2024

Dress to Impress: New Composition Instructors' Interpretations and Embodiment of Professionalism as Displayed through Dress

Jacqueline C. Cano Diaz
University of Central Florida

This Masters Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Thesis and Dissertation 2023-2024 by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

STARS Citation
https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd2023/231
DRESS TO IMPRESS: NEW COMPOSITION INSTRUCTORS’ INTERPRETATIONS AND EMBODIMENT OF PROFESSIONALISM AS DISPLAYED THROUGH DRESS

by

JACQUELINE C. CANO DIAZ
B.S., Jacksonville University, 2019

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2024

Major Professor: Angela Rounsaville
ABSTRACT

While previous research in rhetoric and composition investigates how novice composition instructors negotiate the boundaries of professionalism and identity (Dall'Alba; Grouling; Restaino), the role of dress, or “performative strategic attire” (Mckoy), in crafting these teaching personas has not yet been explored. Viewing everyday dress choices through the lens of embodied rhetoric allows for a deeper understanding of the complex decision-making process of choosing what to wear (Woodward). Further, analyzing dress choice through embodied rhetoric showcases how clothing becomes a tool to craft a persona and inhabit an identity or role. Through positioning instructor’s self-identity and naming their experiences and influences used in navigating the indeterminate boundaries of professionalism, we can further understand how novice instructors leverage dress to embody their new identity in academia. This study focuses on a sample population of three current Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and three recently graduated GTAs, all currently teaching first-year composition within a large state university in Florida. Borrowing from methodologies used previously in the interdisciplinary field of fashion studies research, this study combines qualitative research methods of interviews with deep descriptions of outfits participants wore while instructing and visual analysis of those clothing items (Smith and Yates; Woodward) to locate concrete stories of the prior expectations imparted both by the institution and the novice instructors themselves. From this analysis, I argue that dress provides a material and visual space representing core aspects of how GTAs mediate their position as in between dichotomous identities of student and instructor. Ultimately, I suggest that by studying how the liminality of these positions is expressed and experienced through dress, we can move towards more equitable practices in the field of rhetoric and composition, in the process interrogating the idea of what it means to be “professional.”
To anyone who looked around a room to see no one who looked like them: your mere exitance is rhetorical and powerful.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This endeavor would not have been possible without my committee chair, Dr. Angela Rounsaville. From studying teaching methods during my first year to working through my thesis, thank you for being a guide throughout this journey and demystifying both teaching and the thesis writing process. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my committee members, Dr. Joel Schneier and Dr. Esther Milu, for their feedback and time. An added thanks to Joel for his overall guidance throughout the last couple years.

Special thanks to my amazing cohort—Abigail, Nandi, Sam, Angela, Olivia, Kitty, and Izzy—for their constant loud and loving support and being the coolest of the cool kids. I would not be where I am without our late-night messages, coffee breaks, and grading parties. Thanks should also go to my interviewees for their candor.

Lastly, I’d like to mention my wonderful spouse, Alex, whose constant encouragement sustains me even in the most difficult of times. Thank you for filling my heart alongside our little fur family—Casper Eclipse, Mittens McGonagall, Gaia Ursa Minor, Darth Traya Selene, and the dearly departed Artemis Celeste.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... viii
LIST OF TABLES .............................................................................................................. ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ............................................................................................... x

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................... 1
  Literature Review ......................................................................................................... 2
    Identity as Embodied Performance .......................................................................... 2
    Teaching as Complex Labor .................................................................................... 4
  Research Questions .................................................................................................... 8

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY ..................................................................................... 10
  Theory ....................................................................................................................... 10
  Methods ................................................................................................................... 11
    Data Collection ....................................................................................................... 11
    Coding ................................................................................................................... 15
  Considerations ......................................................................................................... 20

CHAPTER THREE: RECOGNITION OF EXISTING STRUCTURES ..................................... 22
  Acknowledgement of Patriarchal Standards ............................................................ 23
  Age and Perceptions of Youth .................................................................................. 24
  Height as Status and Power ...................................................................................... 25

CHAPTER FOUR: PRODUCTION OF EXISTING STRUCTURES ........................................... 27
  Follow the “Rules” .................................................................................................... 28
  Professionalize Your Personality ............................................................................. 33
  Wear What Feels Right ............................................................................................. 35

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION ......................................................................................... 39
  Policies and Procedures ............................................................................................. 41
Future Research ........................................................................................................................................... 42
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL .................................................................................................................. 44
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT FLYER ...................................................................................................... 46
APPENDIX C: INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ...................................................................................... 48
  Background and Demographics ................................................................................................................. 49
  Interpretation of Professionalism .............................................................................................................. 49
  Professional in Rhetoric and Composition ............................................................................................... 49
  Decision Making and Rhetorical Context ................................................................................................. 49
  Interview Conclusion ................................................................................................................................ 50
APPENDIX D: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ............................................................................ 51
  Clothing Examination ............................................................................................................................... 52
LIST OF REFERENCES ................................................................................................................................... 53
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Photographs featuring worn-down soles. ................................................................. 15
Figure 2: Scuff marks on inside of a pair of heels, further demonstrating how often they are worn. .... 25
Figure 3: Close-up of gem teddy bear detail on t-shirt. .................................................................. 34
Figure 4: Close up necklace and earrings Hazel staged atop a plain grey sweater. ......................... 35
Figure 5: Close up of patterning and pocket positioning on pair of pants. .......................................... 37
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Self-Reported Demographic Information of Research Participants .................................................. 13
Table 2: Examples of In Vivo Codes and Corresponding Interview Excerpts ............................................. 16
Table 3: Examples of Belief Codes and Corresponding Interview Excerpts .............................................. 18
Table 4: Example Coding of Clothing Artifacts and Accompanying Photographs ....................................... 20
Table 5: Wardrobe Pieces Participants Referred to During Interviews ....................................................... 30
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FYC</td>
<td>First Year Composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>Graduate Teaching Assistant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

There is a general consensus among those who study rhetoric that clothing offers an insight into the rhetorical situation. Further, an understanding amongst rhetoric and composition scholars allows us to read the body, and by extension the attire worn by a body, as text (Mckoy). Temptaous Mckoy’s recent writing surrounding performative strategic attire “as a means to influence behavior and as a result of behaviors” (227) and as a means of self-identification with a group furthers such acknowledgements of the value of studying clothing and dress. As such, in using clothing to demonstrate belonging in groups, we also read the clothing choices of others to gauge various identity-laden qualities, “telling others something about our gender, class, status and so on; on the other [hand], our clothes cannot always be ‘read’, since they do not straightforwardly ‘speak’ and can therefore be open to misinterpretation” (Entwistle 112).

In the academic sphere, one such situation in which individuals attempt to use their clothing to demonstrate identity is in performing the role of instructor. In the field of rhetoric and composition, where the disciplinary lines of the field are already blurred and difficult to pinpoint, novice instructors—graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) or other educators early in their career—are often positioned instructing First Year Composition (FYC) courses to students early in their collegiate careers. In this way, novice instructors especially consider how to navigate what to wear when performing this unfamiliar status in front of a group arriving to a new environment and bringing with them preconceived notions of how college professors should look and act. However, despite texts taught in FYC courses offering the example of instructor’s clothing as an introduction to rhetorical analysis (Carroll 45-46), there is a gap of research focusing on how instructors interpret and enact professional dress standards. I argue that applying an embodied rhetoric approach to investigate the rhetorical choices involved in dressing for the
role of teaching provides further insight into how GTAs produce and perform their status as between two identities: student and teacher.

**Literature Review**

Previous research surrounding the graduate teaching assistant experience spans over various areas, from the training that GTAs receive to their performance in the classroom, and the identity, emotion, and labor involved throughout each step of the GTA’s journey. As such, I organize this literature review under two broad sections. The first section combines research in the areas of identity with the act of teaching as an embodied experience due to how identity impacts performance (Knoblauch and Moeller; Osario) and further how the physical body may display identity (Mckoy). The later section will overview previous research in the labor performed alongside the act of teaching.

**Identity as Embodied Performance**

The primary location of training for a Graduate Teaching Assistant is in the classroom, both as an instructor and as a student themself. Previous scholars have focused on the duality of being a student and teacher and how this friction occurs in the early stages of GTA careers (Grouling; Restaino). Being both a scholar and a teacher means navigating what GTAs might consider as two distinct identities (Grouling). More recently, the position of a GTA has been understood as being liminal, as GTAs continuously straddle between realms of academia, alternating between student and teacher (Campbell and Fiscus-Cannaday; Donegan; Lambrecht; Maurer and Matzker, with Dively).

