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Church dress: Oral narratives of African American women

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Church dress: Oral narratives of African American women

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Apparel, Merchandising, and Design

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory of Ima Jean Tucker Tigner, my best friend, my mentor, my cheerleader, my inspiration, and lastly, my aunt who took the role of mother for the last 35 years. Her tireless dedication to nursing until the age of 80 and her love of beautiful clothing inspired me to pursue this subject. I lost her in 2015 but she has been with me through every page of this work.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored church dress of African American women. The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons why African American women today wear church dress and the significance of this dress. Through an oral history approach, ten participants ranging in age from 70 to 100 years old provided narrative which revealed major influencers on their style and what they have worn throughout their life span. The study explored the women's experiences within the African American church and the importance it played in the lives of the community providing social, political, and educational support. Oral narratives were analyzed using open and axial coding by the researcher. Symbolic interactionist theory helped in understanding the meanings behind the women's methods of assembly of garments and accessories. The participants disclosed how garments were acquired and the attachment of status to the methods of acquisition. Evaluation of the data revealed that church denomination did not play as important a role for the participants in this study, however, their mode of dress was used as an outward manifestation of their inner beliefs to present their best to God. Their stories further revealed strong opinions about post-modern church dress and how society influences what is considered proper dress for church. The stories told by these women of their lives through dress explained how their clothing was symbolic of strong religious beliefs as well as a way of life for proper women and disclosed meanings about their self-concept related to dress. Age seemed to be the most significant theme that linked the ideas of church dress.

Key words: African American, church dress, self-concept, modesty, Christian beliefs

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study explored church dress focusing specifically on oral histories conducted with African American women. In this study, church dress is described as a mode of dress that is different from everyday clothing; meaning a more elaborate dress usually accompanied by some type of headwear, jewelry, shoes, and other accessories that are more formal than every day wear. This style is often punctuated with what is referred to as “loud” colors, unexpected features of garments and noticeable accessories of matching shoes, flamboyant hats, gloves, handbags, handkerchiefs, and jewelry (White & White, 1995). This way of dressing has been popular throughout the 20th century, but has noticeably diminished in use from observing what churchgoers are wearing.

Church dress typically represents the best clothing an individual owns, reserved for religious events and other important special occasions such as weddings, funerals, and more formal celebrations. Clothing serves many purposes; a way of identifying a personal self and a communal self (Foster, 1997). Damhorst (2008) describes dress as a way of nonverbal communication while it also serves as a backdrop for a person while verbal and non-verbal communicating is taking place because it is static in the sense that it doesn't change during the time that the wearer has on a specific garment at an event. It is a silent messenger that tells others what an individual is or thinks about themselves. Clothing seems to be a sort of universal language for mankind; it serves to mark gender, age, and status. So, it does more than protect humans from the environment. In the context of slavery, clothing was used by slave owners as a way of marking differences in status. Foster (1997, p.4) notes slaves often succeeded in subverting the meanings inflicted through dress by “purposely marking their difference with

personal choices of dress.” This form of dress appears to have taken hold during slavery and remained and seems to have developed into a tradition of wearing your “Sunday best” for special occasions (Foster, 1997). Dress worked in more than one dimension, i.e., not just providing protection, by creating a way to determine what their attitudes were about their own bodies as well as the attitudes of the slave masters. For slaves, clothing became their way of communication and served as symbols of their positions in the society that dehumanized them. Fully understanding this aesthetic can be challenging because slavery caused a lack of self-knowledge of the culture and background, especially as more time and generations moved away from origins in Africa (O’Neal, 1998).

There is a limited amount of scholarly evidence published on church dress however; some studies have alluded to dress from a Protestant church denominational point of view (Klassen, 2004). Klassen’s research analyzed the Methodist African American women of the 19th century who turned to dress as a tool for communicating, both political and religious messages. These women understood the power of dress and how it served to legitimize them in a society that was hostile toward them for the most part. Respectability and dressing plainly was considered to be the expectation for women within the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church. Others have compared religious practices between Catholic and Protestant with regard to how services are conducted and the level of vocal activity (Collins, 1971). Collins studied a group of Black converts to Catholicism while exploring the decline in involvement of members in the Negro church. This study discusses the significance that the change of church affiliation might have for the traditional Negro church. A key point in this study is that the Negro church served the Black community social, political, and economic needs as well as religious needs. However, dress was not examined. Additional researchers have focused on doctrines,

educational level, and social status and dress (Frazier, 1964; Starke, et al., 1990; Nelson & Nelson, 1975). Further studies proposed that the Negro church served as an effective means of social control among Negroes (Frazier, 1964). The beginnings of the Negro church came about because slaves were given some autonomy in their religious life, even though it was limited. For the most part, they were converted to Christianity and taught the doctrines of this religion and were permitted to have separate religious services at times. According to Frazier (1964), this format of separation from the White congregants allowed them more opportunity to express their deep emotions during services which was considered a more primitive form of worship. Along with serving as a cohesive organization, the church became a refuge for Negroes. The church supported social, political, and educational interests of Negroes. In broad terms, the Negro church sometimes set up schools within the church to provide education; it provided information to the congregants regarding political issues; it gave financial support for families in need; it provided a social format for people to gather and fellowship; and it provided a weekly format for people to dress up. In the writer's opinion, the Negro church was the hub of the community.

A study completed by Nelson & Nelson (1975) examined the character of Black religion as to how it encouraged or discouraged involvement in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The writers referred to this involvement as militancy. Evidence was provided to support the idea that the Black church is one of the major institutions of the Black community. A more recent study completed by Starke, et al (1990) viewed clothing of African Americans from a cultural perspective. The book examined dress and adornment. Church dress has been a topic of interest of popular press books. However, these books feature staged photographs of African American women in church hats with some documentation of the stories told by the wearers explaining the role hats play in their lives (Cunningham & Marberry, 2000).

Additionally absent from the published literature is information regarding the social and psychological elements of this dress phenomenon, possible hidden meanings, and implications for change in postmodern culture, especially among older (65 and older) African American women. Therefore, the purpose of the research is to gain more understanding of this little-studied topic and add to the body of knowledge by (a) exploring what factors influence the selection, use, and perceptions of church dress, (b) investigating whether post-modern society has influenced church dress, and (c) exploring the intersectionality of church denominations, education level, geographic location, and social status with church dress. The expectation of this study is that it will provide more understanding of this dress phenomenon and document individual participants' stories.

The study used in-depth interviews on the subject of church dress as worn by African American women. In order to provide additional evidence and information, the interview transcripts were analyzed alongside pictures retrieved from the women interviewed, as well as substantiated by information found in magazines, online libraries, blogs, and books. I focused on the decades beginning with the 1930s to the present which will represent the lifespan of the individuals in the study. The reason for this focus is that there appears to be visual evidence available to gather information, such as pictures, magazines, newspapers, and hopefully, the sample of respondents that are still alive to serve as primary sources for this type of dress and will be able to describe what they wear and explain what church dress means to them.

The importance of this study is to document a tradition that is dying out, in part, because of the current age of the proposed respondents. This could be a problem since we have evidence from simple observation that the general population younger than 70 years do not consistently

engage in the type of dress we are studying although there are no data to confirm this idea.

Because it appears to be waning as a tradition, it is vital that this story be told and documented.

Research questions

Some of the questions this research investigated included:

1. How did these women dress for church as children and how have they changed their dress throughout their life span?
2. What and who influenced their way of dress?
3. What methods did they use to acquire clothing and accessories?
4. What does church dress mean to them? Why do they continue to dress in this manner or not? How is their dress related to their Christian beliefs?
5. What are their opinions of what is worn today by younger Black women and how does it relate to Christian beliefs?

Definition of terms

African-American, Black, Colored or Negro- refers to a person who self-identifies with a cultural background connected to Africa. Negro and Colored were terms used interchangeably before the term “Black” was widely accepted (Thomas, 2002). The literature will use these terms depending on the time period and which term was most popular at that time. These terms will be used interchangeably within this document.

Church dress- A mode of dress considered highly decorative and includes colors and silhouettes with matching accessories using hats, gloves, shoes, handbags, and jewelry.

Conspicuous display- For the purposes of this study, it refers to the lavish display of expensive clothing or what appears to be expensive and accessories for the intent of achieving or maintaining a high level in social status or prestige (Mason, 1981).

Negro Church- For the purposes of this study, it is the collective religious activities of African Americans (Collins, 1971).

Dissertation Organization

Chapter one covers an overview of the dissertation and includes a general background of the study, research questions, significance of the study and the definition of terms. Chapter two is the literature review which discusses theoretical framework and relevant studies related to the influence of slavery on the development of the Black church and church dress. Chapter three discusses the research design for this study and includes information about the participants along with methods of data collection and analysis.

This dissertation is a non-traditional format that allowed for the completion of two scholarly articles related to church dress of African American women. This approach allowed me to develop articles for (a) an historical context for church dress that documents what was worn and (b) an exploratory study to get insight as to why the respondents dressed a certain way and what their reasons were for doing so. Chapter four was prepared for submission to the *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, which is a widely read publication that focuses on the interdisciplinary aspects of the apparel and textiles industry. This is also the official publication of the International Textiles and Apparel Association, Inc. which is published quarterly. Guidelines for this journal require APA (American Psychological Association) citation style with

an article length of not more than 30 pages. This chapter delves into the reasons why these women engaged in church dress and related to their self-image and changes in attitudes toward the meanings of their dress as they matured. Chapter five was prepared for the *Clothing Cultures* with the requirements of Harvard Style and a maximum of 5000 words. This journal covers a wide range of topics related to dress and clothing. The chapter related to this submission will focus on the oral narratives of the participants with regard to what they actually recall wearing for church dress from childhood into the present day, and the people or events that influenced this way of dressing. The article will document church dress within the context of the specific decades and look for common themes among the participants. Chapter six is the conclusion of the study and will also discuss implications for further studies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The studies related to African American church dress are scarce, if non-existent. One book has been found, *Crowns* (2000), that focuses on staged photographs of African American women in church hats with some documentation of stories the wearers told to explain the role that dress hats play in their lives. Another source entitled *The Way We Wore* (2006) documents general dress for men, women, and children through pictures providing names of those photographed and the year the picture was taken. The majority of the pictures focus on the 1950s through the 1980s. Only three or four images related to church dress are found throughout the book. However, nothing has been found that helps us to understand how this type of dress evolved and how it has managed to flourish over the past decades, especially with African American women who are now 70 years old and older. The following literature review will include information based on topics important for understanding the phenomenon of church dress among older African American church-going women.

