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## The Performance of Health? Motivations Behind University Students' Decisions to Wear Athletic Attire

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THE PERFORMANCE OF HEALTH?  
MOTIVATIONS BEHIND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' DECISIONS TO WEAR  
ATHLETIC ATTIRE

by

SHANNON N. PAYNE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Anthropology  
in the College of Sciences  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

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Thesis Chair: Dr. Joanna Mishtal

## ABSTRACT

“Athleisure” is a relatively new term to the American lexicon, a portmanteau used to describe athletic clothing used for leisure purposes. Recent studies show a disconnect between consumers’ desire to purchase athletic attire and the percentage of Americans considered “active to a healthy level and beyond.” While athletic wear sales skyrocket, reported levels of inactivity have slowly increased in recent years. These trends indicate a phenomenon in which consumers prioritize ownership of athletic wear over athletics. In this research, I set out to answer the following research questions: How do university students interpret and understand the purchase and wearing of athletic clothes, in the absence of athletic activity; and is a student’s decision to wear athletic clothing for nonathletic activity associated with a symbolic performance of a healthy lifestyle? In order to answer these questions, I focused on a set of UCF students between 18 and 24 years of age who wore athletic attire as leisure attire and exercised less than three times a week. My data collection included participant observation, literature review, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 18 UCF students who fit my inclusion criteria. Based on recurring narratives, I invited interview participants back to hold a focus group in which three students ultimately participated. In analyzing these data, I found that college students consider athletic attire suitable for a variety of casual situations, and therefore did not conflate wearing athletic attire with participating in athletic activity or the appearance of a healthy lifestyle. Further, research participants used age- and gender-based stereotypes when making judgments about their peers’ habits regarding athletic activity and wearing athletic attire. These findings are important because they demonstrate how the boundary between public and private attire can change over time, how

discourses of consumption outweigh discourses of personal responsibility, and how dress is a gendered experience.

## DEDICATION

To my baby brother,  
Zachary David Payne,  
for inspiring me to always keep fighting.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....	1
The “Athletic Paradox”: The Disconnect Between Athletic Wear Sales and Athletic Participation .....	1
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	4
Neoliberalism and the Discourses of Consumption and Responsibility .....	4
Anthropology and Gender Studies Scholarship of Dress .....	7
Performativity as a Theoretical Framework .....	10
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY .....	12
CHAPTER FOUR: ARE YOGA PANTS FOR YOGA? PURPOSES AND PERCEPTIONS OF ATHLETIC ATTIRE .....	14
Athletic Attire as Multipurpose Attire .....	15
Athletic Attire and Athleticism .....	23
Discussion .....	30
CHAPTER FIVE: GIRLS IN YOGA PANTS, AND OTHER STEREOTYPES WITHIN ATHLETIC ATTIRE USAGE .....	33
How Participants Understood Their Own and Others’ Motivations to Exercise .....	34
Interpretations of Women in Athletics and Athletic Attire .....	39
Discussion .....	44
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS .....	46
Conclusions and Significance .....	46

Reflections .....	48
Suggestions for Future Research .....	49
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL .....	51
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE .....	53
APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE .....	55
APPENDIX D: COPYRIGHT APPROVAL.....	57
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	59



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### **The “Athletic Paradox”: The Disconnect Between Athletic Wear Sales and Athletic Participation**

An August 2014 article in the *Wall Street Journal* poses the question, “Why work out when you can just buy the clothes and look like you did?” (Germano 2014:1). According to the article, trends in athletic wear are outgrowing athleticism in the United States. Athletic wear sales have grown considerably over the last few years. In September 2013, The NPD Group, Inc., a global market information and advisory group, reported that athletic wear sales increased by seven percent, versus the general apparel market which grew one percent, from January through August 2013, compared to the same time period in 2012 (NPD 2013:1). Women’s active wear was a key growth category, particularly “active pants (up 10 percent), tees/athletic tops (up 12 percent), and sweatshirts (up 11 percent)” (NPD 2013:1). Marshal Cohen, chief industry analyst for The NPD Group, Inc., attributes this rise in sales in part “to the consumer’s passion to get more fit,” but primarily to “the desire to look active” (NPD 2013:1). Both the *Wall Street Journal* (Germano 2014) and *Fortune* (Zillman 2014) refer to this fashion trend as “athleisure,” a term that has become increasingly more common in popular discourses. Zillman reports, “as Americans attempt to be more active – or at least look as if they are – sportswear is going mainstream” (2014:2).

Athletic activity, however, has not increased to the same degree, presenting an interesting sociocultural paradox. In her *Wall Street Journal* article, Germano compares attire sales data from Barclays to athletic participation data from the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA). Germano points out, for example, that yoga apparel sales grew 45 percent in 2013, while

yoga participation only grew 4.5 percent in the same year (2014:1). Annually, SFIA releases its “Sports, Fitness and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report,” which explores facets of athletic participation and lack thereof in the United States. Inactivity levels have increased annually since 2007, when SFIA released its first participation report, and while they decreased slightly in 2013 from 2012, the number remains higher than in 2011 or any year prior (SFIA 2014:5). For the 2014 report, SFIA continued to use the definition of “inactivity” from the previous year to include “19 sports/fitness activities that require minimal to no physical exertion” (2014:4), such as darts and pool/billiards. SFIA classified 80.2 million Americans, 27.6 percent of the population, as “inactive” in 2013 (2014:5). Of college-aged populations, approximately 25.6 percent were inactive (SFIA 2014:8).

The report also breaks down activity levels by a “calorie” component that “incorporates the frequency of activities with the calorie level from each activity” (SFIA 2014:9). In order to be considered “active to a healthy level and beyond,” an individual needed to participate in a high calorie activity 151+ times a year, which is approximately three times a week. Examples of high calorie activities included “running, ice hockey and cross-country skiing,” while low calories activities included “walking for fitness, bowling and sailing” (SFIA 2014:9) Based on this added factor, while 72.4 percent of the population was “active” in some way (and therefore not “inactive”) in 2013, only 32.9 percent was “active to a healthy level and beyond” (SFIA 2014:9). Therefore, these data indicate that the vast majority of the U.S. population fails to exhibit healthy levels of activity.

These trends suggest an interesting, if concerning, phenomenon that rather than seeking fitness, Americans mainly seek to wear fitness clothes. If so, several questions emerge: To what

extent do the neoliberal discourses that simultaneously promote consumerism and individual responsibility shape the desire to buy athletic wear but fail to promote fitness? Do consumers feel responsible for using athletic wear for its intended purpose? If individuals are not exercising, how do they understand their purchases of athletic wear? Is wearing athletic clothing a symbolic performance of exercise?

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Neoliberalism and the Discourses of Consumption and Responsibility**

Neoliberalism is a set of economic and political ideas generally associated with capitalism and globalization; however, neoliberal discourses also include an important aspect for this study that is relevant to how individual behaviors and outcomes of behaviors are discursively constructed around self-responsibility and self-management. Neoliberalism has influenced policy and formed particular discourses, the effects of which scholars have studied at multiple levels. Anthropologist and cultural geographer David Harvey defines neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade” (2005:2). Neoliberal discourses promote capitalism and consumerism, while concurrently calling for personal responsibility and assuming that actors within a neoliberal framework will act rationally for their own best interests. Harvey argues, “while personal and individual freedom in the marketplace is guaranteed, each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being” (2005:65). Typically, this responsibility refers to success or failure in the market. However, neoliberal discourses of personal responsibility are applicable to personal choices in other realms, including health and wellness.

French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault developed the concept of governmentality, which purports that governance need not only come from the state, but that individuals can also govern themselves. This is consistent with neoliberalism, which promotes personal responsibility and self-governance. Wendy Larner, a geographer and sociologist,

conceptualizes neoliberalism through the lens of Foucault's governmentality, observing, "while neo-liberalism may mean less government, it does not follow that there is less governance" (2000:12). Such governance influences "both institutions and individuals" (Larner 2000:12). Governmentality scholars, therefore, can analyze the application of neoliberal techniques and discourses "across manifold sites of self-production, including the body, the family, sexuality, consumption, education, the professions, urban space, etc." (Wacquant 2012:70). While neoliberalism primarily involves economic policy and ideology, neoliberal policies and associated discourses can and do affect other facets of life such as behaviors and perceptions.

For example, Ellen E. Foley, a medical anthropologist, explores the impact neoliberal policies have on individual decision-making, using illness episodes of young Senegalese men. One case followed a young man named Taslim Gueye, who was planning on leaving home to attend university when he was diagnosed with late-stage liver cancer (Foley 2008:265). Gueye's father chose to keep his son's diagnosis a secret, ceased all treatment, and appeared unconcerned with his son's impending university orientation. In line with promoting personal responsibility, neoliberal theory presumes individuals are rational actors. Consistent with this theory, Taslim Gueye should have been capable of pursuing his own best interests. However, within the region's social power structures, Gueye's father had the ultimate say regarding his son's wellbeing. As Foley observes, although Gueye's mother and peers attempted to help with his illness and maintain his university enrollment, "their actions could not overcome the structural gulf between their social power and that of his father" (2008:266). Therefore, Foley contests the neoliberal presumption that individuals necessarily behave as rational actors. In the case of the Ganjool region of Senegal, "neoliberal economic development [...] did not transform [the young men]

into liberated social actors endowed with autonomy and self-determination” (Foley 2008:271). Rather, the young men were influenced by a variety of sociocultural and political structures that contributed to their abilities or lack of abilities to make decisions for their health. Again, this example demonstrates that individuals should not be presumed to be rational economic actors. Instead, a number of factors both directly and indirectly related to neoliberal discourses influence the perceptions that individuals hold regarding their bodies and health as well as their behaviors.