Being in a liminal space means that a GTA at times is enacting one identity more than the other while simultaneously not fully belonging to either identity of student or teacher. This can be especially present in how GTAs navigate authority and relationships with faculty, and the tension accompanied by GTAs’ perceptions of “an us/them dichotomy between TAs and faculty. The ‘us’ is always striving to be ‘them,’ and ‘us’ can only be successfully cross into the desired dominant space with the assistance of
‘them’” (Maurer and Matzker, with Dively 90). Accompanying the liminality of GTAs is the varying degrees of power which they hold over themselves and others. As such, the fully actualized identity of teacher is out of reach. A GTA is not in the position of power that a faculty member would be, since a GTA is still in the position of trying to secure employment (Donegan 114). These identities of student vs teacher are relational and socially constructed in that the internalized turmoil brought by the liminal status accompanies the attention to how other GTAs and faculty perceive identities, further enforcing how GTAs see themselves (Maurer and Matzker, with Dively 91). Additionally, a GTA’s pedagogical performance can be understood as being composed of both their own disciplinary positioning to their field and their orientation to their students, furthering the idea that GTAs are situated in relation to others (Campbell and Fiscus-Cannaday).

This liminal position is not always a negative, and some scholars seek to dismantle such presumptions by empowering GTAs to take advantage of this in-between time (Maurer and Matzker, with Dively; Lambrecht). Kylee Thacker Maurer and Faith Matzker, with Rhonda Leathers Dively, propose that if GTAs identify and acknowledge the liminality of their position, they can further embrace the transition between identities of student and teacher, while “Conversely, experiencing liminality without being able to identify or understand it can lead to higher levels of stress and anxiety for GTAs, while increasing the sense of imposterhood they may feel” (85). Similarly, Kathryn M. Lambrecht invites GTAs to incorporate their dual identities into their teaching, by focusing on how being a student, embodying the “same messy state of learning as our students” (135) can strengthen a GTA’s agency and efficacy, moving away from imposter syndrome. In their in-between state, GTAs “have access to expertise without being defined by it, to understand the process of learning content they are themselves seeking to learn” (Lambrecht 137). For some GTAs brand new to the field, the liminality they face can provide them with a recursive relationship of disciplinary knowledge informing teaching and vice versa (Campbell and Fiscus-Cannaday 37).
The liminality GTAs experience between their roles in academia is just one aspect of their embodied and intersectional identities. Deciding how much of one’s other identities to disclose becomes a challenge, especially when marginalized aspects of identity could become weaponized against the instructor (Donegan). In their addendum to a previously published letter to GTAs, Elizabeth Saur and Jason Palmeri argue that as instructors, aspects of ourselves cannot be fully separated from our interactions with students, “Because teachers are human, teachers have bodies and these bodies are differently positioned. Our embodied positionalities (including race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and age) strongly influence the emotional interactions we have with students” (150). Lambrecht furthers the call to acknowledge the embodied experiences of GTAs in concert with their liminality, noting that in order to have agency as a GTA, we must acknowledge how agency depends “on the relationship humans have with their thoughts, their practices, and ultimately their actions” (138). Recognizing the embodied experiences of GTAs includes giving attention to how GTAs stand on the border of seemingly dichotomous positions. The performance involved in such embodied states, thus, is a form of labor.

Teaching as Complex Labor

Being between identities of student and teacher means that, in addition to their own academic pursuit of a graduate degree, GTAs must balance a complex workload and labor as novice instructors. Many scholars acknowledge and record the arduous and varied workload faced by GTAs (Bowen; Dall’Alba; Dryer; Hodkinson and Hodkinson; Lutkewitte et al.; Restaino). Some scholars focus on the more tangible elements of work faced by GTAs (Dryer; Hodkinson and Hodkinson; Restaino) and offer new approaches to GTA training (Grouling; Lutkewitte et al.; Restaino), while others take a more philosophical approach to the process of “becoming” an instructor (Bowen; Dall’Alba). Additionally, scholars recognize that in forming their professional identities (Bowen), novice instructors must also determine how their appearance aids or inhibits their identity creation process (Gurung, et al.; Tsaousi).
Being that GTAs are learning in both graduate course classrooms and the classrooms they run, workplace learning is an additional form of labor faced by GTAs and novice instructors alike (Hodkinson and Hodkinson). Jessica Restaino describes the classroom both as a site of “appearances” and “work’ in the sense that they routinely create a kind of lasting record of instruction through syllabi, assignments, grades, and even instructional strategies or lesson concepts” (55). These “appearances” further materialize under the ideas of professionalism and concepts of professionalism which, along with identity itself, is in a constant state of flux (Dall’Alba). Further, balancing between the perceived changes in behavior necessitated by professionalism and staying true to oneself requires an ongoing act of renegotiating boundaries (Bowen). This is an incredibly complex and hidden labor that occurs alongside other recognizable labor-intensive tasks like grading.

The duality of being both a graduate student and a teacher means learning two distinct sets of genres and skills, acquiring not only those of someone new to graduate school and the discipline of rhetoric and composition but to someone new to teaching in general (Grouling). Novice instructors may focus on the gaps of knowledge in the day-to-day handling of class which cannot be fully explained through the academic literature presented in practicum courses (Restaino). While aspects of instruction necessitate hands-on practice, the perceived unknowns of teaching can create a sense of anxiety and desperation in GTAs (Restaino). Claire Lutkewitte, Juliette C. Kitchens, and Molly J. Scanlon provide three concrete suggestions to improve the conditions of graduate students in the field of rhetoric and composition: develop more support resources, formalize professional development, and capture the day-to-day life activities of new faculty.

Regular, daily experiences in the classroom provide a site for learning about the act of teaching. Taking GTAs’ liminal positioning into account while improving their relationship to the act of teaching, Lillian Campbell and Jaclyn Fiscus-Cannaday bring attention to embodiment and performance as areas that novice instructors should account for in their daily teaching practices. Analyzing recorded
instructional sessions of four FYC GTAs, Campbell and Fiscus-Cannaday categorized pedagogical performances as constructed by GTAs’ disciplinary positioning and their orientation to their students. In the case of novice instructors, disciplinary positioning and orientation to students can be shaped directly by GTAs’ adherence to departmental writing program expectations and previous experiences as students (Campbell and Fiscus-Cannaday 48). The pedagogical performances, thus, are influenced by GTAs’ embodiment, from the way they physically move around the classroom and gestures used in explaining concepts to the experiences and ideologies which they have been exposed to and carry on, emphasizing GTAs’ teaching and scholarly identities (Campbell and Fiscus-Cannaday 57).

In addition to the typical workload expected of GTAs, such as the day-to-day teaching of a class, handling classroom management, navigating institutional bureaucracy, and entering disciplinary conversations (Grouling; Restaino), the invisible labor of determining what is considered professionalism in the field of rhetoric and composition exists in the background of every decision that novice instructors make. Further, the term professional is heavily imbedded with cultural notions, influenced by the individual’s upbringing and experiences. That means that without a clear or established outline of what this ambiguous expectation means, novice instructors are left in the dark, having to assume that they are interpreting the expectations of professionalism correctly until someone tells them otherwise. The perceived stakes of such faux pas can add to the stress faced by novice instructors navigating the new rhetorical situation.

Professionalism is an ambiguous term, complicated by continuously shifting social contexts (Bowen; Dall’Alba), personal experiences, and cultural interpretations. Understanding one’s role as a professional in academia proves challenging due to the “mystifications of power” (Mohanty 171) which conceals the novice instructors’ observations of “academic cultural values” that in turn are “often invisible, visible only when one keenly observes the academy’s member’s everyday actions, rituals, and practices” (Lutkewitte et al. 101). To aid in the demystification of such values, Lutkewitte et al. write
under their suggestions for formalizing professional development that “professional development is not just about growth and improvement in regard to one’s job responsibilities. It should and can be rhetorical acts that aid in one’s development as a professional through the experimentation and evaluation of possible selves” (163) and invite graduate students and experienced faculty to partner in campus professional development centers and mentorship programs. Jule Wallis and Adrienne Jankens echo such calls for mentorship programs, adding that these should be collaborative programs providing various opportunities and sites for learning.