Influence of Slavery

While it does not necessarily explain the current meanings of African Americans church dress, the influence of slavery and slave dress may show some historical antecedents for the practice. Previous studies found that when brought to the United States, slaves were stripped of their personal and tribal identities. Some slave owners denied individuals the basic garments to cover nakedness which resulted in lack of physical and psychological comfort (Sanders, 2011). Others forced slaves to wear European-style clothing. This was done to make them conform to a European concept of decency and to put the slaveowner more at ease (Camp, 2002; White & White, 1995). There also exists evidence that slave owners mandated slaves that toiled in the

homes to dress differently than those that worked in the field. This difference in dress caused resentment and jealousy among the slaves (Blassingame, 1979). Much of the information we have today regarding slave dress has come from ex-slaves who provided narratives, dialogues, reports, and case histories regarding their lives as slaves. Collected and compiled from 1936 to 1939, the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Projects Administration (WPA), one of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal Programs, included life histories of over 2,300 individuals where they (former slaves) were interviewed by the Works Projects Administration. Because of this effort to document their life experiences, we have first-hand knowledge of their experiences on plantations, in cities as well as on small farms.

Slave narratives combine history, life story, and fiction, to some degree (Smith, 1987). To expound on the word "fiction"; that is not to say that the respondents made up stories. It was noted that respondents tended to tell their stories without embellishing the details if the interviewer was African American whereas it was noted that if the interviewer was White, there was a tendency to tell them what they thought the interviewer wanted to hear; thereby skewing the story and for some, "stretching the truth"(Smith, 1987).

The stories that were recounted were a combination of former slaves' introspection and retrospective perspectives (Sanders, 2011), as those included in the collection "ranged in age from one to fifty at the time of emancipation in 1865," with more than two-thirds over the age of eighty when interviewed (<https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snintro01.html>). The individual's personality and way of telling their stories has to be considered in these documents.

It was also revealed through the above-mentioned narratives that the job of making clothing for the master's family and other slaves was the responsibility of female slaves. From the spinning, weaving, dyeing, and sewing of garments, these chores were completed on a daily

basis by the slave women (White & White, 1998). However, this allowed them to infuse to some degree their sense of aesthetics into the designs and ornamentation of the garments, albeit subtle in most cases, especially with respect to the slaveowner's clothing. The Works Progress Administration's Federal Writer's Project has been the subject of many studies (Foster, 1997; Shaw, 2003; Yetman, 1967) but appearance was rarely considered in these studies. However, a photographic examination of African American women in Georgia was conducted by Patricia Hunt and Lucy Sibley (1994). They focused on the time period between 1890 and 1914, and using pictures to tell the story, documented what Black women wore during this time period in Georgia. There was no particular emphasis on church dress in this study since pictures served as the primary source of information.

The existence and the strength of the information gathered from slave narratives will be beneficial to this study in two ways; the methods used by the WPA to gather information from the respondents (interviews, dialogues, pictures, and personal stories) and the urgency of timing to document the church dress phenomenon before the women who engage in this form of dress die.

When provided the opportunity to select their own attire, there is evidence that slaves used dress to rebel against the norm of every-day dress which was controlled by the slaveowner, to give themselves a sense of identity and freedom (Camp, 2002), and to express their resourcefulness and creativity using available fabrics and dyes (Buckridge, 2003). Creativity was demonstrated in the way American slave women combined their clothing articles into cohesive ensembles. The ensembles sometimes shocked the sensibilities of White people due to the combination of unexpected colors, sometimes referred to as "loud colors," the mixture of stripes, patterns, and irregular pieces, obtained from patching and darning garments (White & White,

1995). Perhaps some of these designs came about out of necessity, so they improvised and, in so doing, provided themselves with designs using their creative skills and ingenuity. According to a study completed by Brian Thomas (2002), some attempts were made by slaveowners to eliminate or suppress certain outward expressions of their African origins especially if visible in dress.

Interestingly enough, two artifacts are identified as evidence that slaves did manage to retain some vestige of their original culture. These are the head-wrap and the baby carrier (Gage, 2013). Head coverings were pieces of fabric wrapped around the head, resembling turbans. It is thought that perhaps this headwrap was the only creative outlet that slave women were allowed with regard to dress (Hunt, 1994). These head coverings served a utilitarian purpose as well as an aesthetic one, though it is doubtful that the slaveowner was aware of its aesthetic value to the female slave. In *New Raiments of Self*, Foster (1997) discusses several hypotheses for the origins and purposes of headwraps. The first idea is that the female slaves were forced to wear a head covering which would mark their status as beneath others. The second hypothesis presents the idea that perhaps slaves were forced to wear head coverings to prevent getting lice and other infestations in their hair, thus used as a measure to try to keep them healthy during the trip across the Atlantic. The third hypothesis stated that the head wrap was introduced by the Europeans as a way to meet Christian requirements that the head be covered during mass. All of the above explanations appear to give credit to Europeans for head coverings. However, Foster states that visual evidence establishes that the headwrap had an African source. Some theorists support the idea that retaining any small component of original culture and customs was important because it helped the slave adapt and cope with slavery (Buckridge, 2003).

Evidence related to the baby carrier as another artifact of retained culture is scarce. However, Gage (2013) does mention the baby carrier in common use by female slaves in Brazil.

These devices were used to comfortably carry infants either in the front or the back while the woman went about her daily work. The images that are found are made from fabrics with African origins. While the baby carrier was not unique to any one culture, it did serve in some measure, as a way for female slaves to preserve their culture by the use of fabrics indigenous to Africa.

One fact noted by Foster, (1997), is that a majority of slaves were taken from West Africa. What this implies is that based on West African traditions, some of the propensities later seen in dress seem derivative from earlier traditions. It is documented that this group of people (West Africans and later, slaves) easily adapted items of clothing from other tribes and had little restrictions on what they wore. The second thing noted is that they usually did not shape the garments by sewing them but usually wore loose-fitting garments that had little shape to them. And thirdly, they used a variety of materials woven into assortments of patterns, with a liberal use of bright colors and other ornamentations. So, what Foster concluded was that the West Africans already had a heightened appreciation for and the propensity for wearing bright colors, adornment, and out of the ordinary apparel. One has to wonder if this innate sense of their “natural style” became the driver in the way they adapted the clothing that was given to them in America. As mentioned earlier, perhaps, a cultural memory of sorts, propelled them in this direction of adornment. White and White (1998) relates a remark made by a slaveowner on the slaves’ great love of fine clothing. Some accounts are quoted as saying that slaves were “fond of dress” and they marveled at how slaves displayed a love for fine clothing.

Furthermore, some researchers contend that slaves liked to flaunt their best Sunday clothing before other slaves and before Whites, especially where the venue allowed them to be seen; to have a visual presence. These researchers report that not only did slaves procure the

valued clothing items, but they reassembled them in combinations according to a different aesthetic code from that worn by the Whites (White & White, 1995). Oftentimes, this outward appearance caused curiosity, amusement, and even contempt among Whites, while it was viewed by other slaves as a way of conveying identity and how that person viewed him or herself. One source (Foster, 1997), points out that information taken from the slave narratives indicates that these ex-slaves took great care with what they wore in an attempt to dress “correctly”, that is what was acceptable by White society.

In terms of psychological elements of emancipation, it is ironic that apparel is one method that female slaves used to take back control of their lives (Sanders, 2011). More often than not, they were unable to achieve physical freedom by dressing in certain manners. However, they did gain some modicum of freedom through role-playing through dress. For those who happened to be very fair in complexion, sometimes they were able to actually escape their bondage and pass for white during slavery. Another component comes into consideration here which is preserving their identity through creating a psychological emancipation; sometimes during slavery and more often after they were freed. The clothing they wore indicated pride in their newly achieved state of freedom (Sanders, 2011).

In examining the institution of slavery, it is interesting to note the differences among the slaves based on their geographical locations and the governments of their respective societies. It might be suggested that there were no differences in the slaves in northern America and those in the South American countries. The comparison has been made by Stanley Elkins in his book, *Slavery* (1959) of American and Brazilian slavery. He attempts to explain the differences and the outcomes of these two systems. It is noted that in Brazil, the slave was allowed to legally marry, had to be baptized and become a member of the Catholic church and his family could not be

broken up by sale. Along with that, he was given many days to rest in which he could earn money with which to purchase his freedom. It is stated that it was allowed for infants' freedom to be purchased as early as the baptismal rite. Elkins states the Brazilian slave "knew he was a man, and that he differed in degree, not in kind, from his master." (p. xii) On the other hand, the American slave system was not controlled by the church and individualism was suppressed. There were no limitations mandated from any entity or institution that dictated to slaveowners what they were allowed to do. Basically, the search for power and wealth fueled the laws and actions of the states with regard to the way slaves were treated. Where keeping a family together in Brazil was a mandate, Americans found it to be more profitable to split a family in order to obtain higher selling prices for individuals. Slaves received a kind of "protection," if you will, from the Church in Brazil, but in America, no such help was afforded them. At the least, slaves were introduced to Christianity as a method of controlling them and making them docile (Elkins, 1959, xi-xii). This is relevant because it might help to explain how dress took on different connotations in the United States compared to dress in Brazil, and perhaps other countries where the laws mandated protection, if you will, by the church.

Symbolic interactionist perspective

The study of dress can be perplexing, especially in the context of slavery and oppression. Since dress is one form of nonverbal communication, it serves as a backdrop for other forms of communication such as facial expressions, movement, or body language (Damhorst, et al., 2005, p.68). The reason that this is perplexing is that one must remember that slaves were not allowed to speak freely and express themselves, thus, dress served the purpose for communication, albeit subtle, but nevertheless, apparent.

Symbolic interactionist theory purports that individuals live in a symbolic environment as well as a physical one and that behavior is stimulated by symbols as well as physical acts. Clothing and adornment are seen as symbols with meaning (Horn, 1981). Kaiser (1998) describes symbolic interactionist theory as one that deals with both appearance management and appearance perception. It can be understood as the degree of consistency between the two messages sent and received, such that sometimes the received message is different from the message that is intended. According to some researchers, individuals develop a notion of how they think people will react to what they are wearing, in advance of the interaction. If a person's predictions are accurate, then the identity that is intended coincides with what others perceive (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).

If this concept is applied to what has been found about slave dress on Sundays and special occasions, then the symbolic interactionist theory may have some bearing on what was seen by others and the effect of Sunday dress on the wearer. Individuals acquire identities through social interaction in various social and physical settings thereby communicating identity by relating the dress to a social position of the wearer and to the observers as well (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).

