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ABSTRACT

Fashion has long been a signifier of social divisions within the education system as well as society at large. This paper seeks to examine how young people's use of fashion varies in two distinct social milieus–the high school and college peer cultures. Interviews with 19 college freshmen were conducted to ascertain how fashion contributed to, or hindered, social divisions within each milieu. While informants recognized numerous social divisions marked by fashion choices within the high school milieu, during their initial weeks on campus no social divisions were identifiable. In this new milieu it appears fashion contributed to a sense of communitas among college freshmen. However, over time, this sense of communitas diminished as freshmen acquired the requisite levels of cultural capital to identify the signifiers of social divisions. Implications of this research are discussed in terms of freshmen's limited ability to play with their identity, as expressed through fashion, as a result of the structuring power of the habitus.

INTRODUCTION

Indeed there exists a correspondence between social structures and mental structures, between the objective divisions of the social world–especially the division into dominant and dominated in the different fields–and the principles of vision and division that agents apply to them.

- Bourdieu 1989a, 1

The work of Pierre Bourdieu, despite being based on research conducted primarily in 1970s France, has been applied to a number of social phenomena within the contemporary American context by consumer behavior researchers. His work, especially the argument presented in his seminal work, *Distinction* (1984), has been applied to varied phenomena such as consumer tastes (Friedland et al. 2007; Holt 1998) and the selection of an institution of higher learning (Allen 2002), among others. A less often cited work, *The State Nobility* (1989a), however points to a need to examine the field of higher education as locus of class struggle. Institutions of higher education, especially elite schools, "produce a *consecrated* elite, that is, an elite that is not only distinct and separate [from the masses], but also recognized by others and by itself as worthy of being so" (Bourdieu 1989a, 102, emphasis in original). Through conferring not only educational credentials but also this mutual recognition, institutions of higher education legitimate and reinforce existing social divisions rather than serve as an equalizing force in class struggles.

Yet American college students do not view the college experience in such terms. Rather, they view it with excitement as an opportunity to reinvent themselves (Karp et al. 1998). And as colleges have experienced a two-fold increase in enrollment since the 1970s, an increase from 7 million to 15 million students (U.S. Census Bureau 2002) more young adults have entered college with this expectation in mind. The question remains, however, about how much agency individuals possess to reinvent themselves in this context? Does college represent a play-community (Huizinga 1950) that shares this collective illusion? And more particularly, how do college freshmen perceive and use fashion as a tool in this reinvention process; for fashion has long been a source of social differentiation (e.g., Bourdieu 1984; Hebdige 1979; Milner 2004) and as a means of expressing personal identity (e.g., Goffman 1959; McCracken 1988; Thompson and Haytko 1997)? Moreover, how

does students' use of fashion reproduce or undermine the social divisions present within the high school milieu?

To examine these questions, the current study is based on interviews with college freshmen during the liminal period (Turner 1969) of the high school to college transition. The analysis of college freshmen's use of fashion at a single, large Midwestern university provides a nice contrast to Bourdieu's studies because, unlike the differences between students attending the selective *grandes écoles* and less selective universities, students' practices, especially in regard to fashion, are subject to the same structural constraints. Therefore, the differences in students' use of fashion may be attributable to "the dispositions of agents, their habitus, that is, the mental structures through which they apprehend the social world…[which is] essentially the product of the internalization of the structures of that world" (Bourdieu 1989b, 130).

Structure, Liminality, and Play

Questions regarding the influence of social structures on individuals' agency have long been the central inquiry of social scientists. For example, scholars have examined the effects of the structural differences between rural and urban communities on the human experience (Gans 1991; Simmel 1971; Wirth 1938). In contrast, other scholars have argued individuals' subjective interpretations of the social world are the only valid way to explore the human experience (e.g., phenomenologists). These scholars believe social structures exert little influence on individuals' practices; individuals possess a great deal of agency to determine/create their own lives. But Bourdieu (1977) has rejected both of these approaches, arguing for "an experimental science of the *dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality*" (72, emphasis in original), essentially a merger of the two approaches.

Bourdieu's ouvre of work is dedicated to demonstrating how such an integration of two divergent social science approaches can be applied to real world experience. Essentially, Bourdieu argues that the habitus, "understood as a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks" (Bourdieu 1977, 83, emphasis in original), negotiates between objective structures and practices and, ultimately, produces strategic action. In other words, Bourdieu proposes individual and collective action is limited by both objective social relationships and structures manifest in the habitus, which reproduce existing patterns of social interaction. Yet practices are not to be simply reduced to the structuring power of the habitus; practice results from the interplay of the habitus, the types and composition of capital individuals possess, and the rules dictated by a particular "field," (e.g., the college peer culture) structured spaces in which individuals struggle to maintain or achieve specific types or combination of capital, and consequently their social position. Individual agency exists within a realm of possible possibles–those possible actions that are possible despite the constraints of one's relative position in the field of power, their habitus, and the demands of the field.