Similar to the negotiation of identity and professionalism faced by GTAs, in order to grade, the instructor must balance their own ideals, understandings, and anxieties surrounding academic writing (Dryer). In this we can account for how GTAs embody their new role as instructor and how emotion and labor are intertwined in the process of teaching, as Saur and Palmeri preview:

Both in and out of the classroom, your life as a teacher is likely to be awash in complex, messy emotions: anxiety that students won’t respect you or won’t be engaged; rushes of joy when you see a student understand a complex idea and run with it; moments of exhaustion when you stare down a stack of papers; frustration when the students just don’t get it; laughter when they get it in a way you weren’t expecting; anger when a student says something offensive and hurtful; pride after a class session where conversation flows in a joyful and easy way. (147)

In these ways, we can begin to see how the embodied existence, the myriad of identities which compose GTAs and the liminality of being in between the identities of student and teacher, integrate themselves into the complex labor of performing the role of composition instructor. My work serves to expand the conversation of how GTAs cross between identities of student and teacher and how our understanding of these embodied acts can extend to the rhetorical choices in dress made by novice instructors.
Research Questions

Given what we know about novice instructors' identity, liminality, and work, this study seeks to understand how new composition instructors use clothing and related artifacts to mediate the creation of teaching personas through the following questions:

1. How do GTAs and recently graduated instructors leverage their understanding of their intersectional identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, and status/rank, to perform their new status as composition instructors?

2. How do GTAs and recently graduated instructors use their understanding of their intersectional self-identities to interpret professionalism in their new roles as composition instructors?

3. How do GTAs and recently graduated instructors use their interpretations of professionalism to inform their use of dress to fashion/create what they perceive as professional within a teaching setting?

Understanding how novice instructors use clothing to manage their new identity as composition instructors, along with traversing their new status as authority figures, can give us insight into the complex labor performed by GTAs. By studying the internalized decisions of novice instructors navigating their new identities, we can move towards more equitable practices, in the process interrogating the idea of what it means to be “professional.” Through locating concrete stories, made possible through qualitative research methods, I hope to locate the prior expectations imparted both by the institution, as voiced through department and program leads, and the novice instructors themselves. This research will allow me to investigate the early academic persona creation of novice composition instructors, which is a much-needed addition to the understanding of the disciplinary lives of novice instructors in the field of rhetoric and composition.
Beyond this introduction, my second chapter will contextualize the theoretical lens of embodied rhetoric through which I approach this work, alongside the research methods which guide my study.

Following are two chapters of analysis, separated as 1) recognition of existing structures and 2) production of existing structures. While these are two distinct aspects that lend themselves to their own dedicated chapters, the lines between these two strategies blur as one informs the other. Finally, this study concludes with a chapter revisiting my research questions, offering suggestions for future policies and procedures, and anticipating future research trajectories, all in the service of representing how dress is a material and visual space where the liminality plays out.
CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

This chapter is composed of two major sections: theory and methods. The proceeding theory section provides an overview of how I combine works from the interdisciplinary field of fashion studies with theories of embodied rhetoric. I believe that the interdisciplinary nature of fashion studies provides a natural flexibility for use in this study. Furthermore, since rhetoric itself is largely accepted as difficult to define, I invite and embrace the blurriness of boundaries into a study situated on the liminality of GTAs and novice instructors.

Theory

This study applies the rhetorical framework of embodied rhetorics to borrowed methods from the interdisciplinary field of fashion studies. Accordingly, I am using Joanne Entwistle’s definitions in *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress & Modern Social Theory*—“‘dress’ as an activity of clothing the body with an aesthetic element (as in ‘adornment’) and ‘fashion’ as a specific system of dress” (48)—in that I use the term *dress* to describe how instructors prepare their bodies for work. This extends beyond the items of clothing instructors choose to how they wear them—the ways in which items of clothing fit their bodies and are accompanied by additional items. In their introductory chapter to *Bodies of Knowledge*, A. Abby Knoblauch and Marie E. Moeller remind us that bodies are more than mere objects and are “socially constructed, technologically mediated and constructed, deconstructed, reconstructed, constrained, damaged” (7). Clothing, then, is one way in which we traverse the complexities of the body.

The choice to apply embodied rhetorics to this study followed previous considerations for applying a framework of visual rhetorics. As Ruth Osario reminds us, multiple frameworks such as visual rhetorics, performative rhetorics, and embodied rhetorics entangle and overlap in studies of the body (155). In acknowledging how my own position as a woman of color in academia impacts the ways in
which I create knowledge, I choose to follow the call for using the lens of embodied rhetoric as a means of understanding the rhetorical power of intersectional identities (Knoblauch and Moeller; Osorio).

**Methods**

My methods section is further split in three parts: data collection, coding, and considerations. Under data collection, I detail how I recruited participants, provide an overview of my participants (Table 1), and describe the interview process. Additionally, I offer further insight into how I adapted previous fashion studies methodologies in the creation of my study. In the coding section, I explain how I dissected my interviewee’s responses and present examples of the codes I created alongside respective interview excerpts (Table 2 and Table 3). I end this section with a sample table of the additional work done in analyzing material artifacts brought in by my research participants (Table 4). Finally, the considerations section serves to ground my methodological choices as being attune to embodied rhetoric and acknowledges limitations in my sample size.

**Data Collection**

Due to the humanistic nature of the questions being investigated in this study, qualitative research methods are preferable to examine the individual perspectives of research participants. I conducted two rounds of interviews in early January, with recruitment beginning in late November of the previous calendar year. My sample groups of novice composition instructors fell under two groups: 1) current GTAs and 2) visiting instructors who have graduated within the last year and served as GTAs in the previous academic year. Among the current GTAs were two first-time GTAs and one returning GTA who had taught the previous academic year. I recruited participants through my own pre-existing social channels and attended a Teaching Circle to introduce my project to first year GTAs alongside emailing and leaving flyers in the mailboxes and GTA offices (see Appendix B for recruitment flyer). All interview
participants taught as part of the FYC program run by the Department of Writing and Rhetoric and instructed ENC1101 and/or ENC1102 at the time of the interviews.

The first interview focused on participants’ personal interpretations of the rhetorical situation of teaching, their understanding of the term professionalism, their perceptions of expectations, and their own experiences which build into these interpretations (see Appendix C for initial interview questions). As part of the initial interview, I collected demographic information for each of my interviewees, which I collate in the table below (Table 1).
Table 1: Self-Reported Demographic Information of Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Born/Raised</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
<th>Professional Influences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Peoria, IL</td>
<td>Visiting Instructor, Previous GTA</td>
<td>Work: retail industry (bridal/dress shop, menswear store)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Familial: mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peaches</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black, African American</td>
<td>Miami, FL</td>
<td>Visiting Instructor, Previous GTA</td>
<td>Work: campus jobs, leasing agent, cashier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Familial: parents, mother of close friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killian</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>England; New Mexico; Florida Panhandle</td>
<td>Visiting Instructor, Previous GTA</td>
<td>Work: fast food, barista, substitute teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Familial: military father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazel</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Female in formal settings, nonbinary in some informal settings</td>
<td>Hispanic, Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Bayamón, Puerto Rico</td>
<td>Current GTA, second year teaching</td>
<td>Work: fast food, customer service, leasing agent, School: uniforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iris</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Clearwater/Tampa area of Florida</td>
<td>Current GTA, first year teaching</td>
<td>Work: lifeguard, server, front desk assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacy</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian, Vietnamese</td>
<td>Chicago, IL; New Smyrna Beach, FL</td>
<td>Current GTA, first year teaching</td>
<td>Work: medical assistant, internship at Fortune 500 company, Familial: immigrant parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In accordance with proper Institutional Review Board standards, all participants received pseudonyms to protect their identities. Demographic responses were broadened slightly for the purposes of this chart to reduce the amount of identifiable information and further protect the identity of my interviewees. For instance, I label age in years at time of the interview rather than include birthdates, and I name type of work rather than the specific names of places where participants worked. Further contextualizing the category “current position,” GTAs instruct a course load of two sessions (first-year teachers also take nine credit hours, and second-year teachers may be completing their thesis research or studying under an adjacent PhD program) and visiting instructors carry a course load of four sessions. The category of
current position does not account for any additional jobs or positions at other institutions that participants might have held at the time of our interview.