Sociologist Sam Binkley (2006) reflects on the influence neoliberalism and its emphasis on consumption have on compulsive shoppers. Compulsive shopping is arguably one example of irrational consumer behavior. Among theories of consumption, according to Binkley, “there seems to be an agreement that within the experiential domain of consumption there persists a tendency toward expressive as opposed to instrumental action, to the imagery associations of desire and fantasy as opposed to the objective, calculating interests that prevail in the professional realms of work and productivity” (2006:352). Inside consumer realms, then, the focus is not on pragmatism, but rather on what is culturally constructed as “fun.”

Consumption takes place in “liminal zones” (Binkley 2006:354), specific physical areas such as shopping malls and commercial web sites which surround consumers with advertisements and pressure to shop, or even states of mind such as joy or depression when consumers are encouraged to shopping in celebration or as “retail therapy.” Binkley criticizes the “increasingly persuasive powers of consumption” which “have generated a culture that undermines rational patterns of thinking,” inciting consumers to make purchases “that are inconsistent with their larger needs, budgets and other responsibilities” (2006:355). Thus, if consumers wish to avoid making compulsive or irrational purchases, they must exercise self-

governance in order to oppose consumerist discourses in the media and these liminal zones. Returning to the *Wall Street Journal* article, a California resident confessed to Germano that, “When you put on your workout apparel [...] you think, ‘Huh, maybe I should think about working out today’” (2014:4). Viewing this statement through Binkley’s argument leads to the question: Do consumers purchasing athletic wear do so with the desire or intent to exercise – or, perhaps, merely to appear as if they do?

### **Anthropology and Gender Studies Scholarship of Dress**

The anthropology of dress is an area of research that, while relatively new in the field, directly relates to this research project. In “The Dressed Body,” Joanne Entwistle defines human bodies as “*dressed* bodies,” explaining, “dress is a basic fact of social life and this, according to anthropologists, is true of all human cultures that we know about” (2001:33). The exact definition of “dress,” according to Entwistle, varies greatly between and within cultures, “since what is considered appropriate dress will vary according to the situation or occasion” (2001:33). In exploring the anthropology of the dressed body, dress is a social structure that has an important role in maintaining microsocial order by exerting pressure on individuals and groups to conform to a particular kind of “appropriate” dress code. “Dressed inappropriately,” Entwistle explains, “we are uncomfortable, we feel ourselves open to social condemnation” (2001:35). Therefore, she argues, even individuals who claim to be indifferent to fashion trends or their appearances, will at least dress appropriately as to avoid drawing undue negative attention to themselves. When dressed comfortably – that is, in clothes that fit correctly and are appropriate for the given situation – dress “becomes an extension of the body which is like a second skin”

(Entwistle 2001:45). Conversely, she argues, when dressed inappropriately or in clothes that do not fit, we become hyperaware of our bodies and their limits.

Entwistle further demonstrates that dress is a learned behavior and argues that “like so much bodily behavior, codes of dress come to be taken for granted and are routinely and unreflexively employed” (2001:47). In other words, except in occasions – such as formal settings – in which we are asked to follow strict dress codes, we typically do not consciously reflect on what we are wearing as we dress. Nonetheless, informal codes and social pressures govern even everyday dress. In day-to-day social settings, “ideas of embarrassment and stigma play a crucial role and are managed, in part, through dress. Dressed inappropriately for a situation we feel vulnerable and embarrassed” (Entwistle 2001:48). Entwistle also maintains that dress is a gendered experience, drawing on the work of cultural theorist Efrat Tseëlon on the construction of femininity in Western society, noting that “women’s sense of self (and self worth) is frequently a ‘fragile’ one and dress can either bolster confidence or make one acutely self-conscious and uncomfortable” (Entwistle 2001:45). Furthermore, she argues that women are more likely to be conscious of their body and dress in public space, as opposed to a private one, where they are more likely exposed to scrutiny. For example, as Entwistle observes, a woman in an office is more likely to feel comfortable taking her jacket off in the privacy of her office space, but she will put the jacket back on in order to look more appropriate for a meeting with her coworkers.

Sociologist Carole Turbin (2003), in her analysis of the scholarship of dress, defines the role of the public/private dichotomy in dress studies. According to Turbin, dress studies scholars, coming from interdisciplinary backgrounds, “recognize that the cultural meanings of dress are



even more complex and multilayered than other material objects because clothing and textiles almost uniquely combine production and consumption, and private, bodily, intimate sensation, sexuality, and fantasy with public self-presentation” (2003:44). Anthropological and gender studies analyses are particularly important in that they tend to focus on these cultural meanings, as well as meanings around the public and private realms. Within dress studies, “public” refers to “spaces where individuals and groups present themselves, consciously or with little or no awareness to others” (Turbin 2003:45). Conversely, “private” refers to the “more specific, personal, and intimate” (Turbin 2003:45). Dress to some degree blurs these lines as it falls into both public and private; “an individual’s outwardly presented signs of internal or private meaning are significant only when they are social, that is comprehensible on some level to observers” (Turbin 2003:45). Intimate dress, such as undergarments, for example, is still designed with “public presentation of appearance” in mind (Turbin 2003:46). Therefore, Turbin argues, dress exists in “a continuum or circular notion of public/private/public” (2003:46).

In “Dress Needs,” feminist scholar Kate Soper considers Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s philosophical concepts of *amour de soi* – “the mode of self-love associated with instincts for self-preservation” – and *amour propre* – “self-esteem or vanity ... which is essentially social and other-dependent in origin” – as they apply to dress (Soper 2001:18). The former refers to humans’ and animals’ instinctual desire to look out for our selves; the latter to our sense of self formed by positive attention from others. Soper chooses these particular concepts as a method to explain why people dress in the manner that they do. In applying these concepts this way, Soper argues that while we may often dress to please ourselves (in the form of *amour de soi*) we ultimately dress “in the manner in which we are happy for others to see us” (2001:19); that is, we

dress in order to receive approval from others. This approval can come from either dressing so that others do not particularly notice us, or in a way that specifically draws others' attention.

The above arguments and observations lead, then, to several questions that are relevant to my research project. In what situations do students consider athletic attire appropriate, and therefore "an extension of the body"? In what situations might athletic attire be considered inappropriate? When college students wear athletic attire, are they dressing in order not to be noticed, or in order to draw attention to themselves as athletic individuals?

### **Performativity as a Theoretical Framework**

In *Body, Self, and Society*, Anne E. Becker, a global health scholar, compares and contrasts "the relationship of embodied experience to the social context of selfhood" (1995:1) in American and Fijian societies. As part of this, Becker also analyzes how members of each of these societies form their body images and ideals. Within Western (particularly American) discourse, the body is something "'to be escaped' on the one hand and 'to be worked on' on the other" (Becker 1995:33). Becker references a phenomenon in American society that she calls the "cult of cultivation" (1995:33), and that other scholars (Turner 1996, Lasch 1979) denote as a narcissistic trend in American culture. Sociologist Bryan Turner illustrates "a late capitalist culture in which narcissism and consumerism are regarded as dominating features" (1996:195). This setting, he contends, resulted in a modern personality type that relies on performances that need continuous audience validation. Therefore, this "new self" became a symbolic expression of the personal self, "embodied in external performances" (Turner 1996:195). Historian and social critic Christopher Lasch (1979) also examines the "performing self" in *The Culture of*

*Narcissism*, a social critique of American society. Here, Lasch argues that the performing self constructs its reality and identity from advertising, popular culture, and cultural traditions, “all of them equally contemporaneous to the contemporary mind” (1979:91). Western discourse, therefore, pressures individuals to express themselves based on what advertising and the media purport as being popular or trendy.

Becker characterizes health in Western society as a symbol of success and achievement (1995:35-36). Individuals can demonstrate their efforts toward health “through the wearing of ‘workout’ clothing and in health clubs that choreograph exercise as a public performance” (Becker 1995:36). Philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler defines performativity as behavior “constituting the identity it is purported to be” (1990:25). In this sense, wearing “workout” clothing and participating in activities such as working out at the gym or recreational exercise are aspects of the performance of a healthy lifestyle.

Therefore, this research project explores the perceptions of and motivations behind university students’ decisions to purchase and to wear athletic attire, and whether these motivations are associated with a desire to exercise, a desire to appear fit, or neither.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Primary data collection for this research consisted of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. For participant observation, I observed students at the University of Central Florida who wore athletic attire in nonathletic settings such as class or the library, while often doing so myself. I also took note of comments made by my fellow students when I discussed my research topic with them. Prior to recruiting interview participants, I successfully submitted a research proposal through the UCF Institutional Review Board. My IRB approval number is: IRB # SBE-14-10677. My two research questions were:

1. How do university students interpret and understand the purchase and wearing of athletic clothes, in the absence of athletic activity?
2. Is a student's decision to wear athletic clothing for nonathletic activity associated with a symbolic performance of a healthy lifestyle?

Participants were recruited online through posts to both my personal Facebook page and several UCF group pages, through a mass email distributed by the UCF Office of Research and Civic Engagement, and through snowball method using contacts provided by participants. My inclusion criteria were that each participant had to be between 18 and 24 years of age, a student at UCF, wear athletic attire for leisure purposes, and exercise less than three times a week. The exercise limitations came from those used by the Sports and Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) in their annual report, which identifies those who exercise three or more times per week as "active to a healthy level and beyond" (2014:9). I chose these criteria in order to avoid interviewing students who wore athletic attire frequently because they also exercised frequently. My exclusion criteria prevented minors under the age of 18 from participating in this study. I

obtained verbal informed consent before beginning each interview. Each interview was conducted using a list of eight open-ended questions, with several potential probes to follow-up each response. Interviews were held on the UCF campus in locations convenient to both myself and the participants. Each interview lasted approximately 15-25 minutes, and the sample size was 18 UCF students. Participants were compensated five dollars for their involvement.