Like Bourdieu, Turner (1969) also examines the relationship between social structures and practices, but his analysis can be classified as objectivist in nature. That is, he focuses his research on the structuring power of the ritual process and views individuals as

possessing limited agency to alter the ritual experience. Yet, he argues within the liminal spaces produced by social rituals, where the influence of social structures is subjugated by the power of anti-structure, social hierarchies are inverted (e.g., those with status are marginalized, the marginalized take a position of power) or eliminated all together (e.g., all are equal). In this way, liminal spaces are similar to the "intermediate positions of social space" where "the indeterminacy and objective uncertainty of relations between practices and positions is at a maximum, and also, consequently, the intensity of symbolic strategies" (Bourdieu 1989b, 133). The liminal phase, however, represents only the middle phase of rites of passage (Van Gennep 1960), which arguably, college is for those who experience it. It is preceded by the separation phase and followed by the aggregation phase. During the separation phase individuals are detached "either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'), or from both" (Turner 1969, 94). Once separated from society and the stable structure it represents, the initiates, in this case college freshmen, become liminars, those who are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner 1969, 95). Their daily activities occur in a distinct place, in this case the college campus, and are governed by different rules than society at large, and thus their social position is ambiguous. The ultimate goal of rites of passage is to pass to the initiate the collective wisdom of the group and then to reintegrate the initiates into the collective, returning to a social order previously inverted (Turner 1969).

Whether considering the college experience as a whole as a liminal period, or just students' first semester, this paper argues college represents a different stage of life than students have previously experienced, complete with its own cultural norms and rules. And upon completion of the liminal stage initiates are reincorporated into the general social structure, applying their newfound knowledge in a manner that reproduces the existing social structure. Therefore the ritual cycle completes itself, "men are released from structure into communitas only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of communitas" (Turner 1969, 129). As a result, communitas, "a sense of the generic social bond between all members of society…regardless of their subgroup affiliations or incumbency of structural positions" (Turner 1969, 116), is fleeting–it is unsustainable. The previously existing social structure reemerges.

But within liminal spaces individuals appear free, relatively, from the power of structure. Although individuals are never completely free from the influence of social structures and norms (Bourdieu 1977; Turner 1969) because liminal spaces exist "outside 'ordinary' life," are governed by rules (e.g., those imposed by tribal elders), and represents a period of "make-believe", at least in comparison to real life, they approximate the characteristics common to play spaces and games (Caillois 1961; Huizinga 1950). Yet, the other characteristics of play and games do not appear to apply to rites of passage like attending college. In particular, participation in traditional rites of passage is obligatory, not voluntary. Moreover, increasingly, the outcome of individuals' participation is not uncertain. By participating in the rite, individuals know that when the rite concludes they will have obtained a new position in society (e.g., a college graduate), replete with all the status that title confers. Finally, because rites of passage transmit social knowledge (i.e., forms of capital), which ultimately contribute to the reproduction of the existing social structure, rites of passage are best conceptualized as a productive activity rather than an unproductive activity.

However, despite these issues with the theoretical conception of play and games, within the liminal phase of contemporary rites of passage individuals appear able to play—at least in comparison with previous behavior. This claim, of course, requires substantiation. This paper attempts to do just that by examining play within a specific liminal phase, the transition from high school to college, and within a particular field, the fashion field. Certainly college as a whole is separated from everyday life, but when students leave the relative stability of high school for the relative uncertainty of transitioning to the college peer culture, they are certainly "betwixt and between" social positions. They are no longer adolescents but have yet to become adults. They are no longer high school students but have yet to become "true" college students. Moreover, they transition from occupying a position of power within one peer culture (i.e., that of a high school senior) to occupying a position of limited power within another (i.e., that of a college freshmen). The primary question, therefore, is when freed from the objective social structure of high school how do freshmen utilize fashion in their new peer culture?