The second interview shifted focus to the embodied aspects of professionalism (see Appendix D for second interview questions). Previous research in the field of fashion studies informed the second round of interviews (Smith and Yates; Woodward). My interview method for understanding values about dress borrowed from Woodward’s wardrobe interviews and Smith and Yates’ exploration of clothing-empowered confidence. Woodward’s methods are useful for understanding the depth and complexity of clothing as mediating the self. Smith and Yates emphasize the power for clothing choices to impact the mood of the wearer. As such, I asked interview participants to bring in examples of clothing artifacts which they use to create their teaching persona, explaining to them that these artifacts should be ones in which the participants feel confident and at ease within their new identity as composition instructor. I left open the choice to bring in an outfit or a singular piece of clothing. One participant, Hazel, went so far as to submit three separate outfits. All participants but Iris returned for a second interview.

The second round of interviews further grounded the embodied practices of dressing and persona creation, in accordance with Woodward’s call to study dress as an embodied experience. Woodward warns, “Reducing clothing to its visual properties ignores the crucial tactile and sensual aspects of clothing as worn by people” (27). To account for the limitations of translating material objects into textual descriptions and avoiding the simplification of clothing as purely visual, I ask participants to provide rich descriptions of their clothing in addition to recording pieces through photographs. This included describing the fit and feel of items and the materials from which they are made. As such, participants’ verbal, detailed accounts were valued over traditional visual rhetorical coding to more accurately represent the participant’s emotional and physical connections to the clothing. Since I conducted each of their interviews virtually, Hazel and Killian submitted their clothing artifacts staged and photographed by themselves. Meeting in person allotted the opportunity to pose the items in the
photographs for Grace, Peaches, and Stacy. This allowed for focus on details like the worn-down soles of shoes, to further emphasize the habitual use of the items they referred to during the interview (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Photographs featuring worn-down soles.

Coding

Following the transcription of my interviews, I began the time and labor-intensive coding process. The combination of both epistemological and ontological questions asked of my interviewees evoked the need to apply multiple coding techniques (Saldaña). I determined values coding in conjunction with in vivo coding to be the most efficacious combination. These coding methods allowed a more holistic approach to view participants’ values, attitudes, and beliefs (beliefs coding) towards professionalism and clothing while also valuing the exact words and phrases used by participants (in vivo coding) when I felt that the participants offered a more astute insight into the phenomena (Saldaña). Below are some instances of in vivo codes developed across the interviews (Table 2).
Table 2: Examples of In Vivo Codes and Corresponding Interview Excerpts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Vivo Code</th>
<th>Excerpts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“PROFESSIONALIZE YOUR PERSONALITY”</td>
<td>“… you can learn how to be professional. And like, I guess professionalize your personality in a sense” - Peaches, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m a person with a personality, you know, right, outside of just being their professor. I think I definitely convey that a lot with what I wear and how I talk to my students as well.” - Peaches, Interview 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I feel like the clothes that I work in can be a little bit more of a reflection of myself.” - Killian, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“HIDDEN LENIENCY”</td>
<td>“There are a lot of expectations that are set out for you, like, boundaries that are made clear, but if those boundaries are broken, there is an understanding, um, that you are a first-year-composition instructor, and those things happen. So, even though that boundary has been broken, it’s—there’s, like, that hidden leniency of this is like a learning experience” - Killian, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I was also a student at the time, so I would kind of be, uh, more lenient with what I wore… I could wear certain styles of clothing that will kind of be, you know, on the fence, you know, because I was a student so I could kind of push those boundaries.” - Peaches, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“INTERACTION”</td>
<td>“I have control of their grades, but I also want to show respect for them in this sense.” - Peaches, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I think I’ve almost gotten more strict with what professionalism looks like, um, not on my end but more on the end of students and expectations for… how students interact with me and each other in the classroom” - Killian, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I think, in terms of professionalism, pretty much just be courteous. Be respectful, um, of that rhetorical situation of the people you’re around, of people you’re with, and where you are as well” - Iris, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“FIT IN”</td>
<td>“I think growing up as an immigrant who was always trying to fit in to school, and, like, understanding what it meant to fit in to, like, American, like, professional or academic settings is how I developed my sense of professionalism.” - Stacy, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m very bubbly and very outspoken… I don’t know if people would think I will fit in well for being a professor” - Peaches, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“there’s a part of me that feels like I’ll never fit in.” - Stacy, Interview 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beliefs coding required extra attention in determining the difference between values (the importance the individual attributes), attitudes (the way the individual thinks), and beliefs (the interplay of values, attitudes, experiences, and perceptions) (Saldaña). Unsurprisingly, due to the socio-cultural implications of professionalism, most of my belief coding resulted in BELIEF codes due to the
multifaceted nature of the participants’ responses. Belief codes encompass a wide array of experiences and observations (Table 3).
Table 3: Examples of Belief Codes and Corresponding Interview Excerpts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs Code</th>
<th>Excerpts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VALUE: SEPARATE SELF FROM STUDENT IDENTITY</td>
<td>“shows that I’m someone in, uh, not a prominent position, but I’m in a different position from the rest of the students” – Peaches, Interview 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I think that I should always look more professional than my students.” – Grace, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m afraid of, like, getting thought of as a student” – Stacy, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I try not to look like a student, even though I’m a grad student. I try not to look like an undergraduate student” – Iris, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTITUDE: RACE AND ETHNICITY AS NUANCED</td>
<td>“…I’m African American, like, a Black woman in America...there’s so many ways that you could say that” – Peaches, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…lineage wise, I’m kind of a good mix of European countries” – Grace, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Um, in terms of race, that’s always a weird question for me. Usually, they only let you put Black or White.” – Hazel, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“So, I’m Vietnamese, which falls under Asian” – Stacy, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BELIEF: AGE/YOUTH AS DETRIMENTS TO AUTHORITY</td>
<td>“…you are being a person who is in front of ... college students and being so young.” – Peaches, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I am so young, and my students are closer in age to me than most of my colleagues right now” – Peaches, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“they just turned 18, some of them are seniors and they could be like two, three years younger than me” – Grace, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I do want to be, like, mature for, like, my age, maybe even appear, like, older in some ways.” – Grace, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I feel like that rule kind of comes from wanting to, like, set a stage of, like, this is still a college classroom and I’m still in charge, especially because I am so young.” – Killian, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BELIEF: DRESS AS LIABILITY</td>
<td>“I can’t really have any, like, negative things coming from the way I dress” – Grace, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There’s certain things that I could not necessarily do or wear, um, that kind of interrupts or impedes my professionalism or how I’m seen professionally” – Peaches, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I think I’m more cautious of how, um, colleagues perceive [my dress choice]...more of like, oh, if somebody sees me wearing this, are they going to be, like, he’s not taking this seriously because he’s not dressed nicely, um, enough” – Killian, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I want to appear as professional as possible, so I get hired back” – Stacy, Interview 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I conducted two rounds of manual coding, with the first round focused on each individual interview. In the proceeding round of coding, I refined codes for clarity and consistency across the 11
interviews (6 first interviews and 5 second interviews). In some instances, belief codes were combined with in vivo codes. An example of this would be the in vivo code “PROFESSIONALIZE YOUR PERSONALITY” receiving the addition of excerpts initially categorized under the beliefs code ATTITUDE: SELF-EXPRESSION.

While the first interviews focused primarily on the beliefs of the participants, thus relied more heavily on beliefs coding, the second interviews were yet another hybridization of coding methods. In addition to the above methodology, I coded the second interviews’ descriptions of the associated clothing artifacts under the following labels: PATTERNS/COLORS, FIT, WEAR, PERSONAL CONNECTION, and WITHIN RULES. PATTERNS/COLORS refers to the visual properties of the clothing. FIT refers to the physical properties of the clothing on the body, such as the cut of the clothing and the feeling of materials, whereas WEAR refers to the physical deterioration of items (as in the wear of shoes in Figure 1). PERSONAL CONNECTION refers to any emotional/sentimentality placed on the pieces, as well as the participants’ understandings of how the artifacts attend to their individuality and personality. Finally, WITHIN RULES harkens back to the participants self-appointed rules in dress as described in their initial interview. Each participants’ clothing artifacts received an individual coding in this way. As such, the chart below demonstrates the coding process for clothing artifacts alongside the photographed piece, in this case Peaches’ clothing artifacts (Table 4).
Table 4: Example Coding of Clothing Artifacts and Accompanying Photographs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clothing Qualities</th>
<th>Excerpts and Observations</th>
<th>Photograph</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PATTERNS/COLORS</td>
<td>Skirt: Brown, flower and lace details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shirt: brown, bedazzled teddy bear in the middle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIT</td>
<td>Skirt: “long and flowing dress” hitting above the ankle, lower-calf</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEAR</td>
<td>Skirt: “it’s kind of faded”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sandals: “I’ve had for, like, years,” with visible wear on soles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I want to say the whole ‘fit itself is something that I always go for. It’s basic, it’s good, you know. It’s perfect for me.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL CONNECTION</td>
<td>Teddy bear signifying “childness, child-like personality about myself”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bracelets got on a trip in GA and one in her favorite color given by her niece → accessories are a way for her hold on to these aspects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WITHIN RULES</td>
<td>“Making sure everything’s covered, right. And making sure that it’s appropriate”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considerations