Immediately following each interview, I asked each participant if he or she might be willing to participate in a focus group at a later date, and to provide his or her contact information if so. Based on availability and willingness to participate, I then held a focus group at the UCF Library with three previously interviewed research participants. I obtained verbal informed consent from each participant before beginning the focus group. The focus group was conducted using a list of four open-ended questions and several potential probes for each, based on recurring themes that I noticed through the interview process. The focus group lasted approximately one hour, and the three participants were compensated with a pizza purchased for the meeting.

With permission of the participants, all responses in the interviews and the focus group were digitally recorded. Interview narratives were transcribed manually into Word documents. I then manually coded all narrative text by themes and subthemes and sorted these findings into recurrent thematic categories, which I recorded in an Excel spreadsheet. Two major themes emerged from my findings, and these became my chapters. Within these major themes came across subthemes, which became the subsections within each chapter. All audio recordings and interview narratives are stored securely on a password-protected computer accessible only to myself. All names in this paper have been changed to pseudonyms.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ARE YOGA PANTS FOR YOGA? PURPOSES AND PERCEPTIONS OF ATHLETIC ATTIRE

Increasingly, consumers are using athletic attire for everyday, nonathletic activities. This brings up the question, what is and what is not appropriate to wear under various circumstances? Are cultural norms about the appropriateness of certain attire to certain situations changing? In seeking to learn how this set of college students understood the wearing of athletic attire, I learned that they generally saw athletic clothes as not only comfortable, but also multipurpose attire appropriate for a variety of situations. Indeed, in situations that called for casual attire, most research participants considered athletic attire appropriate also. For college students, athletic attire falls into two categories: both exercise wear, and casual wear.

As informants did not mentally restrict athletic attire to athletic settings, they therefore did not necessarily interpret wearing athletic attire as a portrayal of athleticism. Inasmuch as dress is a form of self-expression, research participants nonetheless prioritized physique when considering whether or not an individual in athletic attire was an athletic individual. They also did not necessarily believe that a stranger seeing them in athletic attire might presume that they were athletic themselves. Rather than portraying an athletic lifestyle, participants generally felt that, by wearing athletic attire, college students were following trends put forth by media and the market. In this sense, then, did participants feel more pressure from discourses of consumerism than of personal responsibility?

## **Athletic Attire as Multipurpose Attire**

In order to understand how research participants in my study understood the “appropriateness” of certain clothes in particular social contexts, I asked a range of questions exploring this topic. Throughout the interviews, I asked research participants to explain their motivations in purchasing and wearing athletic attire. I asked them for what situations they might wear athletic attire, and for what situations they might consider athletic attire entirely inappropriate. Additionally, given that many college students had indicated to me in my preliminary observations that athletic attire is also comfortable, lounge attire, I asked participants to describe situations in which they would consider athletic attire more appropriate than other types of lounge attire such as sweatpants or pajamas, for example. Overall, in most situations where they might find casual attire acceptable, the participants also saw athletic attire as generally appropriate.

One participant, Dani, revealed that she did not exercise at all, primarily because she already felt happy with her physical appearance, and that her job as a nanny kept her active enough. When I asked Dani to detail her most recent athletic attire purchase, she explained that she bought a jogging suit because “[it] looked really comfortable, and part of me was like: you know, I have it, maybe I’ll go jogging” (interview, December 2, 2014). Nearly two-thirds of participants indicated that they felt some increased motivation or desire to exercise when purchasing athletic attire. Among these was Carrie, a junior majoring in interdisciplinary studies at UCF who, when asked to elaborate on this desire, responded, “If I go ahead and splurge on a pair of Nikes and they’re 70 bucks, and they’re just sitting in the closet, me and the shoes are not getting any – we’re both not benefiting” (interview, December 2, 2014). Nonetheless, despite

this initial increased motivation, participants in this research indicated that this feeling did not last.

This finding relates back to Binkley's (2006) arguments regarding liminal zones and the persuasive powers of consumption. According to Binkley: "The increasingly persuasive powers of consumption, from physical environments to media, have generated a culture that undermines rational patterns of thinking, exposing individuals to currents of desire that often motivate purchasing decisions that are inconsistent with their larger needs, budgets and other responsibilities" (2006:355). Liminality refers to liminal zones, which are areas in time and space in which individuals are subjected to the forces that push them to consume, such as shopping malls or online stores. While in this liminal zone – the store in which the athletic attire is being sold – participants are submerged in advertising and a general environment that encourages them to purchase athletic attire. They rationalize this purchase by telling themselves that they might use the article to go to the gym, but later realize, across the board, that this motivation is only temporary. Rachel, a senior at UCF who did not exercise at all, said that buying athletic attire "motivates me [to exercise] initially, but it's hard to keep that motivation" (interview, December 9, 2014). Jessica, who said she exercised once a week on a good week, explained that while buying new athletic attire sometimes helps her want to exercise, "it's really comfortable, too, so you find yourself wearing them even when you're not exercising" (interview, December 3, 2014). When I asked her if she felt an obligation to use athletic wear for its intended purpose, she responded that she felt that even if she was not exercising, "as long as I'm wearing it, it's not sitting in my drawer [unused]" (interview, December 3, 2014).



Similarly to Jessica, research participants tended to agree that, as long as they were wearing the athletic clothes rather than leaving them unused in a drawer, they were at least putting them to use. The personal responsibility participants felt to use their athletic attire did not, generally, come with an inherent need to always use this athletic attire for athletics. While these consumers do generally appear to purchase athletic attire with the intent to exercise – as third year out-of-state student Lauren said, “I remember saying ‘I’m so excited to wear these to the gym,’ it wasn’t ‘I’m so excited to wear these to school’” (interview, December 5, 2014) – they do not necessarily feel a long-term responsibility to use the attire for its intended purpose. This, again, indicated how these students viewed athletic attire as being multipurpose.

Indeed, when discussing generalized athletic attire, participants consistently and repeatedly cited comfort as a primary motivating factor, and categorized athletic attire as clothing that can be worn for leisure and not solely athletic purposes. When asked why she would purchase athletic attire in spite of knowing that she does not exercise, Dani answered, “Because it’s comfortable. I wear it for things other than exercising. A lot of it, I wear for just hanging around the house” (interview, December 2, 2014). Sarah, who identified as exercising once or twice a week and who wore Under Armour leggings to her interview with me, said she wears athletic attire because “it’s comfortable. We have classes all day, all the time, and instead of sitting in jeans for six hours, I would much rather sit in Under Armour leggings, ‘cause it’s just more comfortable” (interview, December 9, 2014). The overall perception of athletic attire was that, due to its comfort, participants were happy to wear athletic attire in nonathletic settings when they sought to be comfortable. Clothing and textiles scholars Keila E. Tyner and Jennifer Paff Ogle (2009) argue, “Because individuals are capable of deviating from social conventions,

when multiple persons deviate from social norms, their deviations can become legitimated and accepted” (2009:118). While in prior years, the social standards of what is “acceptable” attire in public were stricter; crossing such boundaries is more acceptable now. Athletic attire as casual attire is one such example of this process in action, where enough people deviate from the norm that a new norm is being created.

While some participants limited their personal use of athletic attire to lounging around the house or general activities that did not involve going out in public, others saw going to class or running errands as perfectly acceptable situations in which to wear athletic attire. Nathan, whose exercise habits were limited to spontaneous runs in a local park, noted that he wore athletic attire any day he did not have to dress up for work. Specifically, he said, “Pretty much if I’m not in dress uniform for work or something, I’m in gym shorts, a t-shirt, and running shoes” (interview, December 8, 2014). Frequently citing comfort, participants viewed athletic attire as appropriate for situations in which they did not need to dress up. From there, opinions varied as to what situations did and did not require dressing up. Some, such as Dani, felt that they ought to be well dressed any time they were in public – “You never know who you’re gonna run into!” (interview, December 2, 2014). Dani explained that she has been in situations in which she unexpectedly encountered people on whom, for one reason or another she wanted “to leave a good impression.” Therefore, she preferred to go out into public wearing something other than “an unfitted shirt and yoga pants,” so that she could be prepared for those situations (interview, December 2, 2014). Others generally saw their day-to-day responsibilities as casual, and therefore warranting casual attire such as athletic clothing.

Further, among those who personally did not venture out in public in gym clothes, most did not take issue with their peers doing so. When I asked about their perceptions of other people wearing athletic attire, most research participants indicated that they did not take particular notice – or, if they did, they assumed that an individual was going to the gym, or just decided to wear gym clothes that day. Overall, perceptions of others wearing athletic attire were not negative, but tolerant of re-purposing clothing for other than their intended uses. In some cases however, research participants clearly recognized social situations where specific dress code mattered. Megan, for example, is a senior hospitality major and takes the majority of her classes at the Rosen College of Hospitality Management, which is geographically separated from the main UCF campus, and where students in her major take the vast majority of their upper-division courses. There, she indicated, athletic attire would be completely inappropriate for class due to professors’ expectations of professional appearance from students. However, during the focus group discussion when I asked participants why they think those in college age group wear athletic attire as casual wear, Megan conceded, “... for main campus, it’s definitely different. ... I think just the convenience of not having to think about what you’re putting on, and just slip it on and go. We’re all busy. We all have crazy schedules. So I feel like that’s a pretty good contributing factor” (focus group, February 27, 2015). Therefore, while she claimed that she would never wear athletic attire to her upper-division classes due to her professors’ expectations of students, Megan found athletic attire excusable for those attending classes in a larger campus setting, particularly students in large lecture hall classes, in which professors and classmates may not have the same expectations of students. In terms of more generalized athletic attire – yoga pants, basketball or other athletic shorts, t-shirts and tank tops, sneakers, etc. – most participants

agreed that it was normal and acceptable for college students to wear such clothing for day-to-day activities.