METHOD

The current study is based on depth interviews with 19 college freshmen at the beginning and end of the 2004 Fall semester, their first semester at a large Midwestern university. Interviews began with "broad stroke" questions (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989), such as "tell me a little about yourself and your family." Follow up questions addressed a broad range of topics, including informants' use, and their perceptions of others' use, of clothing during the transition period. The first interviews began with a discussion of informants' high school experience, including a discussion of their clothing preferences and their perceptions of how clothing differentiated social groups. The interview then transitioned to students' initial impressions of college, as well as discussions about whether their clothing preferences had changed since high school. The second interview focused specifically on how students felt they fit into the larger social structure of the college and whether their life had changed over the past four months. Interviews ranged from 26-60 minutes. Of the 19 informants in the first interview, 14 (74%) participated in the second interview. Interviews were conducted either in a location of the informant's choosing (e.g., their dorm lobby) or in the lead author's office. The study resulted in 33 individual interviews, just over 26 hours of discussion, and 308 pages of transcribed text.

Data were analyzed following the hermeneutic method (Thompson 1997). Analysis began with an impressionistic reading of the transcripts and the identification of recurring themes within each individual interview. Subsequently, differences in informants' descriptions of fashion across the two interviews were also noted to explore the evolution of informants' clothing preferences and perceptions of others' clothing evolved over time. A second analysis of the data involved cross-informant analysis, the goal of which was to identify global themes that emerged from informants' descriptions of fashion. Analysis then integrated extant literature to help interpret how these themes fit within the larger discourse regarding structure, liminality, and play. Because any qualitative analysis is an iterative process, a third reading sought to identify any emergent themes not previously identified or themes that contradict the extant literature.

FINDINGS

The High School Milieu: Structure at Work

The ability of fashion to mark social positions is apparent in informants' descriptions of their high school experience. Although a consistent description of "appropriate" high school fashion emerged across informants' descriptions of the clothing common in their schools, individual groups manipulated the fashion code to distin-

guish their group from the various other groups populating the high school milieu. Sally, who attended a large public high school, provided a general overview of the accepted high school fashion norm. As she commented, "Our school is kind of like the preppy school. So everyone wore Abercrombie [& Fitch] and American Eagle [Outfitters] and stuff." Other informants' descriptions corroborated the fact that the "preppy" look was common across high schools but added additional brands such as The Gap, Hollister, Aeropostale, and, in some instances, high-end brands like Banana Republic, Express, and Juicy Couture, to the list of acceptable brands. In addition to specific brands, the fashion norm also included specific items of clothing. Sally felt males would wear "Like just jeans or khakis and then like a collared shirt or like a t-shirt…no one really like dressed up differently than the next person for guys." Kelly, who also attended a large public high school, described the female version of the "preppy" look thusly: "Girls wear mini-skirts, t-shirts, like fitted t-shirts, button downs, polo shirts were big, flip-flops all the time."

Despite this general fashion norm, informants' comments unearthed distinctions between high school cliques, not only in regard to social activities, but also in regard to how they manipulated the fashion norm. The students who generally adhered to the norm, but purchased high-end brands as markers of distinction, represent a group termed the "Populars," although this title does not necessarily reflect whether informants viewed these students as popular. In contrast, those who deviated from the norm belonged to a group termed the "Outcasts." In between these two groups resided the "Normals." Clothing, therefore, marked relative positions within the social milieu, and therefore represented a from of agônistic play—which is "always a question of a rivalry which hinges on a single quality [in this case, fashion]…exercised, within defined limits and without outside assistance, in such a way that the winner appears to be better than the loser in a certain category of exploits" (Caillois 1961, 14).

When describing the social distinctions present in their high school, informants' descriptions suggest the Populars (e.g., "the jocks," "the pretty ones," "the party people") are the winners of the fashion game. As a result of their mastery of the high school fashion code, they are able to translate their high levels of cultural capital within the high school field, along with other potential attributes such as athletic performance or physical attractiveness, into a position of social dominance. The price students pay to achieve this social position, however, is perceived to be conformity. To belong to this group non-group members believe one must conform to the group norm. When asked to describe the Populars, Elaine, a self-described Normal at a private, all-girls high school, stated "Um, homogenous I guess would be a good word…I mean maybe they prefer it that way, like to fit in with their friends and wear similar clothing." Similarly, Eva, a Normal from a large rural high school, believed the Populars "all tried to be the same and nobody is comfortable being themselves or truly being themselves or being an individual. So they're really mainstream. They're the people who don't explore different things."