Using embodied rhetoric as the lens through which we view dress provides an organic progression of fashion studies given that “Embodied rhetorics are...multilayered, encompassing linguistic and textual markers of the body, the body itself as rhetoric, discussions of visual or textual representations of the body, and bodily communicative practices” (Knoblauch and Moeller 10). Thus, by allowing for research participants to share their embodied experiences in the liminal space between realms of academia—student or instructor, novice or expert—I can honor both embodied rhetorics’ attention to discussions of the body and the previous research methodologies of similar wardrobe- and clothing-centered research in fashion studies. By valuing the language used by participants, through the adoption of in vivo coding and the inclusion of interview excerpts, I emphasize the ways in which novice instructors exist and the “specificity and corporeality in the production and expression of knowledge” (Knoblauch and Moeller 9). It should be noted that while the following two chapters intend to analyze and expand on the responses of Grace, Peaches, Killian, Hazel, Iris, and Stacey, I acknowledge the
limitations of interviewing such a small sample size located at a single institution. The next chapter analyzes participants’ acknowledgements of pre-existing structures and conventions of professionalism, followed by a chapter on how and when participants abide by these expectations.
CHAPTER THREE: RECOGNITION OF EXISTING STRUCTURES

In order to understand the interpretations of professionalism constructed by each of my participants, I analyzed both how they directly responded to such questions in our establishing interview (see Appendix C) and how they reacted and retold their stories about teaching with the knowledge held and produced through their bodies (Knoblauch and Moeller 11). In the discussion of these standards, a theme of “dress as liability” emerged, aligning with the idea that the position of a GTA and novice instructor is not only a job title but a socially constructed role realized through the acknowledgement of others (Maurer and Matsker, with Dively 91). This aligns with previous notions that “Dressing involves situating the self in a social context, and so the clothing codes of social occasions allow the enactment of particular identities” (Woodward 141).

Three main themes of expectations and structures emerged under which I categorize the revelations of my interviewees: acknowledgement of patriarchal structures, age and perceptions of youth, and height as status and power. Acknowledging the tensions of existing in a nonnormative body in academia, e.g. outside of the middle-to-upper-class, white, cisgendered and heterosexual able-bodied male assumed to be academic (Knoblauch and Moeller; Mohanty), I place acknowledgement of patriarchal structures in the beginning of my analysis. Recognition of existing structures, then, becomes a way for us to unpack the ways in which my interviewees notice and interpret the elements of the new rhetorical context in which they find themselves. This academic context is by its nature one with patriarchal roots, and in acknowledging and recognizing these elements, we can begin to expand notions of who and what belongs in professionalism. Being in this liminal state of professionalism for these novice teachers of FYC required them to first recognize the existing structures which they then produced in an ongoing negotiation of existing structures through dress.
Acknowledgement of Patriarchal Standards

In our first interview, Grace remarked upon the two main influences on her interpretation of professionalism: “I feel like a lot of [my understanding of professionalism] comes from understanding both, like, my gender and my age.” This level of awareness, without quite naming what “professionalism” is, persisted in several other interviews. In this sense, it might be said that the inability to precisely define professionalism can be best described by Killian’s acknowledgment of his own background as a white male from a military family as creating the need for himself to deconstruct professionalism. Killian described the professionalism clearly as “something that is so culturally and socially constructed…an abstract notion that really doesn’t have any meaning outside of the context.” Further, he breaks down professionalism into two categories, “presentation” and “interaction,” which became in vivo codes for this analysis.

Patriarchal standards particularly emerge when one considers how a body read as female is expected to exist in “professional” settings. The belief in covering the body proves so pervasive that every female participant who mentioned it did so repeatedly. Iris, in addition to naming coverage specifically as “modesty” describes the expectations of dress, specifically of what not to wear, as gendered, giving the example of a mini skirt. It is interesting that such a piece comes to mind when her example of appropriate dress was “the suit and tie kind of thing, except I’m not a guy.” The attitudes displayed by Iris showcase the mythos of professionalism, extending to the role of professor, as being masculine by default. When Iris describes suitable dress as “modest—you can wear what you want, as long as it fringes on professional…still maintaining that modesty,” she is foregrounding the importance of concealing portions of the body. Professionalism and modesty seem to be linked for Iris. This is not a conversation which Killian engaged in, perhaps because the whole “suit and tie kind of thing” (Iris) and the Indiana Jones (Killian) look cover the male body which, historically, has not been sexualized to the same degree as the female body.
Age and Perceptions of Youth

Enforcing the liminal positioning between student and teacher, youthful appearance is often considered an indicator of student status. Throughout my interviews, age consistently appeared across participant responses as a potential detriment to authority, with participants expressing a desire to visibly separate themselves from the image of a student. Aside from the complications of occupying a new space of authority, the nature of teaching FYC alters how age is perceived amongst students, many of whom are in their burgeoning stages of adulthood. For some of these novice instructors, their proximity to graduation—not only from their master’s degrees but from undergraduate as well, impacts how close in age they are to their students, “they just turned 18, some of them are seniors and they could be like two, three years younger than me” (Grace). Peaches calls attention to the age gap she faces in relation to her faculty colleagues as impacted by her status as a recently hired visiting instructor: “I am so young, and my students are closer in age to me than most of my colleagues right now.”

My interviewees expressed a need to separate themselves from students, both the FYC students of their classrooms and their own identities as students. Grace remarks, “I do want to be, like, mature for, like, my age, maybe even appear, like, older in some ways.” Physical presentations and student interactions provide GTAs the chance to create such separations. One tenet in achieving this distinction from students is in the level of formality in dress, “I think that I should always look more professional than my students” (Grace). One of my interviewees in her first year as a GTA expressed some anxiety over the prospect of being confused for a student (Stacy), with my other first-year GTA participant emphasizing that “I try not to look like a student, even though I’m a grad student. I try not to look like an undergraduate student” (Iris). This distinction between graduate student and undergraduate student is interesting and adds nuance to the complexities of navigating identities, as a GTA does not only walk along the dichotomy of student and teacher, but also account for the experiences that split the novice undergraduate from the closer-to-expertise of the graduate student.
Height as Status and Power

To physically be positioned as lower than students was seen as a detriment to authority in the already precarious and liminal position of a GTA or novice instructor. For women, particularly those of short stature, this is especially pronounced in the face of patriarchal assumptions of authority. Grace and Stacy both make a point to wear shoes with heels or platforms on a regular basis, physically wearing down their shoes in the process. Grace remarks upon the physical pain caused by breaking in a new pair of shoes on her first day teaching. Stacy remarks on the metaphorical way she views her shoes, as both being comfortable but worrisome and making her mindful of how she fits into spaces. Stacy’s heels in particular show significant wear given that this pair she reserves specifically for the teaching context, of which she has been involved for just over a semester at the time of our interview (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Scuff marks on inside of a pair of heels, further demonstrating how often they are worn.

Additionally, Grace remarked that she felt her femininity came through most clearly in her shoe choice. This remark is of interest because it followed a description of her button-down shirt being formed for a feminine body. This would indicate a separation between the embodied aspects of femininity, e.g., being fitted for a women’s body, and the stylistic interpretations of heels as feminine. However, the embodied practice of wearing heels, modifying the physical property of height, is seen as feminine. Meanwhile, Hazel mentioned her perception of standard embodied authority in the classroom
includes the instructor standing at the front of the classroom. Hazel, however, prefers to sit at the lectern and computer. She described this as both practical, in that she wouldn’t want to physically stand for that long, and as a conscious yet suitable shift against the westernized power dynamics of the classroom.