In 1902, Charles Cooley proposed that self-concepts were formed as reflections of the responses and evaluations of others in the environment, sometimes referred to as a "looking-glass" self. In simple terms, the individual imagines how they appear to others and then they imagine others' judgment of that appearance. And then finally, a self-concept is developed from this process. Other researchers supported this notion by Cooley that the self develops out of reflected appraisals of others (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934; Schlenker, 1980; Sullivan, 1947, 1953). According to Felson (1985), self-concepts are shaped by actual and reflected appraisals

of others, not in isolation. It was noted by Cooley (1902) that while reflected appraisals are important in shaping self-concept, it is just one process of several that lead to developing a self-concept.

Principle of reflected appraisals

The principle of reflected appraisals holds “that self-perception is a product of how people believe others perceive them” (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). It is also described as the way individuals think others see them with respect to their performance in a particular identity (Ascencio, 2013; Stets and Burke, 2005). With regard to self-perception, research by Rosenberg (1979, 1981) proposed the idea that Blacks seemed to appraise themselves more on that of the White society than any other. It is not known if this is true or not, but this idea poses more unanswered questions about how reflected appraisals shape Blacks’ self-perception.

When the characteristics of Black churches are examined, it is apparent that they served as important sources for a positive self-image for Blacks, as well as being a center for community gatherings, development of social and political leaders, and the stimulation of education. Churches were among the small segment of society that was controlled by Blacks (Ellison, 1993). This is interesting because it may shed some light on what inner source Blacks utilize to see themselves as persons of value despite what labels White society has.

In examining the reflected-appraisal process, it is believed that people see themselves as others who are considered significant see them. According to research by Felson (1985), this has not been demonstrated adequately to convince us that it is true. Felson reviewed three postulates related to symbolic interactionism. It was indicated that the most difficult one to study was related to the idea that people respond to their perceptions of what significant others think, not the actual opinions of these others. Felson points out that the difficulty in studying this arises

from the fact that self-appraisal and reflected-appraisals are subjective variables and can only come from the respondents which may be difficult to interpret correctly. Another postulate suggests that reflected appraisals should not be figments of the imagination but there should be some accuracy in a person's perceptions of how other people see them. Felson's third postulate says that actual responses of others will determine the way a person sees themselves.

According to a study completed by Ascencio (2013), the "reflexive self" is formed by feedback that one receives from others while interacting with them, however, this idea does not account for or explain the differences among individuals who might share a common identity. So, even though people might be connected by blood or culture, there is the likelihood that their self-view might be different from others who are similar. Gegas and Schwalbe (1983) contend that researchers have neglected this extension of the individual in forming self-views. Other researchers have examined the buffering role of self-esteem (Ascencio, 2013; Baumeister, 1998; Campbell, 1990; Cast and Burke, 2002). These studies suggest that the level of a person's self-esteem influences their perception of the feedback from others and the level of self-esteem may serve as a way of explaining why there are differences of the "reflexive self," even though individuals may share common cultures, backgrounds, etc. One researcher suggests that self-esteem may serve as a moderator rather than a buffer (Ascencio, 2013, p. 292) "in that it is a relevant part of the process by which feedback from others is interpreted by the self on a regular basis." So, whether buffer or moderator, it is suggested that self-esteem might be a major part of the symbolic interactionist theory.

Let's examine self-verification and self-enhancement as they relate to identity processes. According to Ascencio (2013), self-verification seeks to bring perceptions about the self in line with the meanings or expectations for the identity held in the identity standard. Studies

conducted by Stets and Burke (2005), Swann, Rentfrow, and Guinn (2003) explain that self-enhancement has a goal of exceeding the identity standard. If this is put in context with church dress, self-verification would suggest that if a Black woman dressed according to the expected norm of a White woman, that she would then be perceived to be on the same social level as that White woman. Whereas, in self-enhancement, the expectation would be that the Black woman would dress in such a manner as to exceed or elevate herself to a higher social status than the White woman. The issue with this is that no matter what type of clothing was worn, it did not change the skin color of the Black person. In some cases, individuals were fair enough with White features that allowed them to appear to be White and thus confirmed their reflected appraisal by dressing in this manner and people reacting to them as if they were White. Consider the ideas of what Stets and Burke, (2005) and Ascencio, (2013) call a comparator in which perceptions are assessed for congruence with the identity standard. Ascencio (2013) explains that if the comparator detects a match between the perceptions of the person and identity standard, then identity verification occurs. Simply put, if the clothing of a Black woman triggers acknowledgement by a White person as proper and appropriate, then this woman's identity is verified in this situation. However, if there is a discrepancy between the self and the identity standard, then nonverification occurs and might give way to negative consequences or the individual may make adjustments in order to align the two components. In the instance of Blacks and Whites and wearing appropriate clothing, it is highly likely that generally nonverification occurred more often than not. One might think here that the perceptions of the identity standard totally affected the self-esteem of the Black person. It is important to note that Ascencio (2013) indicates that in instances where repeated nonverification takes place and individuals attempt to make behavioral adjustments repeatedly in order to alter the feedback from others, that an

individual might choose to abandon the identity and/or make it less important to their self-esteem (Burke and Stets, 2009). One has to wonder if this phenomenon is what projected what was considered appropriate dress to the level of church dress (loud colors, gaudy, over-the-top accessories).

It is proposed by Burke (1991), that feedback from those who are significant in one's life tend to have more importance and relevance in terms of influencing perceptions than feedback from strangers. One might conclude that at some point, the reactions or nonverifications by Whites became less important to Blacks as they moved past the post-slavery decades into the Harlem Renaissance where self-confidence and self-esteem seemed to flourish despite not getting validation from Whites (Burke, 1991).

It might be helpful to discuss key historical events or time periods that influenced African American lives and perhaps contributed to their meaning of dress. This research will focus on the lives of African American women who were born during the time periods between 1916 and 1946, so we will examine key periods of time or historical events that might have influenced this group. We will begin by discussing the Harlem Renaissance even though the intended respondents for this research were not born during that time but it is significant because the ideas and concepts that perhaps served to shape the zeitgeist of African American culture were most likely passed down through the generations. The Harlem Renaissance was a period in African American history that spanned the 1920s through the mid-1930s. It was a time of literary, artistic, and intellectual achievements by Blacks and the outpouring of accomplishments served as inspiration for Blacks as well as creating a sense of pride in being Black and a cultural identity that was completely different from the notion of just being Black and ex-slaves. Some writers called it a period of "coming of age" for the Negro. Creative expression flourished with

writers, artists, poets, and intellectual publications. The movement waned during the 1930s as America went through the Great Depression but the influence of achievements proved to be inspirational for the Black culture. For example, the desire to have straight hair (for both men and women) started to take hold during this period with the start of Madame C.J. Walker's schools and preparations for the hair. This hair phenomenon seemed to flourish throughout the 1930s (Reconstruction time period) into the late 1960s. The Black Power movement actually all but erased the straight hair styles for African American women (Rooks, 1996). However, this trend was short-lived and seemed to return with the invention of chemicals used to straighten Black hair without the heat. For the most part, African American women dressed in the prevailing fashions just like the remainder of Americans with the intent of fitting in and being accepted as equal.

The next period that influenced the lives of African Americans was known as the "Jim Crow" era generally considered to be between the late 1930s and the 1950s. The culture of this period was a time of overt racism, economic exclusion, substandard education, and social attitudes that accepted notions that African Americans were less than human. The period known as the "Second Black Awakening" between 1956 and 1975, is most remembered for the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power. The Civil Rights Movement sought to get rid of entrenched ideas related to social and political placement in America's society while the Black Power movement was more focused on almost every aspect of American culture. So, very similar to the Harlem Renaissance, there is another birth of Black people with a new sense of identity and determination to claim a rightful place in society. According to Mellowes (2010), church affiliation served as a conduit for creating cohesiveness, and heightened the sense of community. And because the church was so strongly entrenched in the African American lifestyle, these

served as the foundation for efforts to transform the political and religious landscape of America which would become the Civil Rights movement. This is probably a pivotal point in relation to apparel for African Americans. The earlier years of this period were marked by the adoption of what was considered proper clothing in order to be accepted and included by White society. Rooks (1996) describes this focus as “proper behavior”, which included dress and hair as a prerequisite for middle class status within the African American communities. In some cases, this mode of dress created classes within the Black society depending on financial and/or educational levels. Most likely, the poor were unable to afford the quality of clothing that would elevate them into the middle or upper classes and thus most clothing was home made. However, it is assumed that the intent was to appear fashionable and well-dressed. With the advent of the Civil Rights movement, also came the desire by African Americans to return to their African roots and create a link or identity with Africa. This was done by allowing their hair to be worn in its natural state, the donning of dashikis and other accessories and colors that associated the wearer with roots and ancestry from the “mother land”. We find that a great number of the general population were churchgoers (Nelson & Nelson, 1975), thereby dressing in garments that were fashionable at the time. This is the period where many pictures and oral descriptions might show that dressing up for church and other special occasions was the norm.

Lastly, the post-civil rights time period was marked by greater opportunities for a large segment of the Black community which included integration of schools (grade school and colleges), more interracial contact, the emergence of an urban underclass, and covert racism practiced more and more because of society’s rejection of overt demonstrations of racism (Brown & Brown, 2006). One of the more interesting developments of the post-civil war era was the economic opportunities as a result of African American beauty and hair products. The

popularity of the straight, processed hair waned as the “Afro” hair-do ascended in popularity. This style represented not only a symbol of their cultural roots (Walker, 2007), but also served as a way of identification with the political movement of Civil Rights. As the movement started to decline somewhat, African American women became more diverse in the types of hairstyles they wore, which also created great economic opportunities for companies who were producing haircare and beauty products. So, a wider variety of products were desired by the consumers and some researchers have pointed out that this consumer group had been largely ignored by mainstream marketing and promotion companies as well as the companies that produced the products (Walker, 2007). Claude Barnett (historian) was cited as one of the advocates for greater recognition of Black consumerism by White advertisers. According to Walker (2007), the African American beauty culture was considered a special kind of business that demonstrated Black consumer power and the potential for Black entrepreneurs.

As relates to apparel, this post-civil war period was marked by most people wearing mainstream styles that neither stood out nor identified them with a specific group. More inclusive styles were adopted as the structure of the Black church started to change and evolve. Changes in rituals and practices allowed a less rigid atmosphere and so followed the acceptable dress norm, not only for church but for special occasions as well. During the late 1980s, a megatrend developed known as “Casual Fridays”. The implications for this mode of dress had enormous impact not only on the workforce in America but also other social venues (Brannon, 2010).