However, in reality, members of the Populars did not conform to the stereotypical high school fashion norm. Instead, their group conformed to an idiosyncratic form of the norm, one that emphasized high-end brands to distinguish themselves from the other peer groups; brands that communicated students' access to both cultural and economic capital. Yet, this mark of distinction was relatively subtle. The style of these high-end clothes mirrored those of the mainstream brands—jeans, khakis, polo's, and button-downs— what differed was the status of the brands. Hence one must possess the requisite level of cultural capital to be able to distinguish the nuance between the Populars' fashion norm and that of the general

high school population. When asked what brands the Populars favored, Dana, a self-described Popular at a large public high school, suggested they "would wear BeBe, they would wear Juicy…guys wore like Lacoste shirts, guys would wear Burberry shirts." By wearing these brands, according to Susan, another Popular at a large public high school, the Populars were able to stand out from their peers: "You know if you're going to be shopping at Saks Fifth Avenue and all that stuff you're going to have like nice trendy clothes. If you're going to be shopping at the mall you're going to be generic or whatever." By wearing high-end brands, the Populars both expressed their relatively higher levels of capital as well as perceived themselves as being different and original, especially in comparison to their "generic" peers.

In comparison to informants' descriptions of the Populars' predilection to conform to their group norm, members of the Normals perceived themselves as free to deviate from their respective group norm, a norm that is far more in line with the general high school fashion norm–jeans, khakis, t-shirts, and button downs. Eva, for example, described her personal style as motivated by a desire to avoid looking like everyone else. As she explained, "Like I don't want to look the same as everybody else. I don't want to blend or something. So I guess you wear what they don't wear." By not conforming Eva believes she is able to express her individuality and occupy a distinct place in the social universe. Rather than being a member of a clique or group, she is simply Eva. Jessica, another self-described Normal from a large public high school, also attempted to avoid wearing brands that she felt the majority of her peers wore. As she stated, "I don't like to buy stuff from Abercrombie because everybody has it. It's like mass produced and it's, you become mass produced when you wear that type of stuff." Through conforming, a trait often attached to members of the Populars, the Normals believe they are sacrificing their individuality. Hence, they perceive their fashion choices as being driven not by group pressures but rather by their own personal tastes; they perceive a great deal of agency. Yet a contradiction arises when comparing this idealized quest for individuality and other descriptions of Normals' fashion preferences. In later comments, Eva, despite her desire to stand out from her peers, claimed: "I like the Gap a lot!" Similarly, April, who attended a smaller suburban public high school, stated that she and her group of friends, all Normals, "wore like Hollister, American Eagle, Abercrombie, and stuff like that." Normals, like their Popular peers, have acquired the requisite cultural capital to act out the appropriate script within their peer group. Through this act of conformity, an act that Normals do not interpret as such, they can be confident in their knowledge that members of their peer group present a unique group identity to anyone who observes them, a unique group identity at least in comparison to the two other main peer groups in their high school environment, the Populars and the Outcasts. Consequently, they too can be considered part of the agônistic game. They may not spend as much on high-end brands as their Popular peers, but through their use of fashion, specifically their "sustained attention, appropriate training, assiduous application…" of a group fashion norm they express their "…desire to win" (Caillois 1961, 15) at the game of fashion, if the game is viewed as a means by which social divisions are communicated, including some while excluding others.

In contrast to the Populars and Normals, informants' descriptions of the Outcasts suggest this group occupies a distinct position among the high school groups in relation to the approved high school fashion norm. Whereas descriptions of the Populars and Normals suggest these groups adhered relatively closely to the norm, albeit with slight group specific deviations, the Outcasts (e.g., "losers," "nerds," "Goths," "stoners") appear to opt out of the high school fashion game. Although no self-described Outcasts

were interviewed for this study, informants' perceptions of this group are still informative. For instance, Eric, a self-described Normal from a public high school, perceived the nerd sub-segment of the Outcasts as not "car[ing] about clothing. They just wanted to show up and do their work or whatever. They didn't want to make a statement or look good or whatever, I guess." Julia, a Normal from a suburban public high school, also perceived a greater emphasis on academics than fashion among this group. Nerds, she stated, "don't care as much about the way they look…They'll just wear really simple clothes. They don't usually worry about like how, like doing their hair especially." Likewise, hippies and stoners were also perceived as ignoring the accepted high school fashion norm, but in a different way than the nerds. As Eva commented: "[Hippies] sort of rebel against mainstream things. They don't necessarily need to match. They don't really obsess about that…They're more interested in vintage things as opposed to new clothes." Even the Goth students, according to Gage, had a specific "uniform," just a uniform that was different from that of the Populars and Normals. As Gage, another Normal from a suburban high school, elaborated, "The Goths or skaters usually wore torn up clothes…[they] would wear stuff from Hot Topic or something. Metal prods on the clothing would be considered Goth." Whether because of a lack of cultural capital necessary to understand, or a conscious effort to reject, the established high school fashion norm, informants viewed the Outcasts as dressing drastically different from the vast majority of high school students.