These existing structures represent institutional values which are rooted in Western, patriarchal traditions of the academy, which further complicate the liminality which GTAs and novice instructors, especially female-presenting ones, navigate. The various ways in which novice instructors recognize existing structures, in terms of academic expectations and contextualizing professionalism, guide the performance of the status and role of instructor. The recognition of existing structures, then, extends to production of existing structures in the rhetorical choices made by novice instructors in their dress.
CHAPTER FOUR: PRODUCTION OF EXISTING STRUCTURES

The novice instructors of my study, both directly and indirectly, discussed how they produce dress choices given their recognition of existing structures. In this way, we can see dress as an extension of “pedagogical performance” (Campbell and Fiscus-Cannaday), the embodiment of how instructors enact their teaching personas. Various studies within and outside of rhetoric and composition use variations of the term embody (Campbell and Fiscus-Cannaday; Lambrecht; Mckoy; Woodward), with Mckoy offering “I employ embodiment as a way to refer to how individuals evoke their identity through the physical body to proclaim who they are and what they represent” (220). In this way, we can see how instructors’ negotiation of existing structures produces dress and can be read as representations of the institution’s values.

In the analysis of these productions, and in discussing specific clothing artifacts in the second interview (see Appendix D), I forefront that rules are a key aspect of dressing rhetorically, due to their ubiquity in social structures:

Different situations impose different ways of dressing, sometimes by imposing ‘rules’ or codes of dress or sometimes simply through conventions that most people adhere to most of the time…Even when individuals choose to ignore such codes of dress, they are likely at least to be aware of the pressure to conform and that their decision not to do so might be read as rebellious. (Entwistle 49)

The “rules” which establish the basis of dress come from both implicit and explicit direction. My interviewees did not always name particular rules but recognized the expectations which would lead to such rules, as outlined in the previous chapter. The negotiation of rules seems to align with previous work in fashion studies, in that “The clothes we choose to wear represent a compromise between the demands of the social world, the milieu in which we belong, and our own individual desires” (Entwistle
114) and “women often use normative dress codes not to repress who they ‘really’ are, but as a means to expand upon themselves” (Woodward 140).

Novice instructors leverage their previous experiences as students and the observations they have made about teachers and instructors in deciding how to navigate classrooms (Campbell and Fiscus-Cannaday). Drawing from their experiences and observations made within and outside of our department, GTAs heavily rely on the signals they receive when deciding how to dress among other techniques. One such way they negotiate such boundaries is through leveraging a “borrowed ethos,” or sense of credibility gained through dress, which my participants produced as a strategy to negotiate the dress as liability mentioned in the recognition of existing structures. As this chapter demonstrates, novice instructors mediate their dress through existing structures in part by how they follow the “rules,” “professionalize [their] personality,” and wear what feels right. The rules serve as an invention strategy integral to the production of existing structures. At times, the lines between recognition and production are blurred, paralleling the liminality of the novice instructor.

**Follow the “Rules”**

As part of our first interview (see Appendix C), I asked my participants whether they followed any rules in dressing for work and where such rules might come from, be it their own upbrings or implicit or explicit departmental guidance. My second interview (see Appendix D) asked that participants recall the “rules” which they cited in their first interview as guiding their dress choice and apply them to their chosen artifacts. Interviewees formed these rules through the interpretations of recognized existing structures rather than prescribed guidelines.

Grace remarked in our first interview that “it’s not, like, a list like that,” referring to the standards of dress in the department. The alternative to a list, and observed reality, is vague descriptions, including the anecdote that Killian shared of our department chair advising to wear funeral clothes if those are the
only nice clothes one owns. He further shared that “orientation wise, I feel like it’s been very stressed that you should always dress, like, nicely and professionally.” Others described this form of dress as “business casual” (Stacy) or, circuitously, “I will come to the work environment dressed like I am going to the work environment” (Iris). I compiled the table below based on items directly mentioned in interviews and brought to the second interview as artifacts. These are what my participants believe to be professional wear appropriate for the teaching context.
### Table 5: Wardrobe Pieces Participants Referred to During Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wardrobe Pieces</th>
<th>Mentioned by</th>
<th>Images</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Button-ups</td>
<td>Killian, Grace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweaters</td>
<td>Grace, Killian, Hazel, Iris</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blouses, “nice” or “professional” shirts</td>
<td>Stacy, Hazel, Peaches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slacks, dress pants</td>
<td>Peaches, Grace, Killian, Hazel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skirts</td>
<td>Peaches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above articles of clothing allow the wearer to distinguish themselves in the role of an instructor and “Make sure they see you as a teacher and a professor rather than just, like, another student in the classroom” (Iris). Some of these wardrobe pieces are inherently gendered, e.g., skirts, blouses, and heels. Further, the notion of appropriate coverage applies to these gendered wardrobe pieces. The male participant did not make mention of coverage, but all female participants did, with one participant insinuating how her fuller figure and the sexualization of it made her more aware of staying covered. This idea of modesty seems to go back to school dress codes, with a few of the female participants directly naming school as an influence of their “professional” wardrobe. It should further be noted, however, that at times participants would defend their decisions as personal, with the caveat that they don’t necessarily expect their colleagues to dress in the same manner. This indicates an acknowledgement that in addition to being culturally and socially nuanced as a whole, the application of professionalism on the individual level will inherently demonstrate variations.

Several participants mentioned jeans as an item they transition into as the semester progresses, leading one to believe that jeans live in between the types of casual. While some admitted to wearing
jeans once they felt more comfortable with the level of authority and classroom management they had achieved through more traditionally professional dress, I did not include jeans in the compendium of clothing (Table 5). This is because the wearing of jeans seems to be related to confidence in the position. For instance, when describing at large how others in the department and across campus dressed, jeans were mentioned when describing some of the more relaxed professors. The position of a GTA, however, is not a relaxed one.

The casual nature of jeans was further emphasized as a comparison against what more experienced instructors could get away with, so to speak. This was enforced, to a memorable degree, during teaching orientation, with the department head addressing that while the composition coordinator is old enough and experienced enough to wear jeans without his authority being questioned, GTAs should not wear jeans in the beginning of the semester. This was one of the few cases of explicit direction in dress. Iris traversed this boundary through implementing a “casual Friday” standard in which she wears “jeans and a nice sweater.” The taking of corporate lingo into the academic workplace is an interesting connection, especially since Iris was one of the few participants who did not have experience working in an office setting.

When asked their thoughts about how the department views dress standards compared to other departments, some participants mentioned seeing professors, and students even, in suits when teaching class in the business building. Grace posits that it might be personal style choice or “something that their department strives for is, like, a certain level of dress.” This musing, shared by some other participants, brings about the question of a difference in values amongst departments and fields. It could also simply be that those in the business department are holding on to their experiential understanding and interpretation of professional from a different rhetorical context.
Perhaps inspired in part through these notions, my participants seemed to adopt a strategy of borrowed ethos in face of the dress as liability mentioned in the recognition of existing structures. For instance, Peaches also mentioned the advice of “dress for the position you want” from her friend’s mother, whose experience is in the more formal, industry side. I like to think that our field has moved beyond such patriarchal and superficial judgements, but there is demonstrably an ethos gained through dress. Height as a marker of authority is another trend I noticed, with heels being favorable to stand out, if not above, to be a “normal-ish height” (Stacy).

**Professionalize Your Personality**

Borrowing from Peaches, the idea of “professionalize your personality” displays an integration into the new rhetorical situation. By adapting her own sense of individuality, Peaches is able to hold on to the parts of herself which she values and does not betray those parts of herself. She does make mention that in the beginning, she believed that there was a standardized way she was supposed to speak and act, but has sense embraced the idea of “professionalize your personality.” This tension and desire to fit a mythical standard seems to appear across the board, portrayed in the uncertainty and insecurity of joining a new situation and taking on the new role/identity of instructor. This finding also mimics the idea of a borrowed ethos, made possible through “overdressing,” as detailed in Grace’s and others’ interviews. Interestingly, despite Peaches mentioning the behavioral aspects of the professional role, she does claim that she dressed in a more relaxed fashion when in the role of GTA. This does not match the borrowed ethos of clothing mentioned by others. However, for Peaches, her desire to hold on to and display her identity as a student while being a GTA seems to go along with her admittance of having a childlike personality. Portions of that personality including being more bubbly and giggly than what she considers standard for someone in the position of instructor. She is young and both wants to remain young yet hold authority in her classroom. She takes ownership of these qualities in herself, though. One way in which Peaches chooses to hold onto her youthfulness is by mixing pieces of casual
clothing and expressive clothing pieces, such as a brown t-shirt with a bedazzled teddy bear in the center (figure 3), with more mature elements, such as a skirt with a length she describes “definitely shows that I’m someone in, uh, not a prominent position, but I’m in a different position from the rest of the students.” For Peaches, this choice also followed her rules of “Making sure everything’s covered, right. And making sure that it’s appropriate.”

Figure 3: Close-up of gem teddy bear detail on t-shirt.