However, more specialized athletic attire was subject to more scrutiny and judgment. When asked about how athletic attire worn by other people influences her perception of how attractive they are, Beth – a senior at UCF who primarily exercises by walking from her apartment to class – said that it depended on the type of attire. She explained that, since she used to play volleyball, she notices when women wear “spandex shorts like you would for volleyball,” and believes that “volleyball spandex are just getting pretty short, at least in my personal opinion, to be wearing out in public” (interview, December 2, 2014). Volleyball is a sport that requires a significant variety of movement – bending, diving, jumping, and so on. In the context of this sport, short, spandex shorts are functional and considered appropriate. However, while acknowledging the role of volleyball shorts in sport, Beth still felt that they were too revealing for general use. From her perspective, athletic attire that provided such little coverage was not appropriate for day-to-day decorum.

On the topic of athletic attire that is not appropriate outside of an athletic setting, around half of the participants echoed Beth’s sentiment and indicated that some types of clothing fit into that category – predominantly more skintight, form-fitting attire such as spandex shorts or sports bras, or revealing attire such as cut-up t-shirts. Participants found these more revealing articles appropriate for the gym for their breathability, given that exercise involves more sweating and requires more flexibility than day-to-day activities. When explaining why such attire would be out of place in a classroom or other similar setting, Isaac, a fourth-year student at UCF, said, “It’s meant for performance, and it’s not – if you’re going to go to class and just sit there, you

don't really need to be wearing a sports bra and compressors" (interview, December 3, 2014). During the focus group, Paul described his experience playing baseball for twelve years. He elaborated that sport-specific attire such as a men's baseball uniform was uncomfortable, and therefore he felt no motivation to wear it outside of its particular setting. Another example of sport-specific attire that informants considered out of place outside of athletics was soccer cleats. In the case of baseball pants or soccer cleats, students saw them as abnormal in public because neither item would be comfortable nor sensible to wear outside of a particular sport. With tighter, form-fitting clothes, students saw these as inappropriate in public as their revealing nature is designed toward performance in sport. In both cases, research participants indicated that they would negatively judge someone if they saw him or her wearing sport-specific attire in a situation in which he or she was clearly not going to participate in that sport.

Moreover, when I asked participants to compare the appropriateness of athletic attire and sleeping attire, most participants viewed athletic attire as something appropriate in which to leave the house. I chose to ask this question due to the fact that, based on my observations, many young people do choose to leave the house in pajama pants. Going to class or the grocery store in pajama pants, just to name two examples, seems to be a common joke and not uncommon occurrence among college students. Carrie indicated that while she would negatively judge someone who wore pajamas to campus, "I wouldn't look down on somebody who's wearing Norts [Nike shorts] or something." She described athletic attire as "actual clothes," saying "we're allowed to wear these things out because we do, we wear them to the gym" (interview, December 2, 2014). Due to the gym being a public setting, she viewed athletic attire as publicly appropriate clothing. Similarly, Lauren responded, "Wearing pajamas out of the house is not

allowed” (interview, December 5, 2014), while Rachel referred to wearing pajamas outside of the house as “the epitome of laziness” (interview, December 9, 2014). Participants who saw athletic attire and pajamas as equally inappropriate also indicated that they personally wore athletic attire as pajamas – and therefore made little distinction between the two. In general, even though some participants felt comfortable taking “public” attire such as athletic clothing and making it private by wearing it as pajamas, they did not feel comfortable with the idea of taking universally accepted “private” attire such as pajamas and making it public. Even among informants who saw athletic attire as lazy dress, it was nonetheless preferable to pajamas in public settings. While dress crosses the boundary of public and private, as argued by Turbin (2003), clothes such as pajamas – associated with sleep, an intimate activity – stay firmly in the private realm. Although people do wear pajamas in public, this action is generally met with condemnation for violating established social code.

Participants repeated this sentiment when I asked them to describe situations in which athletic attire would be entirely inappropriate. While they each indicated that formal, business, and interview settings were such situations, participants somewhat varied in their responses in addition to these. Rachel suggested “any time that you really have to make an at least somewhat professional impression, I don’t think that athletic attire would really be the best option for you” (interview, December 9, 2014). Jessica explained, “I honestly see people in athletic attire everywhere that I go... I don’t think it’s inappropriate for a lot of things” (interview, December 3, 2014). Kathy, anthropology major, echoed this sentiment, noting, “If we’re at school, I don’t really think about it, because everyone is just so different here” (interview, December 5, 2014). Again, while not necessarily their attire of choice, participants distinguished between nonathletic

scenarios in which athletic attire would not be appropriate and those when it might be acceptable or more appropriate than other attire.

### **Athletic Attire and Athleticism**

Due to seeing athletic attire as appropriate for a variety of nonathletic scenarios, participants therefore did not conflate athletic attire with athleticism, nor did they see wearing athletic attire as a portrayal of athleticism. Participants' descriptions of a "fit" individual tended not to include athletic attire as a principal factor. When determining whether or not an individual in athletic attire planned on going to the gym, most participants considered several factors in addition to the individual's attire. Many participants did not necessarily expect others to assume they were going to the gym when they wore athletic attire themselves. Further, when asked directly, participants did not feel as though people wore athletic attire in order to look athletic; rather, many viewed it simply as part of a fashion trend.

In the process of learning if participants equated fitness with other qualities such as healthiness or attractiveness, I asked them to describe what traits they believed made up a "fit" individual. The majority of informants emphasized the significance of muscle tone, and a number discussed body size as a related factor. In her description, Alice, who exercises two to three times a week, commented, "Being fit and being thin – they just seem to go hand in hand" (interview, December 2, 2014). Paul described a "fit" individual as one who is of an "appropriate weight," they look healthy, they're probably toned, their muscles are not overly large" (interview, December 8, 2014). Similarly, Megan said, "They're usually on the thinner side, they have toned muscles – not bulky. But their body is usually more slender, and they have

– you can see that they have muscle tone” (interview, December 5, 2014). Notably, both Megan and Paul, among other participants, argued that a fit individual was muscular, but not *too* muscular. Gina, who exercised once or twice a week, also cited muscle tone as a factor, adding, “I don’t really think size – like, clothing size – has anything to do with it.” Rather, she explained that she saw fitness as an overall look, including “the way they carry themselves, and just how energetic they appear sometimes” (interview, December 3, 2014). Other participants such as Rachel answered, more simply, “Someone who can climb the stairs without getting winded” (interview, December 9, 2014). Therefore, although participants had some range of responses when describing a “fit” individual, these variations overwhelmingly failed to include or emphasize the actual wearing of athletic attire. While physicality and appearance were significant factors, attire fell secondary at best.

Later, when I asked participants how they perceive other students wearing athletic attire, a handful of them responded that it was not something that typically crossed their minds. I asked Beth, “What do you think when you see someone wearing athletic attire in a nonathletic setting?” She responded, “Most of the time I don’t really process that. Or it’s just like, oh, they look comfortable today” (interview, December 2, 2014). Similarly, Sarah responded, “It’s commonplace now, I think, so it doesn’t really trigger anything when I think about it” (interview, December 9, 2014). Many who did notice others wearing athletic attire in nonathletic settings indicated that they might assume that person was going to the gym, or they equally might assume that was just what that person decided to wear that day. Rachel said that she would assume, “Either that person had a lot to do today and they just wanted something comfortable on, or maybe that person is going to the gym later” (interview, December 9, 2014). Reasons why



someone might wear athletic clothes if he or she has no plans to go to the gym typically included that the person might be lazy or want to be comfortable that day. Carrie explained that, with a hectic college schedule, some students have to wear their gym clothes to class because they may only be able to fit gym time into their schedule immediately after. Further, Carrie said that when she sees an individual in athletic attire, she thinks “they’re either heading to the gym, or they’re a regular college student, they’re just not feeling it today, and they’re like, ‘I’m gonna go with this’” (interview, December 2, 2014).

Megan echoed this sentiment, saying, “I usually think they’re going to the gym or they’re planning on going to the gym, or they have gone to the gym before they came to class. Or they’re just lazy and they don’t feel like getting dressed today” (interview, December 5, 2014). She and Paul further elaborated on the topic of laziness during the focus group discussion. Megan explained that, the way she was raised, she sees wearing athletic attire as laziness.

Megan: It was just unacceptable in my house, so it’s kind of ingrained into my brain. So when I see people that are just, for hours, out and about, and I think they have no intention of going to the gym, I perceive them as... today is their lazy day, and they didn’t put too much time and effort into what they were wearing.

Paul: I definitely perceive it as – not necessarily lazy. If I saw someone doing it every single day, it’d be a different story, but if I happen to see someone that I know that’s wearing it that day, it’s, ‘Oh, you’ve had a hard day or two.

Interviewer: So that’s a lazy day as opposed to a lazy person?

P: Yes, exactly, as opposed to a lazy person. [Focus group, February 27, 2015]

To follow up on this, I asked the focus group whether they felt as though it was more socially acceptable for individuals with “gym-going” bodies to wear athletic attire in a casual setting than those without. Megan firmly responded “no,” but elaborated that she does not find athletic attire acceptable on anyone in public, regardless of body type (focus group, February 27, 2015). Paul, on the other hand, said, “from a societal standpoint, people that are fit and then look good are

significantly more ‘able’ to wear gym clothes in public, even if they’re not going to the gym that day. It’s just how it looks from a public perspective” (focus group, February 27, 2015). This observation reinforces Entwistle’s (2001) argument that, when wearing clothes that do not appear to fit (either fit in terms of size or fit in terms of the situation), people are more prone to negative social judgment.