Whether a "winner" of the high school fashion game exists is a rather subjective question–depending on who one asks, and their relative position in the social milieu, the answer will most definitely differ. The Populars will argue they are the winners, same with the Normals and the Outcasts. Yet, what remains consistent across these three groups is that within the high school environment fashion remains a central, albeit contentious, component in students' attempts to express individual and group identities (Danesi 1994; Goffman 1959; Milner 2004) while simultaneously communicating what type of person they are not (Bourdieu 1984; Englis and Solomon 1995).

Liminality, the College Transition, and Fashion

When students graduate high school and transition to college, students enter a new field, replete with new rules, norms, and markers of distinction. That is not to say that they do not remember the social divisions that existed in high school, or how fashion contributed to marking those distinctions, for the high school experience remains a salient schema. Despite students' ability to apply the schema learned in high school to their new environment, it looses some of its efficacy. For college represents a distinctly different environment than the students have previously experienced. In most cases students have left the security of their adolescent homes to move into a residence hall, they are now living a semi-autonomous life free from the daily oversight of parents, they have had to sever some, if not all, of their high school friendships, and their daily life no longer revolves around the familiar norms and schedules of the high school peer culture, among numerous other changes. Consequently, college freshmen, especially during the first few weeks on campus, experience something similar to the second phase of rites of passage: margin (or *limen*) (Van Gennep 1960). They are betwixt and between two distinct phases of their lives: they are no longer high school students but they have yet to become entrenched in the college peer culture and, therefore, are not truly college students either. Although they have been labeled as freshmen, a label that positions them as occupying a low social status within the college social environment, within the freshmen class they represent "threshold people" (Tuner 1969). Among their

peers within this smaller sub-segment of the college milieu individuals "elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (Turner 1969, 95). Because students possess limited cultural capital within this new field they are less equipped to classify themselves and their peers.

Informants' comments, therefore, suggest they viewed college fashion as representing a different type of game than the agônistic game of high school fashion. The college milieu was perceived as free from the competitive environment characteristic of high school. Students, therefore, began the year as equals. For example, Annette, a Normal in high school, commented:

I feel like in high school there is to a certain extent, to where everyone has that mentality of where you have to be what everyone else wants you to be… because it's not so structured of this social ladder that you have to climb…I think that it is the freedom… you don't have to worry about offending anyone or like being, being yourself.

Similarly, April, also a Normal, believed distinct social divisions were not present on campus.

I guess there's new groups forming but college is just different from high school. So I think the groups will always be open…I guess groups are going to form but I think everyone is just nicer in college and more open to meeting people because it's less cliquey. There's so many people around.

Both Annette's and April's comments illustrate the belief that college is not structured in the same manner as high school. They believe individuals are free to be whomever they wish, socialize with whomever they want, and freely switch between social groups. In other words, in contrast to the regimented high school milieu the college milieu is an environment where they are able to play.

Students' perceptions of campus fashion seem to reinforce this feeling of freedom and the lack of social divisions. Despite, as April commented, the fact college fashion is "pretty much the same [as in high school]. Like I said before, American Eagle, Abercrombie, stuff like that," students added certain components to their wardrobe in an attempt to fit into the college peer culture. In particular, every informant mentioned how prior to arriving on campus he or she purchased university branded apparel, clothes that were worn either on a daily basis or on special occasions such as football games. Ultimately, the shared consumption and display of university branded clothing generated a feeling of communitas (Turner 1969) among freshmen and the members of the larger university community. As Eva articulated, she purchased university branded clothing because

I thought "hey, if I go to [University name] I should probably have something that says it." Just because it sort of, it's not like it identifies you but it's a part of you now. Like I go to this school and you want to reflect that sometimes. So you want to have something that reflects it without having to say it. You just wear it and people see you and they know.

In her attempts to fit in, Sally bought university branded clothing to replace the high school branded clothing she previously wore. "Like I always wore [high school] t-shirts. But I feel stupid because I don't go [there] anymore. So I want [name of university] clothes for that purpose." Not only did wearing high school branded clothing make Sally feel stupid, it also appears to prevent her from fitting in with her peers; it communicated that she was different

from everyone else. In contrast, wearing university branded clothing allowed students to perceive themselves as part of the larger college community by minimizing differences and emphasizing similarities.