Racial identity

According to Parker and Lynn (2002), critical race theory (CRT) focuses on race and how racism is perceived as being an intricate part of American society. These researchers

contend that CRT has three main goals: (a) present stories about discrimination from the perspective of the non-white people; (b) argues for the eradication of social injustice and at the same time, recognizes that race is a social construct, and (c) addresses other areas of difference such as gender and class.

A study conducted by Khanna (2004) discusses definitions of race in America as being traditionally based on biological classifications supposedly supported by science and approved by our government. It is thought that the idea of race dates back over 500 years in an effort to classify humans based on physical characteristics. However, some researchers contend that it was more prevalent in Europe and the Americas. European settlers in America solidified these attitudes and beliefs and used them to control economic and political policies in the U.S. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). The notion of grouping people of similar physical traits such as skin color, facial features and hair texture became the mainstay of institutionalized racism in America and created the idea that somehow Whites were in direct opposition to Blacks both physically and intellectually (Massey & Denton, 1993). Some scientists (Mallon, 2004, Zack, 2002; Appiah, 1995) have examined the notion of race and contend that races of any type don't scientifically exist. There are other arguments that propose that if race is false, that various races exist because of culture and human decision (Mallon, 2007) which means simply that society plays a major part in grouping or categorizing people. In 1996, the Association of American Physical Anthropologists issued a statement that rejected the concept of race as having no scientific basis (Heinz, et al, 2014). In order to answer the question of what factors shape racial identity, many studies have been conducted through quantitative methods using the U.S. Census data (Cauce, et al, 1992; Hall, 1980; Mass, 1992; Saenz, Hwang, & Anderson, 1995 and others). What these studies concluded is

that there are several factors that shape racial identity; those being phenotype (or physical features), cultural exposure, and gender (Khanna, 2004). Since church dress was not a part of this study, it surfaces the question as to whether racial identity plays a part in church dress.

According to Khanna's study (2004), physical characteristics don't directly affect the clothing worn by African Americans to church. Dress is dress, regardless of who is wearing it. However, since Blacks were segregated into their own churches and not permitted to attend White churches from post-slavery well into the 1960s, wearing "Sunday best" was allowed to develop within the Black churches without creating a comparison of what they were wearing to White churchgoers. So one might conclude that cultural exposure played a more significant role in church dress rather than the skin color, gender, or socioeconomic background. With regard to cultural exposure, Khanna (2004) suggests that if a person is exposed to a culture different from their own, that it may influence how they identify with specific ethnicities. If we consider the social identity theory proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1986), one of the underlying concepts is that where you have intercultural encounters, a person is believed to behave not necessarily according to their belief system, but will conform to the belief systems held by the larger identity group (Hecht et al, 2005). This idea might give some insight as to why church dress was widely adopted as the norm from the 1930s throughout the 1960s without being challenged as appropriate or necessary. Perhaps that's just what people wore and no one challenged it.

Gender

According to Wood and Ridgeway (2010), socially shared meanings that people and societies assign to females and males actually describes gender. Even though the basis for this thought is based on physical differences, when a society attaches certain meanings to the gender,

this shapes the way that individuals think of themselves as either male or female. Further, the behavior is shaped by these beliefs and social relations with others are formed accordingly. Paoletti (1987) contends that society is very influential on determining gender and examines practices in the early 1900s where infant boys were dressed in pink and infant girls were dressed in blue. Pink was considered a more aggressive color while blue was viewed as being more delicate, thus assigning traits to the genders. Dress for male and female has essentially not changed in the last century in that certain items of clothing are considered acceptable for men while it appears that women have continued to include what is considered “masculine” items into their wardrobes over the years. It is mentioned by Paoletti (1987) that men’s clothing has slowly begun to take on some “feminine” traits such as colors and styling that were not the norm in earlier decades. This freedom of expression is now acceptable in the culture and does not necessarily dictate the gender of an individual.

In considering church dress, the notion of gender may not be as significant since there is much evidence showing both male and female African Americans dressed for special events. What has been observed from pictures and narratives is that Black men, for the most part, stayed with the expected dress that was appropriate for a man and the fashion trend of whatever decade they were living in, while women did the same. It appears that there was a clear distinction as to the gender of the wearer by the articles of clothing worn. Since only women were included in this study, importance of gender is a limitation for this study.

Geographical influences and church attendance

Some researchers have concluded that church dress is more prevalent in the southeastern United States, because of the major influences of protestant denominations, namely, Southern Baptist and Pentecostal churches. It is noted that church attendance and religious

energy are associated more with the southern states of the United States based on the notion that fundamentalism is more strongly entrenched in this area of the country (Nelson & Nelson, 1975). While this information provides insight on church attendance, it does not discuss what is worn to church by churchgoers. According to a study conducted by Taylor, et al., they determined that religious affiliation patterns appear to be markedly different among Blacks and Whites with respect to their denominational preferences. They found that Blacks are much more likely to be Baptist, whereas Whites tend to be Catholic (Taylor, et al., 1996). Yet another single study conducted by Taylor on the indicators of religious involvement, stated that the findings reinforced the characterization of the South as the “Bible belt.” Fichter & Maddox (1965) stated that a higher percentage of people in the south indicate that they are affiliated with a church.

According to a study conducted by Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life in 2008, Blacks were found to be the group most likely to report a formal religious affiliation, with about 85% identifying as Christian. About six-in-ten Black adults were affiliated with historically Black Protestant churches (about 59%).

Further, a Gallup poll was taken in 2010 related to church attendance in the U.S. This was based on more than 800,000 interviews collected between February, 2008 and May, 2010. The respondents were asked to report their place of worship and attendance habits. What they found was that Blacks were more likely to attend church than other groups, older Americans were more likely to attend church, the highest attendance rate was in the South, and among other findings women were more likely to attend than men. They also found that there are more churches in the south and that they are attended frequently. So, one might conclude that Blacks in the south possibly have a higher degree of church involvement than other regions of the country.

Dress amongst churchgoers

It has been noted by M.S. Evans (1915), that there was a great contrast between rural areas and big cities in terms of Sunday attire. The church dress seemed to take more prominence in the rural areas. Evans maintains that attending church was attractive because it gave one an opportunity to dress up and display the clothing. It can be suggested that whether church dress was worn in rural communities or urban areas, it gave Blacks a sense of self-esteem and value which, on an everyday basis, was denied them by White society. So, one day in seven, they felt on equal status by their dress (White, 1995). It is important that more recent studies need to be included to determine if this contrast between rural and urban churchgoers has changed.

From a time span of many years, beginning in the 1910s and lasting into the 1930s, famous streets such as Beale Street in Memphis, Decatur Street in Atlanta, and others served as key locations or “stages” for Black people to leisurely stroll in fashionable attire according to writer, George W. Lee (1934). People usually were dressed in their “Sunday Best.” The streets were viewed as performance sites and were readily accessible by all people (White, p.161). When the street or the “juke joint” are viewed as performance sites, it makes sense that the church became another stage for performance where attendees wore their best clothing. With a similar mindset on Sundays, women wore what was referred to as “taffetas” (White, p.164) to church along with other special garments reserved for special occasions. As quoted by Robin Kelley (White, p.164), “seeing oneself and others “dressed up” was enormously important in terms of constructing a collective identity based on something other than wage work.”

Being able to dress in this manner, even with what was considered flashy attire, was a way of presenting their bodies as neat and elegant which contradicted the stereotype that Black people were without class or dignity by society’s view. With respect to former slaves, dressing

up gave them the appearance of dignity and somehow elevated them to an equal status of Whites. This collaboration of dress also united them, creating a sense of community in spite of their economic standing. The Black church and even the trip to and from church, became the most frequent opportunity for aesthetic display of clothing (White, p.172).

While geographical location might be considered as somewhat important, this study could possibly show that the social status, education level, and cultural influences of the churchgoer are more critical in relation to church dress.

It might be noted that even in a modern mixed congregation of old and young, there is the likelihood that the older African American women (65 and older) are dressed in this manner despite the modern influences of today.

Religious influences-denominational

According to Daniel Collins (1971), the “Negro Church” is described as an acceptable term for the collective religious activities of African Americans. It is considered one of the oldest and largest institutions created by Blacks. Today, there exist seven major denominations of Protestant Black churches in America; namely, African Methodist Episcopal (AME), African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), National Baptist Convention, USA Incorporated, and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) (O’Neal, 1999). In a survey conducted by the Gallup organization in the late 1950s (Nelson & Nelson, 1975), it was found that high levels of church attendance and religious zeal were more associated with the southern states of America. It was assumed that this was so because the southern states is the region that religious fundamentalism was more frequently found. They found that in general, white-collar workers were more likely to attend church regularly than blue-collar workers. Along these same lines, education and church attendance were positively related. For some reason, church

attendance was lower in cities than in rural areas and more conservative religious views seemed to be the norm in rural areas than in the city.

When exploring some protestant denominations, one study focused on the African Methodist Episcopal church (AME) in terms of church dress and the tradition of how women dressed. Klassen (2004) argues that women presented bourgeois norms of respectability that they used from earlier White Wesleyan traditions. In this study, women used clothing to gain authenticity from other power figures such as preachers, journalists, and the public in general. This author contends that women from this time period of 1893 used clothing as a “badge of honor,” and also as a means of protection. According to Klassen, “On the bodies of African American women, however, the language of clothes was not always easily translated-though for White women clothing might separate the fallen woman from the respectable lady, for African American women, clothing could rarely mask the color of skin in a social world defined by it” (p. 40). A fusion of sorts occurred where culture and fashion were used to embody religion, fashion, and even political issues which became tools for combatting male and White dominance.

Comparisons between Catholic churchgoers and Protestants

Although no research has been found, yet, that describes the type of dress churchgoers wore to church and compared the Catholic and Protestant, some comparisons have been noted in an article by Daniel Collins (1971) where when a Black converted to Catholicism, they tended to be of southern origin, in their early twenties when converted, and had a relatively high level of education and adequate economic means with which to be successful. He found also that prior to conversion, these converts were either Baptist or Methodist and had had no contact with Catholicism in their families. Here is an indication of the interconnectedness of religious

practices, education level, and social status of the Black church. What appears to emerge is the more highly educated one is, the more likely they are to dress more conventionally with garments that are worn by their White counterparts rather than engage in adding elements to the ensemble.

According to explanations made by Frazier (1964), the doctrines of the Baptist and Methodist churches were more simple and more emotional whereas the Catholic church was seen to be more dogmatic, albeit, more intellectual and reserved, in rituals and in dress. Another idea supported by W.E.B. DuBois stated that participation in the Baptist and Methodist denominations was based on their ability to incorporate some characteristics of African religion into the ceremonies, rituals, and even the preaching.