Consistent with Paul’s comment, many participants told me that if they saw someone wearing athletic attire, whether or not they assumed that person planned to exercise typically depended on whether or not that person had a “gym-going” body. I asked participants to explain to me what signs and factors made a difference between whether or not they assumed someone in athletic attire was wearing it for exercise. Jessica, noting a concern that she would sound shallow, said what she thinks about someone “depends on if they look fit or not” (interview, December 3, 2014). Similarly, Carrie responded, “If they’re super defined and look like they go to the gym, I’m [going to think] they might be going to the gym today” (interview, December 2, 2014). Such responses showed that, in general, individuals who appeared to be more fit were given the benefit of the doubt when wearing athletic attire in nonathletic settings. Further, this outlook reaffirmed that body type was a more significant factor to informants than clothing.

Another factor in making such an assumption was also whether or not the individual’s entire outfit looked “gym ready.” Many participants said that if they saw someone wearing just gym shorts or a t-shirt, they might not assume that he or she planned on exercising. With the exception of shoes, one article of clothing did not make a tangible difference in perception. Shoes were a significant clue to many participants. Dani said that she notices shoes, “because a lot of people wear all workout clothes and flip flops, and that is usually a sign that they do not

actually work out; they are just wearing those because they wanted to not put on real clothes for the day” (interview, December 2, 2014). Frances, who said she wore athletic attire for comfort, emphasized that she would only assume an individual was bound for the gym if she saw him or her in “the full amount of gym attire” – which, to her meant “if [he or she] could just start running in that second and [he or she] would be comfortable” (interview, December 3, 2014). Research participants noticed the entire outfit and used that to draw their conclusions, rather than taking for granted that, for example, someone wearing gym shorts would be going to the gym.

In turn, I asked the participants to describe what they thought other people thought when they themselves wore athletic clothes in public. A handful of participants clarified that, while they wear athletic clothes for lounging, or in casual settings with friends, it would not be their choice of attire to wear in public on a normal day. Megan was among these, and said, “My closer group of friends who know me – if they saw me going to class in exercise clothing, they would maybe ask me why I’m wearing it, because I don’t wear it frequently, so it’d be a change that they’re not used to” (interview, December 5, 2014). Of those who did wear athletic attire in public, participants more or less equally felt that others might think they were either going to the gym or just having a lazy day. Whether participants saw this perception as positive or negative tended to vary based on participants’ perceptions of their own bodies as fit or not. Dani, who portrayed her body as “an image I’m comfortable with,” said, “With me, they probably think I just got done working out” (interview, December 2, 2014). Conversely, Alice – who described herself as “already fat enough myself” – expressed, “I don’t want to have anyone judging me just because I want to be comfy that day” (interview, December 2, 2014). While Rachel did not express a particularly negative body image, she did acknowledge that she does not consider

herself fit, commenting that a stranger probably would not think she was planning to go to the gym “because I probably don’t look like someone who goes to the gym. I slouch” (interview, December 9, 2014). Thus, participants did not automatically believe that by wearing athletic attire in public they would make other people believe that they planned to exercise.

Generally, the participants did not necessarily feel as though people were attempting to look athletic or like gym-goers by wearing athletic clothes. Rather, they saw the increased ubiquity of athletic clothing such as yoga pants as the result of media and trends. Ella, who described herself as a very fashion-conscious woman, said she had noticed “on the news, just in the past year or so – there’s yoga pants everywhere, and even in schools students are being banned [from wearing] yoga pants because they’re so very form fitting” (interview, December 3, 2014). During the focus group, participants discussed the role of fashion, trends, and stores such as Victoria’s Secret in the emerging popularity of “athleisure” attire. Megan noticed increased athletic attire advertisements geared toward college-aged consumers.

I've seen - I'm not even exaggerating - probably four different companies now having athletic attire that are more fashion-forward. So they're definitely gearing it towards us, and towards college generation kids, because they know that we tend to wear it more than any other generation. I don't think, however, that it encourages me to go to the gym more. I think they just want it - they want to give it to us because they see us wearing it, but I don't think that their whole motive is, ‘Oh, you'll wear these clothes more and you'll go to the gym.’ [Focus group, February 27, 2015]

Accordingly, then, the media has played a large role in the rising popularity of athletic attire.

However, while advertisements influenced Megan’s choice to buy athletic clothing, they did not pressure her to exercise more. Therefore, the neoliberal discourse of consumerism at play outweighed that of personal responsibility for health.

The primary articles of discussion were yoga pants – which, as mentioned over the course of interviews and in preliminary observations, college women do not often seem to use for yoga. Frances described how wearing yoga pants “[has] become a fashion thing now. It’s just a thing. I can get these stretchy pants [that] suck my butt in and make it look good. If they were not called yoga pants, if they were just called ‘sucky-butt pants,’ people would buy them. People think they look good, and they’re comfortable, and they’re going to buy them” (focus group, February 27, 2015). She said that once Victoria’s Secret realized that “[yoga pants] look good on people, and they’re kind of stretchy, most people can wear them, and they look hot ... [they] became a sexualized thing, and a trend” (focus group, February 27, 2015). Participants acknowledged the increasing trendiness of athletic attire, but interpreted its popularity as a desire to wear fashionable clothes more so than a desire to look athletic.

Overall, a variety of factors played into whether or not research participants associated athletic attire with athleticism. The body type of an individual wearing athletic attire had a significantly greater impact on how participants perceived them than the simple act of wearing athletic attire. Further, how each research participant perceived their own body influenced how they imagined others to interpret their own wearing of athletic attire. Due to the influence of media and advertising on fashion trends, and due to the increased number of people wearing athletic attire in public for nonathletic purposes, the students generally did not interpret wearing athletic attire as a portrayal of athleticism.

## Discussion

The interview narratives in this research indicate that cultural norms around dressing are shifting and for college students, athletic clothes are becoming increasingly acceptable and appropriate for a variety of everyday situations, such as attending class or running errands, independent of athletic activity. With the exception of revealing-style clothes or specialized athletic attire such as sports bras or spandex, “gym clothes” are much more acceptable outside of the gym than in the past. “Performative acts,” such as the act of dress “have the potential to change social convention” (Tyner and Ogle 2009:105), and over recent years, more and more people have worn athletic attire for nonathletic activities. As Tyner and Ogle argue, “over time, legitimated deviations may impart change in social conventions and become ordinary and accepted behaviors” (2009:118). The findings of this study show this process in action, as some research participants were more comfortable with wearing athletic attire for day-to-day activities than others, who only wore it at home and at the gym. This suggests a larger cultural trend in which people are beginning to view athletic attire as ordinary and acceptable for purposes such as running errands or studying.

This transition of athletic attire from specialized to general attire in day-to-day living demonstrates how boundaries between public and private have blurred in American culture, particularly among younger generations. As it becomes more multipurpose, athletic attire used as leisure attire moves from the more personal, intimate sphere to the space “where individuals and groups present themselves, consciously or with little or no awareness to others” (Turbin 2003:45). Advertising and fashion trends have played a large role in the growing popularity of athletic attire. Many of the research participants indicated that when in spaces such as the

“liminal zones” defined in Binkley’s (2006) research on compulsive shopping – shopping malls, online stores, and so on – they felt an increased desire to purchase athletic attire in order to begin exercising more. However, once they had bought the article of athletic attire and returned home, they did not feel a continued responsibility to use the item for exercise only, nor did they continue to feel motivated to exercise more. In terms of neoliberal discourses, then, the pressure to consume seems to ultimately be stronger than the responsibility for personal wellbeing that neoliberalism delegates to the individual. Simultaneously, as an ideology that motivates individual consumption, neoliberal discourses seem to work. Neoliberalism promotes the use of a free market as the gateway to a well-functioning society. It makes sense, then, that the pressure to consume is stronger; once an individual has purchased athletic attire, proponents of consumption are not necessarily concerned with whether or not they use the item for its intended purpose.

Therefore, research participants did not intrinsically associate wearing athletic attire with participating in athletic activity. The perceived physical fitness of an individual was a more significant factor than attire to research participants in determining whether or not he or she planned to go to the gym. Most research participants felt that a stranger might just as likely have worn an athletic outfit for comfort as he or she may have worn it to exercise. Further, the majority of research participants felt that others would feel similarly if they saw the informant wearing athletic attire. Entwistle purports that, when we are dressed appropriately for a situation, our clothing “becomes an extension of the body which is like a second skin” (2001:45). In most casual situations, research participants did not think much of other people wearing athletic attire, or of what others might think of them. This finding supports Entwistle’s argument; the lack of

attention given to athletic attire indicates its appropriateness for those situations. Interestingly, this finding also fails to support my original hypothesis that wearing athletic attire is being used as a form of as a performance of a healthy lifestyle. In general, research participants were equally as likely to believe someone in athletic attire was going to the gym, as they were to believe he or she was lazy or wanted to wear something more comfortable than jeans. The increased ubiquity and acceptance of athletic attire as multipurpose, casual attire suggests a decreased association of athletic attire with exercise.



## CHAPTER FIVE: GIRLS IN YOGA PANTS, AND OTHER STEREOTYPES WITHIN ATHLETIC ATTIRE USAGE

In the process of learning how research participants understood the purposes of athletic attire, I also sought to understand the significance of exercise and athletics to the participants. Through this, I discovered that the way that students felt about exercise influenced the way that they perceived athletic attire on others and on themselves. Across the narratives of this study, the research participants used age- and gender-based stereotypes and presumptions to make judgments about their peers' habits and choices regarding athletics and athletic attire. While their own motivations for exercise included health, fun, and occasionally vanity, all research participants believed their peers exercised for appearance, sometimes competition or sociality, and, rarely, health. The research participants generally considered themselves separate from the generalizations they made regarding college-aged students.