In addition to continuing to wear brands like the Gap, Abercrombie & Fitch, and others, along with university branded apparel, informants also mentioned how shopping at Urban Outfitters, a retail store centrally located on campus, that carries a wide range of youth-oriented apparel, aided their attempts to fit the college fashion norm. As Melissa commented, " a lot of kids wear [Urban Outfitters] hear just 'cause it's everywhere." Although informants viewed the store's convenient location as the primary reason students shopped at Urban Outfitters, by wearing its clothes students felt more confident in their ability to communicate a "true" college identity. Yet, like the Normals' assertion that the clothes they purchased were unique and helped them express their individuality, college students view shopping at Urban Outfitters in a similar manner. As Julia suggested, Urban Outfitters is "not your run of the mill Gap or Express and, that like mass produces the like same thing over and over. It's just really fun and, I don't know, creative." Thus, subjectively, shopping at Urban Outfitters was viewed as an act of non-conformity, while objectively, due to the number of students who shopped there, it can be viewed as a form of conformity contributing to a feeling of communitas, similar to that developed by wearing university branded apparel.

Through their similar use of fashion, college freshmen generate a sense of communitas that helps them transition into their new role as college students. That is, they appear to minimize their distinct high school identity (e.g., as a member of the Populars) in favor of maximizing the similarities between members of their new peer group. In essence, college freshmen appear to engage in a game of *mimicry*. Freshmen apply the limited cultural capital they have acquired during their first few days and weeks on campus, especially in regard to fashion, to make themselves believe, or make others believe, they are someone other than whom they truly are (Caillois 1961), or at least a different person than they had previously been categorized as in high school. Moreover, instead of accepting a position as a liminar freshmen play with fashion, by wearing university branded clothing or shopping at Urban Outfitters, to convince themselves and others that they belong on campus, that they are indeed college students.

The End of the Liminal

Despite the initial feelings of communitas generated by wearing similar clothing, communitas is inherently a temporary state. As mentioned previously, informants stated that college fashion was very similar to that in high school, with slight deviations. As such, the nuanced styles present in high school ultimately reappeared on the college campus as well. These nuances were masked, however, by students' desire to fit in on campus, the desire that contributed to feelings of communitas. However, as time progressed and students become more confident in their new identity as college students, the feeling of communitas dissipated and social divisions reemerged. Although students remained in a liminal phase in regard to their position within society at large, feelings of communitas ended.

Although during the first interview informants' discussion of fashion focused on how similar students' fashion was, during the second interview informants' comments centered on how students' fashion differed, and how these differences represented social distinctions. In addition to discussing fashion distinctions in similar terms to those described when discussing high school fashion, informants mentioned two brands distinct to the college peer culture. The North Face and Ugg Boots, unlike brands prevalent in the high school context, were not common in informants' high schools and, therefore, were perceived by informants as symbolic of a college identity. April's comments are illustrative of how informants discussed these items:

It's funny because me and my roommate were talking about the status symbols on campus…cause we went and got North Face fleece for Christmas, like from our parents. But we went and got 'em because they don't really have 'em at home. And um, we're just like "Oh, all we have to do now is get some Ugg Boots and an iPod and we'll be like everyone else on campus." 'Cause that's really how it is. Like there's things that you want and you don't even know why you want them. But like when you think about it, you look around and everybody has 'em. Like everyone has North Face fleece and like, sure, yeah, it's warm and it's nice. But I probably wanted it because everyone else has it. It's the same with Ugg Boots and iPods; everyone has 'em.

Although representing a symbolic marker of belonging, these brands, despite April's perceptions, were not nearly as prevalent on campus as university branded apparel, especially among freshmen. One potential explanation to this fact is that freshmen acquired the needed cultural capital to recognize these items over time, especially since they were not present in their high school milieu. In other words, they did not initially realize that at this university these brands were markers of belonging. Another interpretation, however, could be that unlike purchasing university branded apparel, a relatively affordable item (t-shirts begin at $5), and shopping, or simply browsing, at Urban Outfitters, acquiring a North Face fleece ($70+) or Ugg Boots ($160+) required a higher level of economic capital. Thus, despite being fairly prevalent on campus, not all members of the peer culture could afford them. For instance, April, who comes from a middle-class background, got her North Face fleece as a gift from her parents. However, due to her self-described limited financial situation she was unable to purchase Ugg Boots. Consequently, they remained a marker of status in her mind. As she later commented:

I can remember one time that me and my roommate were like sitting there and we saw this girl that we see a lot and she was like "she's so pretty." And she's like, "Ahh, look. She has those Ugg Boots. And they're real Ugg Boots!" Because they have like the fake ones and all that. But it was like she has the real ones, she must be rich…If we see someone with them we'll be like "Oh those are so cute. And they're real!"