It is thought that the kind of religious instruction that slaves received depended on the religious persuasion of their masters (Blassingame, 1972). What is interesting here is that because there was often a shortage of clergy for whatever denomination was being introduced to the slaves, masters would sometimes recruit clergy from other denominations to preach to the slaves and conduct services. We are further told that Methodists were more active in evangelizing slaves than were other denominations, especially Baptists. This is a paradox, because even though Baptists were not spending money or time to evangelize slaves, it is thought that for some reason, the Baptists appeared more attractive to the slaves. The bodily movements of active worship by the slaves seemed to ease into the services of the Baptist and Methodist churches. So, other denominations that were more formal in worship started to adopt these preaching styles and forms of worship services. According to Blassingame (1972), Baptists by far held the highest membership of Blacks by the 1860s with a smaller amount belonging to

other denominations such as Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Church of Christ, Lutherans, Quakers, and others (Blassingame, 1979).

Education and social status

There may exist a link between higher education level, especially in this older (aged 65 and older) generation of women who will be a part of this study and their social status. Some research indicates the expectation of upholding certain dress standards at church service, as well as at other special events. The notion was that the better dressed the woman, the more highly educated (probably associated with the quality of clothing and possibly higher income with which to afford the clothing; such as a teacher, principal, nurse, or secretary) (Collins, 1998). With this viewpoint, the status of the woman was elevated because of the perception of the viewers.

Discussion about sororities and fraternities is included here because it has been noted that traditional organizations in the Black society are associated with colleges and higher education. Some intersection of educational level, social status, and the way one dresses are interrelated. There are nine primary national Pan-Hellenic organizations that consist mainly of African Americans. These organizations boast prominent members that have made significant contributions to society in the arts, literature, music, politics, education, medicine, science, and the Civil Rights movement (Ross, 2000).

After considering the interconnectedness of social status and education, one might conclude that the higher education level of individuals actually increased their social status within Black society. This group tended to dress more soberly and refined for church dress; usually garments that were considered appropriate and proper by White standards. This more highly educated group were found to gravitate to “quieter” more refined churches such as the

Methodist, CME, and AME while the lower class (considered the uneducated group) gravitated more toward the Baptist and COGIC churches. As these denominations developed over time, the church dress that involved “loud colors” and unexpected silhouettes and garment combinations were more common in the Baptist and COGIC churches and were widely accepted. What seemed to form was a class distinction based on the intersections of education and social status which helped in the formation of congregational makeup of the various denominations. Thus, church dress might be noted as an indicator of religious denomination as well as social class and education level.

African American consumerism

Many researchers have promoted their definition for consumerism as this term has been used to define a movement toward protecting the consumer with regard to businesses and government. According to Ede & Calcich (1999), a more traditional description involves actions taken to protect and enhance the rights of consumers while others contend that it includes transactions between buyers and sellers (Kotler, 1972). Still another view on what consumerism means is given by Pruden & Longman (1972) where it refers to “activities involving the government, businesses, and independent organizations which are designed to protect individuals.”

Overall, the intent of consumerism is to ultimately protect the rights of consumers. This issue gained momentum during the tenure of President Kennedy when he signed the bill of rights in 1962. However, this focus changed during the time when President Reagan took office where the attention was not as intense because he considered it to be a burden on businesses (Ede & Calcich, 1999). Ede and Calcich define African American consumerism as “the efforts of

individuals and groups, acting in concert, to solve problems facing African Americans as minorities in the U.S. economy” (114). Eventually, the consumerism movement was blended with social and economic issues (Bloom and Greysen, 1981). This is an interesting phenomenon in that these consumer advocates and rights of buying and selling would apply to all citizens. But we know this is not the case in looking at African American consumers.

Though not documented, there are opinions that this group of consumers were not important, that they had no taste level, that they were uninformed as consumers, and that they had no spending power (Weems, 1998). Thus, they were largely ignored as consumers until the beginning of the Civil Rights movements.

Consumption patterns

Coming out of the Great Depression and entering World War II, African Americans migrated to the northern states as they saw opportunities for better paying jobs, education, and some chance of making a better life. During this time, Black consumers began to be targeted primarily by the rise of radio, Black newspapers, and even publications such as *Ebony magazine*. It was during this time some small interest was beginning with the larger market in terms of considering African American consumers as a potential for increased market share.

Many older beliefs about Blacks were that they lacked the purchasing power to buy expensive merchandise and that they had no interest in fashions (Portis, 1966). In order to measure fashion interest of African American women, a survey was conducted in 1962, both White and Black respondents, in New York and Cleveland. They found that among White and Black women who were defined as fashion-conscious, there was no significant difference in the ways that they followed fashion.

However, it was indicated that African American shoppers at the lower- and middle-income levels were somewhat more interested in fashion than their White counterparts.

As American culture approached the 1960s and forward, America experienced the Civil Rights Movement, women's liberation, and a rapid growth in the middle class of Blacks along with increased education levels and broader choices of careers and better paying jobs. These events came together and what you have is a group of consumers who now have the financial means to spend money on clothing and accessories. And it can be stated that because of the change in direction of marketers, even people in the lower classes now were motivated to purchase articles of clothing with brand names that denoted status or wealth, even if they couldn't afford them.

In terms of marketing, we see evidence of more ads depicting women and men of color- from television commercials to magazine ads. These strategies have a broader appeal and entice people of all income levels to spend more money. Branchik and Davis (2009) also note that the Black middle class appears to divide into several segments, namely, Conventional Middle-class, Traditional elites, and Nouveau riche. For the sake of clarity, the Conventional Upper Middle-class included people with college educations, better paying jobs and who came up during the Civil Rights movement. Traditional elites were tied to some of the older Black families with established status from either being in professions in the early 1900s and having what was considered "old" money. The Nouveau riche includes the newly wealthy. We must include the class of poor in our discourse because this segment of consumers, even though they have low income levels, continue to place importance on expensive clothing and accessories and have been noted to buy way beyond their means in order to appear to be in a status class. Because of this phenomenon, retailers and marketers are confused because basically, there is no pattern of consumption that can be pinpointed among this group.

Some consumption pattern research was conducted by Stafford, Cox, and Higginbotham in 1968 in Houston to determine if there were differences in consumption between urban Whites and Blacks. The products used in the questionnaire were related to food, liquor, personal hygiene, and home appliances. Apparel was not part of this study, but some conclusions that they made might be generalizable to this group. What their results revealed is that the differences in consumption were more related to income level or socio-demographic variations rather than ethnic group. They concluded that ethnic group did not determine a pattern of consumption.

Evidence presented in a study conducted by Bernard Portis in 1966 concluded that African Americans, though an important market for fashionable clothing, may not constitute a special market. Indeed, there might be some danger in treating African Americans as a special market, particularly if this results in a failure to recognize separate and important segments within that market. It might not be safe to assume that all African Americans like to wear bright colors, for instance. This could have huge financial impact on retailers if they operate under this assumption.

In a study conducted by Bernard Portis in 1966, there was evidence to make some conclusions about fashion interest of African Americans. He concluded that there was little indication in the data presented that Black women followed fashion differently from their White counterparts. Both groups read on a regular basis, magazines such as *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, etc., even though during the 1960s, there was no direct appeal to this group. If we fast-forward to present day, it is evident in almost all fashion magazines that the awareness is there of African Americans and other cultural groups as consumers. So there is broad appeal in terms of the images shown in these modern magazines.

In discussing church dress, it is appropriate to consider that Blacks used lots of creativity in making “Sunday” outfits; often re-purposing old cast away garments, using unusual fabric combinations, and sewing their own clothing (Starke, et al., 1990). Special attention was given to creating ensembles for holidays such as Easter Sunday, Mother’s Day, and Christmas pageants.

The fashion trends and lifestyle changes in the 1980s saw changes in the expectations of church dress especially in the more modern, younger congregants. Hats were no longer required; pants could be worn and a more casual tone was acceptable depending on the culture of the church.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

Qualitative research is described as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of qualification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). For this study, the qualitative method was used. And under that umbrella, oral narratives, i.e., interviews and examination of documents were utilized to obtain information. Research was conducted by listening to interviews of African American females in Texas who either wore “church dress” and fit into the age group of 70 years and older. The participants were volunteers and represented a narrow sampling of denominations, specifically, Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, and Non-denominational. I did not approach any single church or churches, but rather spoke with individuals who had been suggested to me by other acquaintances in the church while I also contacted various friends for suggested interviewees. The snowball sampling strategy was used. I started out with a list of 5 to 6 possible participants and those who did interview with me, knew other women who were willing to be interviewed. Thus, I ended up with 10 interviews and more participants who would have been available for an interview. I stopped at 10 because of saturation of data; that is, nothing new surfaced and I was not getting any new information from the participants so I determined that to interview more people would not yield new information.

I traveled to each participant’s home to interview them. The interviews were conducted by the researcher and were recorded. The duration of the interviews was between 40 minutes to an hour depending on the ability of the participant to talk. I took some field notes while listening to the answers that denoted body language or emphasis on key words or phrases. During this

process, some of them showed me pictures from scrapbooks or those on display in their homes. One participant took out quite a few of her hats to display for me. Some of them agreed to provide me with pictures of them dressed up for special occasions or church. This approach did not predispose me to assume current church affiliation or denomination. A limited amount of demographic information was also collected during the interviews such as age, year of birth, education, occupation, and church affiliation. The primary goal of this research was to understand the behavior and offer implications for further study. A copy of the interview questions is included. The ages ranged from 70 to 100. For the most part, their careers were nurses, educators, one pharmacist, one retail buyer, one homemaker, and one foundry worker. All of them were retired.

Oral narratives

I used a narrative research analysis approach for this study as described by Creswell (2007). This approach is described as exploring the life of an individual with the intent of telling the individual's life experiences, studying one or more persons using interviews as the primary source, and finally analyzing the data for stories and developing themes (Creswell, p. 79). The method of narrative research or oral narrative is useful in getting not only information but a human perspective on the subject; for instance, what it was like to grow up in a certain time period, their experiences, or reactions to certain events. Narrative can be used to construct identity (Czarniawaka, 1997); it can aid in education ((Abma, 2000; Cox, 2001), and it can act as a source of understanding (Cortazzi, 2001). By constructing stories, narrative can become an instrument to build and communicate meaning and impart knowledge to others.