These generalizations particularly focused on women. Just as college women's motivations to exercise were subject to more scrutiny and judgment – the presumption that they only exercised for appearances and male attention – as were their motivations to wear athletic attire – that they only did so in order to look “sexy” or, again, to draw attention to themselves. Cultural norms are shifting to view athletic attire as more appropriate in casual situations, yet women's attire is nonetheless judged more harshly than men's. In a society in which women have made great strides toward equality, in what ways do women continue to experience dress differently to men?

## **How Participants Understood Their Own and Others' Motivations to Exercise**

In order to understand how research participants understood the significance of exercise, I asked them what motivated them to exercise – or, if they identified that they did not exercise, what motivated them not to do so. I also asked them what they believed inspired others in their age group to exercise. An interesting finding emerged from the responses to this line of questioning. Across the board, informants believed that their peers – young college students – exercised for the sake of appearances. Furthermore, the majority of informants believed that their own motivations to exercise were different, and in some cases more noble, than those of their peers.

Responses varied when I asked each participant to describe his or her personal motivations for exercising or not exercising. Those who did not exercise maintained that their health did not warrant doing so. When I asked Dani why she felt no motivation to work out, she asserted, “I don’t really have a need to. I’m healthy, I’m a good weight, I’m pretty skinny in general” (interview, December 2, 2014). She indicated later in the interview that if her weight were to shift significantly in one direction or the other, she would adjust her diet and exercise habits accordingly; however, being happy with her existing body image, Dani did not feel the need to go to the gym. As another example, in his original interview in December 2014, Paul indicated that he did not exercise, firstly because he was “far too lazy to work out.” He then elaborated, “I can keep myself healthy enough by just not gorging on foods I shouldn't be, that I don't feel inclined to work out. The only thing that I would do at the gym is go and play racquetball, because I enjoy playing that sport. I don't do it to work out; I just do it 'cause it's fun. I have to have a reason, personally” (interview, December 8, 2014). Nearly three months later

during the focus group discussion, Paul noted that he had begun exercising on a regular basis since then. He explained, “[Exercising is] mostly just a way that I can keep a little healthier, for the most part. I don’t do it too often. I’ve started going to the gym once a week, but mainly just to do cardio, to keep myself fit – not necessarily to get incredibly buff or anything. It’s just a way to stay a little healthier” (focus group, February 27, 2015). Therefore, participants who did not exercise felt that they would do so if they believed that their health was an issue.

Overall, responses from those who did exercise fell into four major categories: exercising for health, exercising for appearances, exercising for fun, and exercising as a hobby. Several informants said that their health motivated them to exercise. Time and scheduling also factored in; Frances, who said she typically exercised less than once a week, indicated that her primary motivation to exercise was her health, but that time was often the deciding factor. She explained, “If I have time, then I’m going to exercise. The only reason I don’t exercise this semester is because I haven’t had time” (interview, December 3, 2014). Lauren played sports in high school and listed her weight and a desire to be “in shape” as her main motivations to exercise, noting, “I know what my body is like when it’s in shape, and I don’t get winded going up stairs” (interview, December 5, 2014). Other participants confessed to being more concerned with their outward appearance. When I asked Rachel what motivated her to exercise, she responded, “My thigh flab.” I asked if she meant that in regards to her health or in terms of wanting to be a certain size; she said neither, but that it was related to “vanity, more so” (interview, December 9, 2014). Another group of participants cited stress relief as the factor that motivated them to go to the gym. Alice claimed that she exercised, “Because it’s supposed to be really good for you – and also, it calms me down, and I feel like I feel happier after I’ve done it” (interview, December

2, 2014). Holly, who fell out of her exercise routine due to study abroad, but who preferred to do yoga or Pilates when she exercised, also exercised for stress relief. She said she enjoys going to yoga classes “during stressful times, to just take a break and get moving” (interview, December 3, 2014). Finally, a couple of participants had a hard time describing their motivation to exercise. Nathan felt that his motivation was hard to pinpoint, that it was “spontaneous” (interview, December 8, 2014). Meanwhile, Isaac, who described his exercise routine as jogging once a week at most, confessed that his motivation to exercise hinged on “if the weather’s nice, honestly” (interview, December 3, 2014). Over the course of the interviews, a wide variety of intrinsic and extrinsic factors emerged that motivated each participant to exercise – or not.

However, when I asked them what they believed motivated other students in their age group to exercise, every single participant identified appearance as a factor. In addition to appearance, which each participant mentioned in some fashion, other factors that came up included health, sociality, and competition. Holly felt that “attractiveness is really the first goal, and then healthiness is kind of a by-factor” (interview, December 3, 2014). Other responses supported Holly’s assertion. Similarly, Gina argued that while she believes many people do exercise for health purposes, “there’s always the people who are like, ‘I need to look good’” (interview, December 3, 2014). Other informants noted social aspects to exercise. According to Frances, “sometimes people make friends at the gym,” and according to Paul, “it’s almost a lifestyle,” in which one can only befriend certain people if he or she goes to the gym frequently (Frances, interview, December 3, 2014, Paul, focus group, February 27, 2015). By virtue of being a social activity, then, some research participants saw exercise as a competitive activity as well. Both Beth and Jessica argued that men exercise to be “buff” and “impress the girls” (Beth,

interview, December 2, 2014, and Jessica, interview, December 3, 2014). Again, however, the majority of participants saw factors such as health and socialization or competition as secondary to appearances among their peers when it came to exercise.

Further, many research participants cited appearance as motivating their peers in an accusatory fashion, indicating negative judgment of those who exercise for the sake of aesthetics. Carrie voiced concern that her peers “exercise sometimes for the wrong reasons, and they do it excessively, and not in the right, the proper ways they should be doing it” (interview, December 2, 2014). She maintained that, in pursuit of a certain number of calories or pounds lost, her peers were doing certain exercises excessively or even incorrectly. During the focus group discussion, Frances argued that the main factor motivating college students to exercise was definitely appearance. She added, “I think [appearance is important to] our age group – I don’t think me, but I think our age group – especially people who are pretty, who like to be prettier” (focus group, February 27, 2015). These types of comments were interesting, as they indicated a sense of “me versus them” among research participants.

Furthermore, such comments demonstrated that research participants not only considered themselves separate from their peers in making these generalizations, but that they considered their aims in exercise somehow more noble than those of others in their age group. During the focus group, Megan talked about the peer pressure that she felt others in her age group, but not herself, felt to keep up a particular appearance: “I want to go take off some stress, or to be healthy, or maybe change something positively about myself, I’m doing it for me personally, I’m not doing it because someone else is telling me I need to. But I think that people in my generation would not say the same thing” (focus group, February 27, 2015). Following this

comment, Frances reinforced both the appearance and competition factors that she believed motivated her peers to exercise, stating:

Personally I like doing exercising when I get really anxious, it helps me burn that off, and it gives me something that I feel is productive. So if I'm getting in a funk it makes me feel good, 'cause I'm like, yeah, I got that done, that's one thing I've done, that's a positive way to try to change the rest of my day. But I think, like [Megan] said, with the whole competition thing – I think that [for] other women my age, it is more of a competitive thing, to think that, 'Oh, I spin every day, and I'm just so fit.' And for me, I go when I can, I'm not going to go spinning every day just to say I go to spinning every day. And I'm not going to post to my Facebook every single time I go to the gym so that people will think better about me. [Focus group, February 27, 2015]

Frances' commentary here indicated a negative perception of her peers, whom she believed exercise for attention – as noted by her comment about posting to Facebook, a method by which a Facebook user can inform their entire “friends” list that they are at the gym. She believed that by exercising for personal, rather than social, gain and by refraining from informing the world that she was doing so, she was superior to her peers.

These types of responses revealed that, while research participants made generalizations about students in their age group, they did not typically include themselves in these generalizations. They used stereotypes about their generation's vanity to make judgment calls on the behaviors of their peers. This finding is relevant because the way that research participants interpreted their own and others' motivations for exercise influenced the way that they interpreted their and others' motivation to wear athletic attire. This was particularly evident in the way that research participants spoke about women in athletic attire and at the gym, as discussed in the following section.

## **Interpretations of Women in Athletics and Athletic Attire**

Across the interview narratives, I observed that – while it was not an explicit topic addressed in the interview guide – women’s choices in wearing athletic attire, both inside and outside of athletic settings, was subject to more scrutiny than men’s. Research participants were inclined to talk about women’s athletic attire and about women in the gym. While this may have been due to the majority of participants being women, the way they spoke of “stereotypical” women in athletic attire and in the gym was generally negative.

When I asked research participants what articles of clothing they classified as “athletic attire,” only one exclusively listed men’s attire. Besides that, each one described women’s, and some also described men’s. Descriptions of women’s attire tended to be more complex than men’s. For example, Jessica listed “Nike shoes, the tight spandex pants, or even the shorts, sports bras, tank tops. And for guys, tank tops, too. And they’ll wear the basketball shorts” (interview, December 3, 2014). Gina only listed women’s attire, but included a wide variety of clothing: “Leggings, running shorts, yoga pants, yoga shorts, pretty much anything stretchy, breathable. There’s athletic shirts that are made for that, spandex shirts, tank tops. There’s also oversized free UCF t-shirts that we cut up. Anything you can move comfortably in” (interview, December 3, 2014). Descriptions of men’s attire were generally more simplistic, such as “basketball shorts and a t-shirt,” according to Paul, or “gym shorts [and] running shoes,” according to Nathan (Paul, interview, December 8, 2014, and Nathan, interview, December 8, 2014).