Although Ugg Boots appear to become the focus of an ongoing joke between April and her roommate, it also becomes illustrative of how April feels left out, to a certain extent, of the college peer culture. Because she views Ugg Boots as a marker of a college identity, a marker she has yet to acquire, she is quite aware of others who possess them. Moreover, this example illustrates that agôn, the competitive form of play, manifests itself even in mimicry. April aspires to dress like those individuals who possess all of the markers of a college identity, but when she is unable to do so she expresses her longing through observation of, and commentary on, others' fashion choices. In this case, a particular brand, a brand that potentially could have served as a source of communitas, served as a source of social division due to the necessary economic capital needed to purchase the item.

Other fashion choices also emerged over time that contributed to social divisions. For instance, informants' consistently commented how the fashion choices of sorority members differentiated

them from the larger peer culture. Commenting on sorority members, Annie, a non-sorority member, stated:

> Oh you know! The sorority girls are just very, they're very, you can just tell. They are either wearing huge sunglasses and their purses and the collared polo shirts, driving Range Rovers. You can just tell. It's actually, they have a very distinct crowd. They are very rich, they get to wear, they're on mom and dad's dime so they get to wear whatever they want and it definitely shows.

Here the tension April felt in regard to her inability to purchase Ugg Boots becomes even more palpable. Annie, who came from a professional middle class background, interpreted the clothes, accessories, and automobiles sorority members owned as requiring high levels of economic capital. Because she could not afford or chose not to purchase these items she recognized a social divide between these individuals and herself. The distinction between those possessing high levels and those possessing lower levels of economic capital, a tension extremely apparent in contemporary American society, not surprisingly appears to manifests itself in the college setting as well.

Another social division that emerged over time appeared not to revolve around fashion per se, but more on behavior. Specifically, informants discussed a division between those who partied, define by the students as going "out" numerous times a week, drinking was often discussed but was not required, and those who did not. Despite being a division based on behavior, it was a division that was reinforced by fashion. While non-partiers and partiers alike were described as following the typical college fashion norm (i.e., a more relaxed version of the high school fashion norm) during a typical day, partiers adhered to a different fashion norm when they went out. According to Emma, a non-partier, it was quite easy to tell who goes out and who doesn't. "I mean in my opinion it's a lot like high school. They take forever to do each others' hair and makeup and pick out the perfect outfit." And, as Emma elaborated, if students were going out, then "the clothes better have a label!" Jessica, another non-partier, was able to provide a more detailed description of how she perceived partier's clothes differing from the non-partiers. "[Girls who go out] have the clubbing type clothes. You know, like the short skirts and the tops [that] always have sequins or beads on it, and you know, very low cut." In contrast, non-partiers did not alter their daily dress during the evening, and as such, were identifiable as non-partiers.

Through informants' comments it becomes apparent that, in comparison with the communitas felt during the early part of the semester, over time the social environment fragmented. The feelings of social cohesion that accompanied students' arrival on campus dissipated as students became better integrated into the peer culture, not only in regard to their fashion knowledge and choices but also in regard to forming peer groups and participating in campus activities. Fashion, a marker ignored other than to reaffirm social cohesion early in the semester, returned as a symbolic marker of social divisions recognized by members of the peer culture. In other words, the presence of agônistic play so prominent and divisive in the high school peer culture gave way to mimicry during the early part of the semester, which ultimately gave way to a more agônistic divisive form of mimicry and the return of agônistic play at the end of the first semester.

DISCUSSION

The findings presented above present an interesting paradox. In a new milieu, a milieu that students perceive as being devoid of social divisions, fashion ultimately contributes to the formation of social divisions among peers. Despite feeling constrained by the divisions fashion created and maintained within the high school peer culture freshmen, after experiencing a brief period of communitas with their peers, appear content to let social divisions reemerge, with fashion as a symbolic marker of these divisions. The initial feelings of togetherness freshmen experience upon arriving on campus, a feeling facilitated by their separation from high school friends and family, cannot be maintained. Freshmen's perceptions of college as being representative of a utopian environment where everyone is free to be himself or herself and to be treated as equals crumble as objective social norms and structures reassert their dominance (Turner 1969). Although it is a relatively isolated environment (Bourdieu 1989a), the college environment is not so removed from the culture within which it is embedded as to be completely resistant to the structuring power of society at large.