Other data analysis approaches have been used by researchers such as Madison (2005), who used abstract coding and identified salient themes and patterns within the narratives. The

data were displayed using graphs or pictures. Huberman and Miles (1994) incorporated writing fieldnotes in the margins of the interviews; drafting summaries of fieldnotes and defining codes and themes. Using this strategy, they were able to note relations among variables. Another researcher, Wolcott (1994), simply highlighted certain information in description, identified pattern regularities and related categories by contextualizing in framework from literature (Creswell, 2007).

This research used two approaches for gathering information related to church dress. The first approach involved recording the actual oral interview of the participants where they talked about their recollections of what they wore and are still wearing for church and other special events. The interview questions were structured so that information could easily be categorized by specific time periods or events. The researcher used a pre-set group of questions but allowed the participants to talk freely, oftentimes moving to another topic not necessarily in the order of the questions but this allowed them to speak more openly without making them feel like they were being coached.

The second approach focused on examining personal documents that were shown by the participants, such as photos, picture albums, diaries or journals. Each participant was given a copy of a disclosure form and the interview process was reviewed with them before the actual interview was done. The interviews were conducted in each participants' home which allowed them to be comfortable and more likely to talk about their memories of dressing.

The third approach helped in obtaining information by examining various historical web sites which included pictures and images from magazine archives such as Ebony magazine, American Heritage History web site, various blog sites related to African American church dress, as well as a personal visit to the Gregory School in Houston, Texas which featured historical hats

from several pastor's wives and other local leaders within the African American Houston community. The displays represented a wide variety of church dress hats across several decades beginning in the 1950s.

A narrative research approach involves data collected that will be analyzed for the story it has to tell along with unfolding events in a chronological way, and perhaps turning points or epiphanies (Creswell, 2007). The process that I used was to create and organize files for data (a hard copy of the actual interview manuscript), and reading through the text and making notes in the margin as an initial way of open coding. My next challenge was to describe each story and place it in a chronology, classify the data by identifying stories, finding any epiphanies (if they exist), and identifying contextual materials. Finally, interpreting the larger meaning of the story and using it to find differences and commonalities among the stories. The interviews are biographical narratives since they tell a story and identify a specific kind of experience related to the participant's lives. The questions I asked related to how they dressed as children, adolescents, young adults, and older women allowed me to develop a chronology of the participant's life. Stories and life-changing events did emerge from some of the participants. I took cursory field notes during the interview process so that key words or phrases would be remembered during the coding process. I reviewed the manuscripts for contextual materials that concrete evidence to support these stories.

A semi-structured interview method was used where it was necessary to listen carefully to the participant's responses and to follow their lead. According to Esterberg (2002), this is almost like a dance where the interviewer has to be very attentive to what is happening in the interview process; from body language, tone, and other movements. This technique did allow me more freedom in the exchange between me and the participant. I began the interview with some

basic information about the nature of the questions and explained the format and also asked them if they had any questions. In this case, the participant's responses did direct the order and structure of the questions because if they jumped to another area of questioning, I allowed them to do so without interrupting in order to increase their comfort level for talking to me.

In preparing for the interviews, I had to find participants that would be able to provide the information I was looking for. Thus, I narrowed the age group to 70 and older, not really knowing beforehand, who I would interview in that age group. As it turned out, the ages spanned from 70 to 100 years old. I used snowball sampling to get participants. My initial interviewee who was a key informant as well as the pre-test interview referred me to her friend who then suggested another person to contact, and so on. Also, a gatekeeper was used, although this person was not interviewed because of the age requirements, who provided names and contact information of several potential interviewees.

Study setting

All of the participants lived in Houston, Texas with the exception of two; one of which was a prior resident of Houston. The duration of each interview was between 40 minutes to an hour. It took 4-6 weeks to complete the interview process because of convenience scheduling related to the respondents availability. The audio-recorded interviews were translated verbatim into manuscript documents. There were 10 females, aged 70 and older who identified themselves as African American. The ages ranged from 70 to 100. I traveled to each person's home but in two cases, I interviewed them by phone, recording the conversation.

Selection process

An acquaintance involved in a ministry for the elderly at her church, who acted as a gatekeeper, provided me with a list of possible participants along with their phone numbers. My

criteria was that they be at least 70 years old and African-American women. I also contacted other friends for participants. Several of them also responded and provided names and contact information. After contacting the first person, snowball sampling just happened naturally. The first interviewee knew someone else who would like to be a part of the study, I made contact with them, and so on. Eventually, I had more names than I needed.

Permission statements

Approval was also given by the IRB of Iowa State University giving me permission to conduct the research. An informed consent form was provided to each participant and they were asked to sign it after I explained it to them before beginning the interviews. In order to insure confidentiality, the audio recordings were saved on a separate jump drive and given to an impartial transcriber. The names were blocked out on the manuscripts to insure privacy.

Coding process

Coding can be defined as a process of organizing and sorting data. The method of coding was used as a two-stage process. Initially, I used open coding which is the process of reading the data, line by line, and identifying themes and categories that surfaced and appearing to have some relevance to what I was looking for (Esterberg, 2002). The goal in this stage was to see what the data showed. After completing open coding on all the interview manuscripts, some key themes emerged, often over and over. When I started to see the same codes in every interview, and nothing new was being found, that suggested to me that I had reached saturation in the kind of information I was getting. After completing open coding, I used focused or axial coding (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996) to focus on the key themes that I identified in the open coding process. Again, I went through each manuscript line by line identifying specific words and descriptions that fit the themes. In going about this process, the researcher read through the hard

copies of each respondents' manuscript and made notes in the margins. After this was finished, a matrix was made with an acronym for each participant and all identified codes entered so that comparisons could be made and common themes could be identified (Miles & Huberman, 1994). At the same time I was using open coding and focused coding, my major professor was doing the same thing. When we finished, we compared what we found and there was agreement on the themes that were identified. In order to insure reliability, the number of agreements was counted and divided by the total number of agreements plus disagreements. This was calculated two times; the first time getting a 75% intercoder reliability and the second time, a 95% intercoder reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). We agreed that no new information was coming from the interviews that would add to my understanding of the topic, so it was agreed that the data was saturated.

The most important part of this step was to stay focused on my purpose for my evaluation; in other words, "What is this study about?" Toward the end of coding, several key themes emerged while others did not appear to be as significant to the study. Several methods were employed for identifying themes such as 1) word repetition, 2) key words in context, 3) connectors, and 4) cutting and sorting. Word repetition can be described as words that occur a lot in the responses. Key-words-in-context relates to the process of attempting to understand phrases and words by looking at the context in which they occur. When words and phrases are reviewed carefully to find relationships among things, the technique for this is called using connectors; words such as *because*, *since*, and *as a result* are examples. The technique of cutting and sorting was used to help identify subthemes by cutting out quotes that seem important and pasting them on small index cards, naming each pile of cards, thus identifying themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Theme identification is one of the most essential and necessary job in qualitative research.

All of these techniques proved beneficial and helped to validate those themes that were dominant and sub-themes that would require further research in perhaps another study.

Explanation of themes

As the themes were revealed by analyzing the transcripts, a decision was made as to which themes fit the two separate articles best. The data revealed information that formed the following themes: (a) Influencers of church dress—who were the people that influenced them in how they dressed—abbreviated as INFL. The sub-themes are: Chronological descriptions—the participants described dress clothing from earliest childhood to present day and also disclosed favorite colors and descriptions of specific garments; acquisition of clothing—how they acquired church dress from childhood through adulthood; (b) postmodern church dress—abbreviated as POSTMOD with the sub themes of modesty and adornment, dressing age appropriately, rules for church dress, dress related to their religious beliefs, and (c) Meaning of church dress—abbreviated as INTER in reference to symbolic interactionist theoretical basis with sub-themes of opinions of what is worn today and how it relates to Christian beliefs, reasons why they continue or discontinue dressing up for church, preferred seats in church, meaning for term, “sharp as a tack” as it related to church dress.

Researcher bias

It is necessary to note that the researcher only knew three of the respondents. As the interviews progressed, it became apparent that while several of them did attend the same church, they were not close friends or acquaintances. As it turned out, the ones who attended the same church participate in a common ministry but did not know each other intimately. The researcher was once a member of this church and some bias may have come into play because I was

familiar with the worship services and the pastor which might have influenced the way in which some of the questions were asked.

Basis for data analysis

The interviews were transcribed so that they could be printed and clearly understood. The researcher read the manuscripts at least 3 times each and started an opening coding process as a first step. The next step was to start to recognize key words or themes that kept emerging from each interview. After these were clustered together, several patterns of responses were evident; namely, influence of parents on dress attitudes, developing their own sense of style based on availability, and how their mode of dress reflected their religious beliefs. Another impartial person also was asked to code the responses in order to check for reliability of responses and also to detect any outlying codes that were unexpected. Once the interviews were transcribed, they were stored in locked computer files.

The number of people interviewed was ten and ranged from ages 70 to 100. After going through the manuscripts in the coding process three times, themes were identified, both minor and major. The major professor also read and coded independently to insure intercoder reliability which is described in the coding process. This was important because we needed to agree on the codes, the code names, and the coded passages (Creswell, 2007). This was calculated by dividing the number the total number of agreements by the total number of decisions made. It was determined that after 10 interviews, no new themes emerged and so the decision was made to not proceed with any new interviews since saturation was evident. Of the ten women, 8 of them lived in Houston and the surrounding areas; one of them had lived in Houston and recently moved to another state; one of them had never lived in Houston, but rather lived in a small town within the state. In order to get reliable statements, the interviews were recorded and then transcribed by

paid transcription service that works on legal documents and court proceedings. Where words were not audible or clear, it was indicated in the manuscript. Also, the researcher reviewed every manuscript along with the audio interview to validate the statements. A written copy of the interview questions was used during the interview to insure clarity and continuity for the process and to make sure all the questions were answered.

According to a study conducted by Reeves-DeArmond, et al (2011) in examining methods and use of theory in publishing articles for the *CTRJ* and *Dress*, many approaches are used in research related to historic dress and textiles. Taylor (2002) mentions the traditional historical approach as being related to a multidisciplinary approach and further describes it as the social/cultural history-based approach. Research suited to this approach would be critical and cultural studies such as consumption history, ethnography, feminism, etc. where primary sources are used to gather evidence.

Whereas the oral history approach gleans information from live interviews that share recollections of their life experiences from various historical periods (Bornat, 1998; Taylor, 2002). Reeves-DeArmond, et al. (2011) supports the idea that the interviews are turned into narratives that tell stories that allow the researcher to interpret them based on what is already known about the time periods being covered. Because of the nature of this approach, oral history methodology is thought to be well suited for historic dress and textiles inquiries (Taylor, 2002).