Professionalizing one’s personality provides an additional opportunity outside of purely following the rules. Hazel expressed a desire to balance traditional dress with more quirky elements and items which bring her joy. One way in which she achieves this is through pairing a plain sweater with a pair of mushroom earrings (figure 4). As adaptations such as this occur with the more experienced novice instructors, it seems that the comfort in showcasing personality is further complicated by discomfort in the liminality. The two first-time GTAs expressed varying degrees of conformity, with Iris stating, “I kind of try to separate my personalities.” Peaches, on the other hand, asserts, “I cannot for the life of me... cut part of my self-identity out.” The intrinsic value she places on her identity, be it through pride or the acknowledgement of her embodied existence, leads her to this conscious choice to leverage her identity—professionalize her personality. There’s additionally an argument that no longer being in the position of a student empowers Peaches to come to this realization. Along with the anxieties of being a
GTA, conforming to interpretations of standards avoids the additional labor of resistance. Unfortunately, since Iris declined to meet with me for a second interview, I was unable to further inquire how she goes about separating these parts of herself.

Figure 4: Close up necklace and earrings Hazel staggered atop a plain grey sweater.

The act of professionalizing one’s personality exists simultaneously within and alongside following the rules. For Peaches, being able to showcase aspects of their personality through their dress was a rule which she followed when preparing what to wear to teach. For others like Hazel, self-expression comes in adapting and adding elements to dress which already follows her rules.

**Wear What Feels Right**

Ultimately, the embodied experience of dress means that the rules my interviewees produce and the ways which they enact those rules comes back to how the novice instructor feels in their liminal position. This involves not only whether they sense a visual belonging acted through dress, but the emotional elements accompanying finding a sense of belonging.

My participants described that what they wear has to fit, both literally and figuratively. The fit of clothing is an important factor in determining whether a piece can be considered professional. An item cannot be too form-fitting, but it can also not be too loose. Iris considers her regular, out of work clothing to be looser fitting, typically leaning towards sweatpants or sweatshirts, although she also
mentions spandex as gym clothing. While comfort was a factor that many instructors looked for, Grace specified that comfort was the main factor in her regular clothing choices but not as integral for her work clothing.

Participants demonstrate other criteria for fit through their processes in deciding dress. At times, participants described choosing their teaching outfits in advance, either at the beginning of the week or the night prior to teaching in the outfits. In describing their processes for getting dressed, two participants described checking in a mirror to make sure their outfit looked good. While Iris did not specify what qualities she is looking for in her outfit check, Peaches did directly mention that she was checking to make sure she was properly covered. Looking in a mirror prior to leaving for work may be an action taken for granted in its regular existence, but a mirror might be the final step in ensuring the embodied nature of the dressing persona. Our students aren’t going to directly tell us if something doesn’t look right or doesn’t match the vibe we’ve been trying to curate through our clothing—we must look at ourselves in a mirror to see what the outside world sees.

In a further connection to the material elements of dress, some participants mentioned the physical separation of their wardrobe, with the more delicate fabrics used for professional wear needing to be hung. Checking for wrinkles was another element mentioned in ensuring that the outfit was in proper condition (Hazel, Peaches). Many participants mentioned that a common factor, regardless of getting ready for teaching or not, was the weather. That being said, while the weather informed some clothing choices, namely the type of shoes participants would wear, layers were also described as a necessity. Dressing in layers served three main purposes, 1) allowing instructors to comfortably switch between teaching in a chilly classroom and walking around a humid campus, 2) providing coverage of the body, particularly shoulders, and 3) as an accessory to further embody the mythos of a teacher, e.g. the blazer.
One participant joked about having multiple pairs of plain black slacks potentially leading their students to think they’re rewearing the same pair every day; meanwhile, Killian admits to wearing the same pair of pants daily. Killian read the alignment of the pockets and the textured pattern of the pants (figure 5) as a sign of more formal dress. Killian remarked that his currently favored pair of pants fits the more formal persona he is trying to embody in his teaching, “I feel like [these pants] lean very much into the aesthetic of, like, classic professor.”

![Figure 5: Close up of patterning and pocket positioning on pair of pants.](image)

Thus, embodying the role of a teacher can include dressing in a way that values the “image in our head” we hold of professors (Peaches). A few concrete examples of the historical and cultural mythos that my participants mentioned of how a teacher should perform include Miss Frizzle (Peaches), Indiana Jones (Killian), and the sound of heels clacking down a hallway (Stacy). While some of these cultural expectations are formed by the media we consume, the sensory images created in our memories of former teachers stick with us and create this fictitious ideal. Stacy further acknowledges that this memory is deep within her when explaining her draw to heels: “growing up and, like, walking down hallways, I would hear teachers in heels, so maybe that’s more of a subconscious thing.” It is possible that in calling upon such embedded memories, her own clacking of heels calls upon the association between heels and authority: “I’m walking into the classroom and I want some authority over my students.”
Aside from tactile sensations, visual cues, and confidence markers, the feel of the clothing extends to the emotional connections between clothing artifacts and their wearers. These emotional connections to dress represent why embodied rhetoric is such a valuable tool for exploring teaching personas. Both Grace and Peaches include items in their wardrobes that hold sentimental attachments. While Peaches is more aware of it, having accessories given to her by her niece and through her own journeys, Grace includes hand-me-down items gifted to her by her mother. These relationships to not just the pieces of clothing but to the reasons and ways they are attained furthers the call for studying dress through embodied rhetorics.

Through the production of existing structures, novice instructors perform and embody their new roles as teachers while negotiating their simultaneous, in the case of GTAs, or previous, in the case of recent graduates, identities of students. The invention of rules provides a network for novice instructors to fall back on when making rhetorical decisions. These rules, however, can be adapted to suit the evolving needs and understandings of the rhetorical context. This leaves room for novice instructors to further integrate themselves into the position, and do so in a way that fulfils their embodied identities.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

As my analysis shows, novice instructors navigate the teaching context through recognizing existing structures and producing and performing within such structures. In this way, we begin to see how the novice gains agency both in recognition and production. Recognition is a form of agency through which the novice instructor notices standards and accounts for their place amongst these structures. Production and performance lead way to another form of agency in which the novice instructor finds ways to place themselves in the recognized structures. The distinction between recognition and production is a fluid one, in that while the former often informs the latter, the two sometimes occur simultaneously. In this fluidity so are the experiences of someone new to academia. Dress becomes one way in which novice instructors embody their academic role.

Dress and appearance are core aspects of how GTAs mediate their position between the dichotomous identities of student and instructor. The visual distinction which GTAs and novice instructors achieve through more conventional professional clothing enforces the differentiation from students through dress. Further, professionalism is composed of appearance—the visual aspects including dress—and interactions—the embodied actions of instructors around students. Interactions more directly indicate the relationship of instructor as authority figure, but appearance primes both students and the instructors themselves to accept this position. These observations come alongside the research questions which inform this study:

1. How do GTAs and recently graduated instructors leverage their understanding of their intersectional identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, and status/rank, to perform their new status as composition instructors?
2. How do GTAs and recently graduated instructors use their understanding of their intersectional self-identities to interpret professionalism in their new roles as composition instructors?

3. How do GTAs and recently graduated instructors use their interpretations of professionalism to inform their use of dress to fashion/create what they perceive as professional within a teaching setting?

From these questions, I argue 1) the liminality of these positions then is expressed and experienced through the recognition and the production of dress and 2) dress is a material and visual space where the liminality plays out, extending beyond the background to literally show on GTAs through their embodied identity in the liminal space.