Yet the experience of freshmen during the liminal phase of the college transition suggests that feelings of communitas can exist among people who share emotional experiences together. Whether the experience manifests itself during the liminal period of the college transition or during other liminal periods (e.g., Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2002), fashion contributes to forming a sense of community among otherwise disparate individuals. By dressing in a similar fashion, students who may be struggling to feel a part of a larger community, and in many cases have yet to develop stable friendships on campus, are better able to deal with the uncertainty of their new environment. Fashion allows them to perceive that they are just like their peers; that they share something in common despite coming from different backgrounds. Moreover, fashion provides an opportunity for people to play with their identities, to present a specific identity to their peers, regardless of whether or not it is consistent with the reality the student experienced prior to arriving on campus.

To this point, however, it is necessary to mention that students' ability to play with their identity, whether expressed through fashion or other means, remains constrained by the habitus. That is because, as Bourdieu (1977) asserts, the habitus is transposable from one social environment to the next. It relies more on past experiences than it does on future experiences to determine practices. Consequently, although informants perceived themselves as free from the social constraints of high school and capable of enacting any identity they chose in the college environment, informants' personal style and perceptions of others' style did not alter drastically from how they described these things in regard to their high school experience. Informants who described themselves as Populars during high school continued to view themselves in this manner. Moreover, they often mentioned how they owned and wore North Face fleece jackets, Ugg Boots, and high-end brands in college. Likewise, informants who described themselves as Normals continued to rely on brands like Abercrombie & Fitch, American Eagle Outfitters, and the Gap as staples of their college wardrobe. Even when informants incorporated new brands into their wardrobe in their attempts to express a new college identity the vast majority of their practices and perceptions remained consistent with their high school practices and perceptions. For instance, April purchased a North Face fleece but still primarily wore the brands she wore in high school. Moreover, she viewed individuals who were able to purchase high-end brands as "rich," a term she did not use to describe herself.

The overall lack of informants who attempted to significantly alter their personal style, however, indicates the structuring power of the habitus. It appears the inertia of the habitus, the "*modus operandi* of which he is not the producer and has no conscious mastery" (Bourdieu 1977, 79), allows individuals to remain comfortable with their practices even when they transition to a new

field, a transition that arguably provides an opportunity for people to play with their practices and identity. Yet, practice rarely strays from "the limits of the group of agents possessing the schemes (of production and interpretation) implied in their production" (Bourdieu 1977, 80). In other words, the clothing students wore and felt comfortable in can be considered reflective of their past experience, the social class they belong to, and the composition of their collective levels of capital (Bourdieu 1984).

Therefore, it appears that not only does college control the allocation of status and privilege in contemporary society through the conferral of educational credentials it also continues the socialization process begun by primary and secondary educational institutions. That is, the socialization of students into a specific cultural tradition—a tradition which recognizes the symbolic nature of clothing and its ability to reinforce individuals' position in society. Moreover, this idea is reinforced by the fact that the way a student dresses may have ramifications in regard to what social groups individuals end up joining—which ultimately can influence potential career opportunities and future capital accumulation (Bourdieu 1989a).

In light of these conclusions, it is necessary to address some limitations of the current study. First, fashion is but one factor in a complex phenomenon, the structuring of society. So although clothing appears to contribute to the creation and reproduction of social divisions, the current study does not claim it is the only factor responsible for this process. Future research should continue to attempt to identify additional factors that contribute to this process. Second, gender differences may color the findings discussed above. The majority of informants in the current study were female, and as they mentioned, in contrast with female students, male students appeared less concerned with fashion choices and, in general, dressed in a very similar fashion. Again future research with a more representative sample of males and females, as well as with individuals possessing differing ethnic, racial, and income backgrounds is needed to support the centrality of fashion as a symbolic marker of social status on college campuses. Third, future research should include more diverse institutions of higher learning (e.g., private, liberal arts, technical colleges) to determine how the idiosyncratic nature of the various institutions may contribute to, or hinder, the use of fashion as a marker of social divisions.

The ultimate conclusion of the current study, however, is that individuals' ability to play, even during liminal periods, maintains an agônistic undertone and remains severely constrained by the power of the habitus. The consequence of this reality is that as individuals progress throughout their life course they remain on a relatively stable trajectory, albeit a trajectory that situates them within the competitive social structure of society. Although slight alterations may occur that result in a slight shift in trajectory for one particular individual, in general, social practices, specifically in this study the clothes one wears, reproduce and reinforce objective social structures.

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