It was further noted that most of the studies published in these two journals during the specific time period being examined, did not declare a specific theory as a basis for the study, but instead used what is referred to as “unnamed theory.” What was found is that the authors of these articles developed arguments or theses in narrative formats by telling stories about either historical events, a person’s life, a research method, or an artifact (Reeves-DeArmond, 2011).

As the arguments developed, the researchers were able to form relational statements to make links between the various events and justifying the selected research method. So this effort had served the same purpose as using theory in that it described and explained the events. Basically, the unnamed theories answered “how,” “why,” and “so what” questions; very similar to what using theory would do.

Reliability

With reference to reliability of studies, it is important to be consistent in the measurement, that is, to make sure that an instrument measures the same way each time it is used under the same condition (Cozby, 1993). The same set of questions were used for each respondent and they were asked in the same order. Sometimes, the respondents would wander in their narratives, however, the researcher made sure that no questions were missed during the interviews. So, the study was repeatable. Reliability was also insured because the data were gathered from primary sources; that being the respondents in this study. All of them spoke easily and without coaching. In some cases, there was one other person present, such as a caretaker or a relative. The oral narrative was recorded and translated verbatim. The person who transcribed the audio recordings did not know the researcher or the respondents, therefore the translations were impartial and accurate. Field notes were also taken as the interview progressed and were compared to the actual manuscripts for inaudible words, body movements, etc. Because of timing and location constraints, only one interview was conducted for each respondent. It is felt that the respondents revealed everything that was necessary with only one interview.

Validity

Cook and Campbell (1979) define validity as the “best available approximation to the truth or falsity of a given inference, proposition, or conclusion.” The best way to explain this is

to ask if the conclusions were right. If external validity is considered, the question arises as to the conclusions made about the research: Is the information valid? Does it make sense and can it be generalized to a broader sample and is there a relationship between how I used my concepts in the study to the actual events that were found?

One writer says there is little use for validation (Wolcott, 1990; Creswell, 2007). His contention is that validation does not guide or inform his work. According to Creswell, he placed validity in a broader perspective. Wolcott's goal was to identify "critical elements" and write "plausible interpretations from them" (p. 146). This point of view allowed the researcher to understand the church dress phenomena rather than trying to convince others that it exists.

Limitations

Limitations of this study are obviously, the small sample size as well as geographical location of the respondents. There are many opportunities for further research here, from location to denomination, to other faiths, and even to the male churchgoers. Another point to consider is made by McCracken (1988, p. 32), "advantage of giving the investigator an extraordinary intimate acquaintance with the object of study. This acquaintance gives the investigator a fineness of touch and delicacy of insight".

The fact that I had a slightly knew some of the respondents, and as an African American woman who understands the church setting and dress expectations of my generation, it allowed me to develop a relationship with the respondents and be an encourager as they spoke about their life stories.

CHAPTER 4

Church Dress: What It Means to African American Women Aged 70 and Older

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons why African American women today wear church dress and the significance of this dress. The importance of this study was to document a tradition that appears to be waning as the postmodern church has changed the structure of the worship services and to whom they are appealing. Research related to symbolic interactionist theory and literature on effects of slavery on church dress were used to make a connection of how church dress evolved in the Black church. Data collection was conducted by interviewing ten African American female participants aged 70 and older. Analysis was conducted by open coding and axial coding of oral narratives to identify emergent themes. Evaluation of the data revealed that their mode of dress is an outward manifestation of their inner beliefs that to dress well is to present their best to God. Despite new fashion trends, they continue to dress in this manner. Their stories further revealed very strong opinions about post-modern church dress and how society influences what is considered proper dress for church. The stories told by these women of their lives through dress explained how their clothing was symbolic of strong religious beliefs as well as a way of life for proper women and disclosed meanings about their self-concept related to dress.

Key Words: church dress, African Americans, self-concept, modesty, Christian beliefs

Introduction

In the context of slavery, clothing was used to dehumanize, belittle, and enslave; but could also provide a form of individuality and expression. Upon first entry into the U.S., slaves were stripped of their personal and tribal identities. Some slave owners denied individuals the basic garments to cover nakedness which resulted in lack of physical and psychological comfort (Sanders, 2011). Others forced slaves to wear European-style clothing, in order to force conformation to a European sense of decency and to put the slave owners at ease (Camp, 2002; White & White, 1995). Status was denoted by slave owners by providing those working in the fields the plainest and coarsest clothing, and those working in the house receiving finer goods (Hunt-Hurst, 2012); often causing jealousy and resentment among the slaves.

Clothing could be handed down from the plantation owner, but was more likely to be made on the plantation. It was often the responsibility of the slaves to make clothing for the master's family and other slaves. From the spinning, weaving, dyeing, and sewing of garments, these chores allowed, in some cases, the opportunity to infuse to some subtle degree of their sense of aesthetics into the designs and ornamentation of the garments (Shaw, WPA Narratives, 2003). Some slaves found means of expressing individuality by "purposely marking their difference with personal choices of dress" (Foster, 1997, p.4). As an example, slaves might use patches on garments in a creative way. There is also evidence that when provided the opportunity to select their own attire, slaves rebelled against the norm of every-day dress which was controlled by the slave owner, to give themselves a sense of identity and freedom (Camp, 2002), and to express resourcefulness and creativity using available fabrics and dyes (Buckridge, 2003).

Creativity was demonstrated in the way African American slaves, particularly women, combined their clothing articles into cohesive ensembles. The ensembles sometimes shocked the

sensibilities of White people due to the combination of unexpected colors, sometimes referred to as “loud colors,” the mixture of stripes, patterns, and irregular pieces, obtained from patching and darning garments (White & White, 1995). While some of these creative designs derived from necessity, they also provided the opportunity to demonstrate creative skills and ingenuity.

One fact noted by Foster (1997) is that a majority of slaves were taken from West Africa. Based on West African traditions, some of the propensities later seen in dress seem derivative from earlier traditions. It is documented that this group of people (West Africans and later, slaves) easily adapted items of clothing from other tribes and had little restrictions on what they wore. There is also evidence that West Africans used a variety of materials woven into assortments of patterns, with a liberal use of bright colors and other ornamentations. So, what Foster concluded was that the West Africans already had a heightened appreciation for and the propensity for wearing bright colors, adornment, and out of the ordinary apparel. One has to wonder if this innate sense of a “natural style” became the driver in the way they adapted the clothing that was given to them in America. Perhaps, a cultural memory of sorts, propelled them in this direction of adornment (White & White, 1995).

Some researchers contend that slaves liked to flaunt their best Sunday clothing before other slaves and before Whites, especially where the venue allowed them to be seen - to have a visual presence. These researchers report that not only did slaves procure the valued clothing items, but they reassembled them in combinations according to a different aesthetic code from that worn by the Whites (White & White, 1995). Oftentimes, this outward appearance caused curiosity, amusement, and even contempt among Whites, while it was viewed by other slaves as a way of conveying identity and how that person viewed him or herself. One source (Foster, 1997), points out that information taken from the slave narratives indicates that when freed, ex-

slaves often took great care with what they wore in an attempt to dress “correctly,” that is what was acceptable by White society. It is evident that, when they had an opportunity to obtain proper clothing, former slaves felt it was important to dress nice and appear well-groomed. This seemed to boost their self-worth and allowed them some semblance of acceptability within a society that for the most part, rejected their value as citizens.

The church

Many slaves were converted to Christianity and taught the doctrines of this religion. It is thought that the kind of religious instruction that slaves received depended on the religious persuasion of their masters (Blassingame, 1972). What is interesting here is that because there was often a shortage of clergy for whatever denomination was being introduced to the slaves, masters would sometimes recruit clergy from other denominations to preach to the slaves and conduct services. We are further told that Methodists were more active in evangelizing slaves than were other denominations, especially Baptists (Blassingame, 1972). This is a paradox, because even though Baptists were not spending as much time to evangelize slaves, it is thought that for some reason, the Baptists appeared more attractive to the slaves. The bodily movements of active worship by the slaves seemed to ease into the services of the Baptist and Methodist churches. So, other denominations that were more formal in worship started to adopt these preaching styles and forms of worship services. One source is quoted as saying “Sometimes in spite of the ministers, the slaves would “get happy” and make the church rock with singing and shouting” (Journal, 1860). According to Blassingame (1972), Baptists by far held the highest membership of Blacks by the 1860s with a smaller amount belonging to other denominations such as Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Church of Christ, Lutherans, Quakers, and others.

Because of societal notions of appropriateness and status, most slaves did not worship with their owners, but held separate religious services. According to Frazier (1964), this format allowed them more opportunity to express themselves without the judgement of the slave owners. Along with serving as a cohesive organization, the church also became a refuge. The church supported social, political, and educational interests. Both during and after slavery, the church often set up schools to provide education, it provided information to the congregants regarding political issues, it gave financial support for families in need, and it provided a social format for people to gather and fellowship. It truly became the hub of the community.

Despite its importance, there is a limited amount of scholarly evidence published on church dress. However, some studies have alluded to dress from a Protestant church denominational point of view (Klassen, 2004). Klassen's research analyzed the Methodist African American (AME) women of the 19th century who turned to dress as a tool for communicating, both political and religious messages. These women understood the power of dress and how it served to legitimize them in a society that was hostile. An example of what they wore can be described as plain dress without any ornamentation usually made from solid drab color fabric and a silhouette that did not enhance the female figure. The head was usually covered with a white or black bonnet (Klassen, 2004). Respectability and dressing plainly was considered to be the expectation for women within the AME church. Others have compared religious practices between Catholic and Protestant with regard to how services were conducted and the level of vocal activity, however, nothing is mentioned in this study with regard to dress (Frazier, 1964). Collins (1971) studied a group of Black converts to Catholicism while exploring the decline in involvement of members in the church. This study discussed the significance that the change of church affiliation might have for the traditional African American church. A key

point in this study is that the churches served the Black community's social, political, and economic needs as well as its' religious needs.

Dress amongst churchgoers

In the early twentieth century, M.S. Evans (1915) noted that there was a great contrast between rural areas and big cities in terms of Sunday church attire. Dressing up for church, or church dress, seemed to take more prominence in the rural areas. Evans maintains that attending church was attractive because it gave one an opportunity to dress up and display fine clothing. It can be suggested that whether church dress was worn in rural communities or urban areas, it gave Blacks a sense of self-esteem and value which, on an everyday basis, was denied them by White society. So, one day in seven, they felt on equal status by their dress (White & White, 1995). It is important that more recent studies need to be included to determine if this contrast between rural and urban churchgoers has changed.