The open-ended nature of these research questions, and the accompanying interview questions, values the individual experiences of current and former GTAs and allows participants to speak openly and candidly about their embodied experiences. In their embodiment of the position, GTAs teeter between identities of student and teacher. GTAs and novice instructors use their awareness of their intersectional identities to make meaning out of the indeterminate nature of professionalism. This performance of professionalism, in turn, plays a part in their larger role as new professionals in the field of academia. What it means to be professional, however, is an intricate and subjective quality which my participants, and myself in writing this, struggle to directly name. Despite the challenging nature of naming professionalism as a concept, novice instructors allow their experiences and observations to color their wardrobe choice. Their dress is relational to what they see around them—reaching or extending past the level of formality seen around the department and creating clear distinctions from typical undergraduate clothing. Dress, then, for novice instructors, provides a location for “rhetorical acts that aid in one’s development as a professional through the experimentation and evaluation of possible selves” (Lutkewitte et al. 163).
With the exception of Killian’s direct acknowledgement of professionalism being socially and culturally constructed, thus difficult to name, my participants seemed to dance around providing definitions. I think this is important because it further illustrates that point—professionalism cannot be defined in one way, and it is our embodied experiences that create how we navigate professionalism. As dress is such a visual form, impacted directly by the body of the wearer, applying the lens of embodied rhetoric lets us further understand how non-normative bodies—those historically seen as Other (Knoblauch and Moeller 8)—are impacted by Western ideals of professionalism. Additionally, for a number of instructors, their minoritized status in academia complicates their relationship with authority. Among their existing identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, novice instructors must navigate which aspects of their identity are considered safe to share (Donnegan) in the new rhetorical situation. Liminality as an aspect of identity, especially in how much of being a student is allowed to come through, further complicates these negotiations. Moreover, the decisions of what identity markers to display can vary drastically from instructor to instructor. While certain markers of identity feel omnipresent, especially to the individual themselves, other aspects of identity can be highlighted or hidden at the discretion of the individual. There is a blurring of the lines seen both in the uncertainty of professionalism and the liminality of being a GTA. Embracing this messiness, acknowledging its presence and how it impacts each individual’s embodied experiences, is an integral step in understanding how novice instructors come to be in the field of rhetoric and composition.

**Policies and Procedures**

Ultimately, I suggest that by studying the internalized decisions of novice instructors navigating their new identities and statuses, we can move towards more equitable practices in the field of rhetoric and composition, in the process interrogating the idea of what it means to be “professional.” While the focus of this study, and thus the remainder of my conclusion, focus on GTAs, I would like to acknowledge the broader applications of studying dress and embodied rhetorics to understand how broader groups
traverse their experiences and daily activities. Aside from GTA training and instructor development, taking an embodied rhetoric approach to integrating existing dress codes and clothing expectations may serve to further unpack and resist patriarchal standards of professionalism.

Implications for this research can assist in determining new ways of handling GTA training in the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition, particularly for graduate students with little to no experience in the discipline, as well as a broader range on how departments can create more equitable practices in welcoming novice instructors to the field. One such way we might achieve more equitable and socially conscious methods is by integrating an approach to awareness and production in GTA training. This goes beyond just raising consciousness of existing structures but providing GTAs with the skills and confidence to act upon these structures. As Luttkewitte et al. note in their call for resources, these resources provided to GTAs must go beyond just naming suggestions and must be used “cautiously and critically,” in a way where we can “question it in relationship to your own realities and those of others” (158). In addition to providing concrete examples of dress expectations and discussing achieving physical and visual differentiation from students, GTA training must forefront that while GTAs are trying to visually separate themselves from their student identities, it does not mean that they must fully abandon this identity. Instead, we should encourage GTAs to accept their liminal positions and that they can, and should, still call upon their student identities to strengthen their relationships to their students and the new teaching context they face together (Lambrecht).

Future Research

In initially drafts of this study, I postulated that in the increasingly hostile political climate of Florida, LGBTQ+ instructors may not feel comfortable with being outed by their attire and might opt for more “traditional” clothing choices over more gender-affirming options. None of my participants mentioned their sexuality given the invitation to mention additional identities (see Appendix C), and
participants identified under the traditional gender binary, I believe due in part to the small sample size. Notably, however, Hazel remarked upon a personal growing comfort with using nonbinary pronouns outside of academic and professional settings. I would like to have further investigated this concealment and differentiation of identity alongside how sexuality and gender impact clothing choice; however, I did not find it appropriate to push more sensitive topics to protect the comfort and safety of my interviewees. Considerations for future study include interviewing a larger sample size which would include efforts to recruit a greater variation of gender expressions. I at times foreground and seem to privilege the female gender, due to my own positioning as a woman in academia and my borrowed interview methodologies from Entwistle's *What Women Wear*, though I would like to make a concentrated effort to expand the discussion to include men and nonbinary, genderfluid, trans, or intersex folks. Additionally, the hostility towards LGBTQ+ identifying individuals and “woke” culture in the state of Florida makes it challenging to navigate discussions of gender and sexuality in state-funded spaces. Despite and because of these challenges, I think it is of continued importance to seek out and share the stories of individuals outside heteronormative gender expressions and not allow them to be erased.
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL
EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

November 14, 2023

Dear Jackie Cano Díaz:

On 11/14/2023, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Review</th>
<th>Initial Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
<td>Interpretations of Professionalism and Teaching Attire by New Composition Instructors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigator:</td>
<td>Jackie Cano Díaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB ID:</td>
<td>STUDY000000999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in is detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2601 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Kristin Badillo
Designated Reviewer
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT FLYER
THESIS RESEARCH INVITATION

In search of current and former Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) to interview about interpretations of professionalism and teaching attire by new composition instructors.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand how new composition instructors use clothing and related artifacts, alongside their self-identities, to navigate expectations and their understanding of professionalism in the field of rhetoric and composition.

DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPATION

Participation will consist of in person or online, remote interviews lasting 60 to 90 minutes each. Participants will be invited to share photographs of outfits or articles that they feel assist in the creation of their teaching persona. Interviews will be held in English. Accommodations can be made for written responses in lieu of verbal responses. Participation in the research is completely voluntary.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do GTAs and recently graduated instructors leverage their understanding of their intersectional identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, and status/rank, to perform their new status as a composition instructor?

2. How do GTAs and recently graduated instructors use their understanding of their intersectional self-identities to interpret professionalism in their new roles as composition instructors?

3. How do GTAs and recently graduated instructors use their interpretations of professionalism to inform their use of dress to fashion/create what they perceive as professional within a teaching setting?

PARTICIPANT CRITERIA

- 18+ or older
- Current or recently graduated GTA

CURRENT GTAS

- Current, full-time graduate student in MA or PhD program
- Currently teaching ENCI101 or ENCI1102 as an instructor of record under the Department of Writing and Rhetoric

FORMER GTAS

- Graduated from MA or PhD program within the past year
- Worked as a GTA within the past year teaching ENCI101 or ENCI1102 as an instructor of record under the Department of Writing and Rhetoric
- Currently teaching ENCI101 or ENCI1102 as a visiting instructor under the Department of Writing and Rhetoric

If interested in participation or have further questions, please contact

JACQUELINE CANO DIAZ
jacqueline.canodiaz@ucf.edu
using the following email subject line: GTA Professionalism and Attire Interview
APPENDIX C: INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Background and Demographics

1. How old are you or when were you born?
2. Where are you from and where were you raised?
3. How do you self-identify in terms of gender, race, or ethnicity?
4. Are there other self-identification categories that are important to you?
5. What was your employment background prior to becoming an instructor?
6. Please describe your professional background and your current employment situation.

Interpretation of Professionalism

7. What aspects of your self-identity inform your understanding of professionalism?
8. How has your work in prior workplace settings informed the clothing choices you make in this teaching context?
9. What “rules,” if any, do you follow when dressing to teach?
10. Where do you think these rules come from?
11. Do you consider teaching to have an implicit or explicit dress code? If so, what is it?
12. Has your interpretation of professionalism changed with more experience as an instructor?

Professional in Rhetoric and Composition

13. What expectations were expressed to you by faculty during orientation regarding dress?
14. Do you think these expectations differ from other departments adjacent to our field, for example, English? If so, how?

Decision Making and Rhetorical Context

15. How would you describe the rhetorical context of being a new first-year composition instructor?
16. How does your status as a GTA or as a new instructor inform your dress?
17. What is your process for choosing work attire? Does this differ from your usual process of choosing clothing?

18. Do you find that your process changes as the semester progresses?

19. To what extent do you believe aspects of your self-identity are displayed in your clothing choices?

20. What aspects of your personality are showcased or hidden through your clothing choices?

**Interview Conclusion**

21. Would you be willing to share photographs of outfits with me you discussed in our interview?

22. Would you be willing to be part of a follow-up interview with me to talk about those pieces of clothing?
Clothing Examination

1. What aspects of your self-identity may be showcased through the item(s) of clothing you brought with you today?

2. How do you feel that the item(s) of clothing display your position as an instructor?

3. How does the item of clothing work within the “rules,” if any, you follow when dressing to teach?

4. How often do you incorporate the item(s) of clothing you brought today into your teaching wardrobe?
LIST OF REFERENCES


Wallis, Julie and Adrienne Jankens. “Collaborative Development: Reflective Mentoring for GTAs.” *Writing Program and Writing Center Collaborations: Transcending Boundaries*, edited by Alice Johnston