On the topic of athletic attire that would be considered inappropriate outside of an athletic setting, most research participants described the revealing, form-fitting attire that is almost exclusively geared toward women. Regarding sports bras, Isaac said, “you can be outside

jogging and be wearing a sports bra, but I feel like if you wore a sports bra - like, I guess if you wore a sports bra to class, but then you weren't going to the gym or had come from the gym, I feel like that'd be weird" (interview, December 3, 2014). Lauren echoed this statement firmly, declaring, "You shouldn't wear a sports bra unless you're going to the gym" (interview, December 5, 2014). She felt that, even though athletic shorts or sneakers were acceptable for class or other day-to-day activities, sports bras were only acceptable in a gym setting, and that women should take the time to put on a "real" bra otherwise. In her interview, Rachel provided an explanation of why she considers these tight, revealing items appropriate inside the gym but not outside:

Those seem like more specialized clothing, I guess. And I feel like, at the gym, it's appropriate to show more skin because you are sweating, or getting hot, or whatnot – and sometimes it's easier to bend or, you know, do certain things with less clothing. And that's cool, because you're doing activity. But if you just wear it out, it's like - are you doing splits in the middle of Starbucks or something? [Interview, December 9, 2014]

As mentioned earlier, participants were generally more critical of an individual wearing revealing athletic attire in public than someone wearing more loose-fitting, casual athletic attire. The significance here, however, is that this same form-fitting attire is almost exclusively geared toward women. Therefore, there is a larger amount of such attire available to women, and a greater chance that they may choose to wear it in public.

Many research participants, when I asked them to describe how attractive they find other people in athletic attire, focused on the attractiveness of women. In some cases, this focus was positive; Dani applauded "girls who rock yoga pants," calling them "super attractive" (interview, December 2, 2014). While Frances did not find people in athletic attire more attractive in general, she conceded, "I do think the tactic of women wearing yoga shorts to show off their butt



is impressive” (interview, December 3, 2014). In those cases, informants thought that women’s using the more form-fitting clothing in order to draw attention to what they saw as positive physical attributes was a good thing, but in moderation. Frances, who supported women using athletic attire to draw attention to their body, criticized those who wore attire that she considered too tight, did not fit, and was too revealing, saying, “It’s not appropriate. You can see too much. You probably wouldn’t even wear that if you went to the gym” (focus group, February 27, 2015).

Similarly, other research participants were more critical of women in athletic attire. For example, Lauren believed that “overweight people look worse in athletic attire because it doesn’t do anything for them, it doesn’t emphasize the right parts of their body” (interview, December 5, 2014). With women’s attire, such as leggings or yoga pants, being generally more fitted and stretchy, some research participants felt that women with larger bodies should avoid these tighter items in favor of more flattering clothing. Others, such as Paul, found athletic attire less attractive on a woman overall: “If I’m going around looking for a girl that’s attractive,” he explained, “I’m not thinking of somebody in athletic attire. That’s not what I picture when I think of an attractive female” (interview, December 8, 2014). The focus on women’s athletic attire was interesting, given that the majority of participants were women who were attracted to men, yet neither necessarily nor explicitly discussed how they perceived men’s attractiveness in athletic attire. This points to a gendered difference in how men and women are viewed in dress and in athletics.

One distinct difference in men’s and women’s athletic attire, as explored in the focus group, was simply the fact that, to the focus group participants, there appeared to be a wider

variety of athletic attire available to women. In the focus group, research participants agreed that, while men's clothes are simpler, "Women just have more options in what we wear" (Megan, focus group, February 27, 2015). Megan further elaborated that "[men] don't distinguish athletic attire from casual attire. And I know that firsthand because I'm around guys a lot and they wear the same things that they wear to class to the gym, and I think what they wear to class is fine, but if you want to wear that to the gym too, go for it if that makes you happy" (focus group, February 27, 2015).

Informants felt that the variety of fashionable, trendy athletic attire available to women created both motivation and pressure to look good in their gym clothes. To Olivia, who identified that her primary motivation to exercise was her appearance, "Part of getting motivated to work out is looking good while you're working out" (interview, December 8, 2014). Others saw that motivation to look good in athletic attire in a negative light. Regarding women at the gym, Paul confessed, "I will say when I see someone who's completely put together with the perfect outfit that's matching and the shoes that happen to work for that random outfit - I kind of chuckle at them" (focus group, February 27, 2015). Alice felt significantly more negative judgment toward such women:

The cuter you look, the more you want to show it off. But at the same time, I feel like it could be counterproductive, because there are girls – I've seen it at the UCF gym – that look really pretty, but they do no exercise whatsoever. They're just literally hanging out. And it's almost as if they're afraid to get their outfit dirty, and they haven't realized that they can wash it. But that's not the case with me. I actually want to get as sweaty as possible. I want to give it my all. [Interview, December 2, 2014]

While research participants admitted that women have a greater variety of athletic clothes from which to choose, and that often these are designed to flatter women, they nonetheless negatively judged women who appeared to wear these kinds of athletic attire just for the sake of looking

good. This points to Entwistle's (2001) argument that dress is a gendered experience, that women and men experience dress differently.

"The female body," according to Entwistle is always 'feminine' and by association, 'sexual'" (2001:54). This was evident throughout the narratives of this study. Research participants viewed women's athletic attire as more sexualized, and women as more sexual than men. Frances argued this point passionately during the focus group, when she declared, "I think that women always want to feel like a sexy bombshell. There's no woman who doesn't want to feel like a sexy bombshell. It is more socially okay to wear yoga attire than it is to wear other things that would make you a sexy bomb—I can't walk around campus in a corset! That's not okay!" (focus group, February 27, 2015). She contended further that because yoga pants are both accepted in daily wear on a college campus and also figure flattering, "that's the socially acceptable way to be sexy" (focus group, February 27, 2015). Yoga pants appeared to be an "acceptable" form of sexy due to the skin coverage they provide, as opposed to spandex shorts or sports bras.

As with generalizations about their age group, research participants generally saw themselves as separate from the generalizations they made regarding women in the gym and women wearing athletic attire. Once again, many informants exhibited a "me versus them" outlook on the topic of athletic attire and also exercise in general. This finding is significant because it demonstrates how, even in a society that has achieved a great deal of equality between men and women, dress continues to be a realm in which women are subject to greater scrutiny than men.

## Discussion

“[The] feminine body ... is always, potentially at least, a sexual body and women have not entirely been able to escape this association despite their challenge to tradition and the acquisition, in part, of sexual equality. In other words, women are still seen as located in the body whereas men are seen as transcending it” (Entwistle 2001:53). Entwistle argues, “men’s bodies are taken for granted or rendered invisible, in contrast to the attention paid to female bodies at work and in other public arenas” (2001:54). By this she means that society perceives the dress of men and women in public arenas differently, with men’s dress being taken as the norm and women’s interpreted as a deviation from or variation of this norm. This argument was evident in the findings of this study. Research participants were more critical of women’s athletic attire than of men’s, in large part due to the emphasis that women’s athletic attire puts on the sexualized areas of the female body.

Similarly, many research participants held criticisms of their age group and of women in terms of exercise. Students believed that they exercised for reasons such as health or to relieve stress whereas others in their age group, particularly women, did so in response to social pressure to look a particular way. These beliefs exposed an attitude of “me versus them,” in which research participants saw themselves as independent of their age group, and in most cases, other women. Research participants’ attitudes toward their peers’ motivations to exercise extended to their perception of their peers’ motivation to wear athletic attire. While informants generally saw athletic attire as appropriate in public, there were still limits on what they considered appropriate in a public, nonathletic setting. Attire could be revealing, but not too revealing; women could look sexy, but not *too* sexy.

In “The Dressed Body,” Entwistle (2001) approaches dress through Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, “systems of durable, transposable dispositions” (Bourdieu 1977:72), the values and expectations of groups formed through their life experiences. Entwistle maintains, “changes in the social world, such as the changing status of women, are, according to Bourdieu, slow to find their way into the habitus” (2001:54). These findings are consistent with this argument, in the way that research participants perceive themselves and others. Even in attire that is designed to be form fitting and revealing for the purpose of athletic performance, women are sexualized, despite the fact that our society has achieved a significant degree of sexual equality compared to previous decades and centuries.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

### **Conclusions and Significance**

In this project, I set out to answer two questions. Firstly, how do university students interpret and understand the purchase and wearing of athletic clothes, in the absence of athletic activity? Secondly, is a student's decision to wear athletic clothing for nonathletic activity associated with a symbolic performance of a healthy lifestyle? In doing so, I also sought to understand how these students interpreted and understood wearing athletic attire, along with other aspects of health, fitness, and exercise.

From the narratives that emerged from this study, I learned that, for college students, athletic attire is not just for athletic purposes. In response to my first research question, while many use it for lounge attire at home or in similarly private settings, a growing number of students view attire such as athletic shorts or yoga pants as appropriate for a variety of casual, public settings besides the gym – such as the grocery store, the library, or class. As athletic attire transitions to become more generalized, day-to-day clothing, its association with athleticism is weaker. Therefore, the findings of my study failed to support my original hypothesis. In response to my second research question, a student's decision to wear athletic clothing for nonathletic activity is not inherently associated with a symbolic performance of a healthy lifestyle. Indeed, the majority of research participants were equally likely to associate athletic clothing with laziness as with exercise.

