MARKETERS

The following are some of the issues marketers may consider when targeting clothing articles to Hispanic women. As findings in this research cannot be generalized, these recommendations are aimed at providing awareness and generating discussion of some of the issues relevant to this market.

- It is necessary to consider segmentation beyond the level of acculturation. This study has shown that variables such as lifestyle, life stage, and self-perception are as important for understanding the relationship of Hispanic women and clothing as traditional acculturation variables have been.

- Due to the appreciation for tailor-made clothes and the fit and uniqueness Hispanic women desire, there is an opportunity for small designers to cater to Hispanic women. Also, stores that offer alteration services may attract more Hispanic female consumers. Offering the unique benefit of the right fit is important for the image of clothing products, not to mention that it is equally important that the clothing articles be designed with different body shapes in mind. It is important to adapt designs (particularly pants) for curvier figures. Also, the use of fabrics that allow stretching and enhanced fit are likely to be well received.

- The fact that the Hispanic woman may have grown up with a seamstress in the family makes them savvy when it comes to materials and cuts. Emphasizing how clothes are made and showing the process and the technical details may be a point of interest for these consumers.

- Along the same vein, clothes made by their mothers/grandmother create a strong emotional connection involving memories, love and pride, and a sense of uniqueness. Marketers could use this idea to invest their product with this meaning (similar to the idea of “homemade” food in the food industry).

- Shopping together is one of the activities daughters and mothers do when they see each other. This is an opportunity for retail stores to offer promotions targeting the mother/daughter pair.
• Clothing is not perceived as separate from other elements of appearance such as make-up, hair, accessories, and nails. This represents an opportunity for cross-promotion among product categories.

• Take advantage of the need for variety and newness that Hispanic women have. Your message can communicate a way to satisfy the need for change and variation. Hispanic women also enjoy and cultivate the different roles they perform. Understanding in which roles and which women would wear your product is essential. Addressing those roles in an explicit way can create a direct connection with the target. Using the dramaturgical metaphor imagery (performer, setting, and audience) may bring appropriate results.

• Retail stores may also use the dramaturgical imagery and the different roles by creating a theatrical display of the merchandise.

• The transitions to new roles (going to college, new job, marriage, motherhood, joining the gym, becoming a gardener, etc.) represent great opportunities to provide the emotional and psychological support needed through clothing. Marketers can assist in providing the right image to fit the new role.

• Understand that the perception of how women should dress by age in the Hispanic market may not be in alignment with the same perception in the general market. How does your target perceive the clothes assigned by the general market to Juniors, Misses, and Ladies sections? Do women feel identified with any of those groups?

• The women did not consume a lot of media related to fashion. Few of them subscribed to magazines or watched programs specifically about clothes and fashion. They reported basing their decisions more on observations. From this, marketers should consider:
  o The use of Spanish and English media outlets.
  o Advertising in less traditional media (internet, myspace, wireless).
  o Using street promotions in order to increase observability.

• Price is important. It is important to clearly display price in advertising and in stores. Emphasize value (relationship price/quality).

• Quality is important. Women preserve and conserve clothes they like. Manufacturers should consider using high quality materials, which are easy to take care of and
durable. Deliver clothes that have colors which do not fade, with resistant materials. This is also an opportunity to advertise to this market laundry detergents and other products related to the care of clothes

- Offer a variety of colors every season. Even if the color of the season is yellow, Hispanic women may want to find a red skirt. Sales racks with off-season clothes and colors may work all year round for this market.

- Related to the above, it is important to understand what type of adopter the target is. Women in this study, for example, did not perceive wearing at the latest fashion as a priority. Instead, they were driven by fit and taste. Also, price was a crucial factor in the buying decision. Despite their active observation of what is in the stores, these women are likely to wait until something they like is on sale. Marketers that want to communicate with this group may benefit from placing more emphasis in the clearance stage than in the introduction stage.

- The sensorial experience is extremely important for Hispanic women. They need to see, touch and feel the actual colors, materials and fit of the clothes they are considering buying. That is why promoting by catalogue or online needs to include samples of fabrics and emphasize the sensorial and fit qualities of the material.

- Hispanic women enjoy shopping. Encourage “a day for me” type of promotions. Promote a day of the week in which your target is more likely to engage in shopping as a distraction.

- Hispanic women need a variety of styles and designs. If you are reaching Hispanic women in smaller cities in the U.S., promote trips to outlets or bigger retail stores in which more variety is available.

- Promote trial at the stores. This allows women to “rehearse their roles” and anticipate the reactions of the audience they plan to meet. Also, revise return policies to encourage trial at home.

- Hispanics react well to images of people that look like them. It is necessary to advertise using models with diverse body types, skin colors, and styles.

- Take advantage of Hispanic celebrities and models with physical characteristics that are not necessary aspirational. Hispanic women use them as reference for what could look good on them too (in terms of skin color, shape, size).
• Efforts such as the section “real fashion on real mujeres” in *Latina Magazine* in which different strategies for concealing/enhancing one’s features are discussed may have a lot of appeal for Hispanic women, who are high self-monitors and very self-aware.

• Hispanic women may confer magical powers to some of their clothes. For example, colors are thought to cause certain outcomes. Using this imagery in the message may resonate with the Hispanic consumer in a more intimate way than it would in the mainstream market.

• Hispanic women prefer to clearly differentiate masculinity and femininity through clothing. The desired image is associated with the traditional female characteristics of clothing, like soft, marked silhouette, ruffles, etc. Therefore designs or styles that are perceived as masculine (straight lines, simple and loose) are perceived as unflattering. Marketers need to include details in the designs targeting this group.

• Despite this preference for traditional image of femininity, Hispanic women, particularly young professionals and educated women are also incorporating other features such as intellectual capacity, empowerment, etc. to their understanding of femininity. If marketers identify this characteristic in their target, they may utilize messages and images that celebrate women’s personal power, personal achievements and their influence in the community and society at large.

• Hispanic women may not be driven by the status or prestige symbolized by brands. These women seem to be more driven by clothes that fit their bodies and their sense of identity, as well as by the sensorial experience that clothes offer. Brands that consider attracting this type of Hispanic women need to consider building their brand identity around these pillars. Such brands also need to speak to Hispanic women’s particular competency in expressing their individual, social, and cultural identities through their clothing and appearance.
REFERENCES


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