This cultural trend in attire is an example of, as Tyner and Ogle (2009) argue, how “legitimated deviations” in social convention can lead to those deviations becoming the norm. These deviations from the norm have been legitimated, according to this study, by advertising

and the media, which encourage consumers to purchase athletic attire because it is purported as trendy and flattering. This pressure to consume, by purchasing athletic attire, stems from neoliberal discourses that encourage consumption within a free market. Neoliberal discourses also promote the belief that each individual is responsible for his or her own wellbeing. Health is an aspect of wellbeing, and most research participants were not using athletic attire for its designed purpose, to pursue health through exercise. Therefore, the participants were failing to fulfill the personal responsibility delegated to them under neoliberal discourses. Yet within discourses of consumption, the important part is that the consumers bought the athletic attire – not so much that they used it for exercise. Thus it makes sense that the pressure to consume outweighed the responsibility for one’s wellbeing. Overall, the trend of “athleisure” clothing is related to the shifting boundaries between public and private, as argued in Turbin (2003). Because dress is both public and private, it exists in a continuum, rather than a dichotomy (Turbin 2003:46). This finding is significant as it shows how different trends in fashion, in this case athletic or “athleisure” attire, influence the styles of clothing perceived as appropriate for different situations, reinforcing this continuum. It also shows how these trends influence consumer behaviors, and how these behaviors can transition from deviant, to “legitimated deviations,” and finally to a social norm.

In the process of answering my research questions, I gained an understanding of how my research participants interpreted their and others’ motivations to exercise, as well as their and others’ use of athletic attire in the absence of exercise. They typically viewed their peers as exercising primarily for vanity, and this perception transitioned to their interpretation of their peers in athletic attire. Therefore, research participants felt that their peers wore athletic attire to

look attractive and to follow fashion trends. This attitude most frequently affected women. The research participants, mostly women, saw college women as the “other,” as a separate category from themselves, in many cases. This finding is significant because, in addition to adding knowledge to the anthropological body of work within dress studies, it addresses inequalities in the experience of dress. Entwistle argues that the female body “is always, potentially at least, a sexual body and women have not entirely been able to escape this association despite their challenge to tradition and the acquisition, in part, of sexual equality” (2001:53). The narratives from this study reflect a sexualization of women’s athletic attire, which is in theory designed for the sake of athletic performance. This demonstrates how women continue to be sexualized in American society, in spite of the strides made toward equality of the sexes over the past century.

## **Reflections**

Over the course of gathering data, I ran into minor, yet recurring issues. Initially, I had a number of students volunteer to be interviewed, then later learned they did not fit my advertised inclusion criteria – one, for example, was a physical trainer. I solved this problem by starting to ask potential participants how often they exercised before I scheduled an interview with them. Another issue I came across was no-shows, particularly due to the fact that I held my interviews during finals week and focus group during midterms. While these times worked for the vast majority of participants, I had some potential participants who rescheduled their interviews several times before canceling altogether. This was particularly problematic with the focus group, when I offered over a dozen potential time slots to the 18 research participants, all of whom had indicated they would participate in the focus group if time permitted. The final time



was selected because it worked for six participants. One became ill the day of, one canceled 15 minutes beforehand due to a school commitment, and one failed to show and never responded to any further communication. Ultimately, three research participants took part in the focus group. All scheduling issues and prior troubles notwithstanding, I felt that they had an interesting and more thorough discussion than I may have been able to record with a larger group.

The participants in this study were all UCF students who wore athletic clothing for leisure activity and who exercised less than three times a week. Coincidentally, I also fell into this category (in fact, the majority of this thesis was written while wearing yoga pants, leggings, or spandex shorts). Additionally, because I recruited through Facebook and through the Honors in the Major email list, I personally knew most of my research participants. In some cases, I was concerned that participants might not give candid responses because they may have thought I was judging them. Once or twice, when a participant said something mid-interview to indicate that they felt bad for saying something negative, I took a moment to remind them that I was not there to judge. For the most part, however, I felt that the research participants were frank and open with me, some even freely criticizing women of my body type. This may have been partially due to the fact that they knew me and knew I did not exercise.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Anthropology of dress is an interesting topic that could be explored in a variety of ways on a college campus. College is a transitional period, when students (ideally) learn to become young professionals. An important aspect of this is learning appropriate dress, particularly for business settings. Another recent trend I have observed, contemporary with but not necessarily

directly connected to the emergence of “athleisure” clothing, is the rise of what I call “business trendy,” more fashion-forward attire designed for a professional workplace. A similar study in trends in business attire, particularly among college students, could explore further how men and women experience dress, and how cultural norms are changing to allow for less rigid dress in public arenas such as work.

As I conducted my research using traditional college students, my sample consisted of students between 18 and 24 years of age. However, during the focus group, Frances suggested that while she did not believe college students wore athletic clothes in order to appear athletic, “older women, maybe moms” (focus group, February 27, 2015), might. In Sara Germano’s (2014) *Wall Street Journal* article, she spoke to graduate students, businesswomen, and mothers regarding their everyday use of yoga pants. Therefore, a similar study to this conducted with an older or otherwise different sample – such as young mothers, for example – might produce different results.

## APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Joanna Zofia Mishtal and Co-PI: Shannon N. Payne**

Date: **November 05, 2014**

Dear Researcher:

On 11/05/2014, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	The Performance of Health? Motivations Behind University Students' Decisions to Wear Athletic Attire
Investigator:	Joanna Zofia Mishtal
IRB Number:	SBE-14-10677
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

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 contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne Muratori".

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 11/05/2014 11:07:59 AM EST

IRB Coordinator

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

## Interview Guide

Project Title: The Performance of Health? Motivations Behind University Students' Decisions to Wear Athletic Attire

1. How many times do you exercise in a typical week?
  - a. How long is each time?
  - b. What activities do you typically do?
2. Where do you usually exercise?
  - a. Do you prefer to exercise alone or with someone else?
  - b. How often do you participate in group exercise classes?
  - c. If yes, do you go by yourself or with friends?
3. Why do you exercise?
  - a. What motivates you to do so?
  - b. In your view, is exercising at your age, a young age, mainly for health?
  - c. If not, what other factors do you think are involved?
  - d. Do you think that appearing fit conveys healthiness?
  - e. How about attractiveness? Or, self-discipline?
4. What do you classify as athletic attire?
5. When was your most recent athletic attire purchase?
  - a. What did you purchase, and where?
  - b. What motivated that purchase?
  - c. What influence does brand name have on your shopping decision?
  - d. How, if at all, does buying new athletic attire influence your desire to exercise?
6. For what reasons do you most commonly wear what you define as athletic attire?
  - a. For what situations would you say athletic attire is more appropriate than, say, pajamas or sweatpants?  
Can you explain why?
  - b. For what situations would athletic attire be entirely inappropriate?  
Can you explain why?
  - c. Do you wear athletic attire when you don't necessarily plan to work out? Can you explain why?
7. What do you think when you see someone wearing athletic attire in a nonathletic setting?
  - a. What do you think people think when they see you doing so?
  - b. What do you hope they think?
  - c. Which do you like better: the way your body looks in athletic clothes or in nonathletic clothes, generally speaking.
8. What effect does wearing athletic attire have on how attractive you feel?
  - a. Does athletic attire on others influence how attractive you perceive them as?  
Why? Can you explain?

## APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

## Focus Group Guide

Project Title: The Performance of Health? Motivations Behind University Students' Decisions to Wear Athletic Attire

1. What are your personal motivations for exercising – or not exercising?
  - a. What do you think motivates others in our age group?
  - b. How does this relate to your personal motivations?
2. Why do you think gym clothes are considered acceptable as casual wear in our age group/social setting?
  - a. Do you think this is a phenomenon particular to college, or a general societal trend?
  - b. How do you feel about this trend?
3. Many of you said in your interviews that if you had to judge why someone was wearing gym clothes to class, you would guess that they either were going to the gym or they didn't feel like putting on real clothes. You also indicated that one factor you might use to tell the difference between one or the other would be whether or not you thought that person had the body of someone who worked out often.
  - a. Do you think that wearing gym clothes out and about if you are not planning on going to the gym comes off as laziness?
  - b. Do you think that it is more socially acceptable for people with "gym going" bodies to wear gym clothes in nonathletic settings?
4. Do you think the implications of this study affect women more than men?
  - a. Things to consider: more women offered to participate in this study than men; almost every participant discussed women when discussing athletic attire and its influence on attractiveness; many participants brought up the influence of the media
  - b. Is there a more distinct difference between women's gym clothes/casual wear and men's? Or do men wear athletic clothes casually more often?



## APPENDIX D: COPYRIGHT APPROVAL

13 May 2015

Keith Storey  
Sports Marketing Surveys USA  
6650 West Indiantown Road, Suite 220  
Jupiter, FL 33458

Re: Permission to Use Copyrighted Material

To Mr. Storey:

I am contacting you because you are the author of the Sports and Fitness Industry Association's 2014 Sports, Fitness and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report, and I would like to use the report in my undergraduate thesis. I am an Honors in the Major student in the Burnett Honors College at the University of Central Florida. My thesis, "The Performance of Health? Motivations behind University Students' Decisions to Wear Athletic Attire," will be completed and published in August 2015.

I am researching the motivations of college students in electing to wear athletic attire in the absence of athletic activity. I plan to limit my use of your material to citing statistical data regarding levels of inactivity in the U.S. and among college aged groups. I will not use it in any other way.

I respectfully request your support as the copyright holder to grant me the right to use this report free of charge in the manner described herein. If this is acceptable, you can simply sign and return to me a copy of this letter, which is attached in PDF form. Thank you for your consideration and your time.

Sincerely,

Shannon Payne  
Burnett Honors College  
University of Central Florida



Permission is Hereby Granted Pursuant  
To the Terms and Conditions of this Letter

Copyright Owner Signature: Keith Storey

Copyright Owner Name: KEITH STOREY

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