Denominational influences on dress and status

According to Daniel Collins (1971), the "Negro Church" was described as an acceptable term for the collective religious activities of African Americans. It is considered one of the oldest and largest institutions created by Blacks. Today, there exist seven major denominations of Protestant Black churches in America; namely, African Methodist Episcopal (AME), African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), National Baptist Convention, USA Incorporated, and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) (O'Neal, 1999). In a survey conducted by the Gallup organization in the late 1950s (Nelson & Nelson, 1975), it was found that high levels of church attendance and religious zeal were more associated with the southern states of America. It was assumed that this was because religious fundamentalism was also more frequently found in the southern states. The researchers also found that in general, white-collar

workers were more likely to attend church regularly than blue-collar workers. More recently, a Gallup poll taken in 2002 indicated that those with higher education levels have a high percentage (70%) of church membership while 64% of those with high school education or less, have church membership. Another study conducted in 2011 by the General Social Survey, stated that since the 1970s, church attendance has overall declined slightly in the U.S. Along these same lines, education and church attendance were positively related. Church attendance was lower in cities than in rural areas and more conservative religious views seemed to be the norm in rural areas than in the city.

It is possible that there may be a link between higher education level and social status; meaning that people who attended college and obtained degrees either considered themselves in a higher social status or were perceived by others to be in a higher social status (Collins, 1998). Some research indicates the expectation of upholding certain dress standards at church service, as well as at other special events. The notion was that the better dressed the woman, the more highly educated (probably associated with the quality of clothing and possibly higher income with which to afford the clothing; such as a teacher, principal, nurse, or secretary). With this viewpoint, the status of the woman was elevated because of the perception of the viewers.

After considering the interconnectedness of social status and education, one might conclude that the higher education level of individuals actually increased their social status within Black society. This group tended to dress more soberly and refined for church dress; usually garments that were considered appropriate and proper by White standards (White & White, 1995). This more highly educated group were found to gravitate to “quieter,” more refined churches such as the Methodist, CME, and AME while the lower class (considered the less educated group) gravitated more toward the Baptist and COGIC churches. According to

explanations made by Frazier (1964), the doctrines of the Baptist and Methodist churches were simpler and more emotional whereas other denominations were seen to be more dogmatic, more intellectual and reserved, in both rituals and in dress. Another idea supported by W.E.B. DuBois (1903) was that participation in the Baptist and Methodist denominations was based on their ability to incorporate some characteristics of African religion into the ceremonies, rituals, and even the preaching.

As the denominations developed over time, the church dress that involved “loud colors” and unexpected silhouettes and garment combinations were more common in the Baptist and COGIC churches. What seemed to form was a class distinction based on the intersections of education and social status which helped in the formation of congregational makeup of the various denominations. Thus, church dress might be noted as an indicator of religious denomination as well as social class and education level.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to understand the reasons why African American women today wear church dress and the significance of this dress. The importance of this study was to document a tradition that appears to be waning as the postmodern church has changed the structure of the worship services and to whom they are appealing. A more casual, relaxed attitude pervades the modern church where the clothing reflects the attitude of today’s society. Church dress as it was worn in past decades, seems to no longer be the expected way to dress with the younger demographic (Shook, 2012). Because it appears to be dying as a tradition, it is vital that this story be told and documented with oral narratives and stories that reveal meanings behind church dress. This is not just about the dress but its deeper meanings for these women and what it symbolizes in their lives.

Research Questions

This study explored the following questions:

1. What does church dress mean to the respondents? Why do they continue to dress in this manner?
2. How is their dress related to their Christian beliefs?
3. What are their opinions of what is worn today by younger women and how does it relate to Christian beliefs?

Theoretical Perspective

Symbolic interactionist perspective

Symbolic interactionist theory purports that individuals live in a symbolic environment as well as a physical one and that behavior is stimulated by symbols as well as physical acts. Clothing and adornment are seen as symbols with meaning (Horn, 1981). Kaiser (1998) describes symbolic interactionist theory as one that deals with both appearance management and appearance perception. It can be understood as the degree of consistency between the two messages sent and received, such that sometimes the received message is different from the message that is intended. According to some researchers, individuals develop a notion of how they think people will react to what they are wearing, in advance of the interaction. If a person's predictions are accurate, then the identity that is intended coincides with what others perceive (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).

If this concept is applied to what has been found about slave dress and church dress worn on Sundays and special occasions, then the symbolic interactionist theory may have some bearing on what was seen by others and the effect of Sunday dress on the wearer. Individuals acquire identities through social interaction in various social and physical settings thereby

communicating identity by relating the dress to a social position of the wearer and to the observers as well (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).

In 1902, Charles Cooley proposed that self-concepts were formed as reflections of the responses and evaluations of others in the environment, sometimes referred to as a “looking-glass” self. In simple terms, the individual imagines how they appear to others and then they imagine others’ judgment of that appearance. And then finally, a self-concept is developed from this process. Other researchers supported this notion by Cooley that the self develops out of reflected appraisals of others (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934; Schlenker, 1980; Sullivan, 1947, 1953). According to Felson (1985), self-concepts are shaped by actual and reflected appraisals of others, not in isolation. It was noted by Cooley (1902) that while reflected appraisals are important in shaping self-concept, it is just one process of several that lead to developing a self-concept.

Model for considering an African American dress aesthetic and dress culture

When one attempts to create a model for African American dress aesthetic, it can be challenging because slavery actually caused a lack of knowledge of the culture and background, especially as time moved more generations away from actually crossing the ocean (O’Neal, 1998). O’Neal contends that a kind of “cultural memory” seemed to occur as the African American women existed in slavery and then moved further away from it into the twentieth century. Some works have captured through pictures and personal accounts about the tradition of dressing up for church and other special events. This type of dress appears to have taken hold during and shortly after slavery and seems to have developed into a tradition of wearing your “Sunday best” on special occasions. This style is punctuated with what is referred to as “loud” colors, unexpected features of garments and noticeable accessories of matching shoes,

flamboyant hats, gloves, handbags, handkerchief in hand, and jewelry. When an aesthetic of dress is examined more closely, it is determined to be constantly changing in the sense that style or personal expression come into play as individuals express themselves through dress. O'Neal (1998) has noted that African Americans might appear to use style as a kind of resistance, very similar to what was found during slavery. The thinking is that even though the garments are designed and manufactured by the dominant White culture, African Americans adopt the garments by wearing them but use them to emphasize the cultural differences by the way they style or accessorize the garments. In this context, style is another way of saying "show off what you got" by the wearer (O'Neal, 1998, p. 170). The attitude of the wearer definitely affects the style. This re-shaping of the garments coupled with this "style" sends strong nonverbal messages. These messages may be interpreted in various ways, depending on the receiver of the message (that is, who might be looking at the individual). The lack of existence of a clear African American aesthetic might be the result of forcing a Eurocentric notion of beauty on slaves and as slaves adapted and transformed in an attempt at survival. Blassingame (1972) contends that a kind of cultural memory was used. O'Neal (1998) states that the aesthetic that emerged from this process is neither African nor American, but perhaps a mixture of the two.

Performances

While in the presence of others, the individual typically infuses his activity with signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure. If the person wants his activity to become significant to others, he must act so that it expressed the intended significance. In other words, you act how you want people to see you (Goffman, 1959, p. 30). According to Goffman, when individuals encounter others, the tendency to seek to get information about that person often comparing what is seen with

preconceived ideas. To explain the previous statement, an example would be if a White person encounters a Black person, the messages that are communicated are based on the appearance (how they are dressed and groomed), and their speech. Goffman maintains that there is a tendency to receive or seek this information from observing that person and then comparing it to pre-conceived ideas or prejudices that may not be correct. Sources of information are often the actions or conduct and the appearance or dress of the person. This allows an observer to apply their previous experience with individuals to the person they are interacting with. Goffman (1959) defines a face-to-face interaction as the “reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another’s actions when in one another’s immediate physical presence.” (p. 15). These interactions create performances of the individuals which influences how they are perceived by others. The performance includes a “front” which can be used to influence others and necessarily includes appearance and behavior.

Method

Oral narratives

The method of narrative research or oral narrative is useful in getting not only information but a human perspective on the interviewee; for instance, what it was like to grow up in a certain time period, their experiences, or reactions to certain events. Narrative can be used to construct identity (Czarniawaka, 1997), it can aid in education (Abma, 2000; Cox, 2001), and it can act as a source of understanding (Cortazzi, 2001). By constructing stories, narrative can become an instrument to build and communicate meaning and impart knowledge to others. This research used oral narrative to interview older, African American women regarding their use and perspectives regarding church dress. The interview questions were structured so that

information could easily be categorized by specific time periods or events. The researcher used a pre-set group of questions but allowed the participants to talk freely, oftentimes moving to another topic not necessarily in the order of the questions but this allowed them to speak more openly without making them feel like they were being coached. Each participant was given a copy of a disclosure form and the interview process was reviewed with them before the actual interview was done. The interviews were conducted in each participants' home which allowed them to be comfortable and more likely to talk about their memories of dressing. Institutional Review Board exemption was received prior to conducting the interviews.

The intention of the research was to also use a second approach of examining personal documents that were shown by the participants, such as photos, picture albums, diaries or journals, newspaper clippings, and other artifacts related to church dress. I was able to use some of the information shown to me to confirm what they were saying in the interviews. However, there was no consistency in their offering documents, pictures, scrapbooks. Some of them had pictures, etc. while others did not. So, the primary source was through the interviews, with documentation serving to triangulate and confirm their oral information.

Study setting

Eight of the ten participants lived in Houston, Texas. One of the participants was a prior resident of Houston and since moved to California. The other participant grew up in and still resides in a small town in east Texas. The duration of each interview was between 40 minutes to one hour. It took the researcher about 6 weeks to complete the interview process and convert the oral interviews into transcripts. The participants included 10 women, aged 70 and older who identified themselves as African American. The ages ranged from 70 to 100. I traveled to each person's home in but two cases when I interviewed them by phone, recording the conversation.

Analyzing the data

The data were analyzed initially using open coding. In going about the open coding process, the researcher read through the hard copies of each respondents' manuscript and made notes in the margins. The major professor also read through the manuscripts simultaneously, looking for themes. Codes were assigned to each major theme and determined the frequency of occurrence in the oral narratives. After this was finished, a matrix was made with an acronym for each participant and all identified codes entered so that comparisons could be made and common themes could be identified (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Toward the end of the coding process, several key themes emerged while others were not so significant to the study. Several methods were employed for identifying themes such as word repetition, key words in context, connectors, and cutting and sorting. Theme identification is one of the most essential and necessary job in qualitative research. All of these techniques proved beneficial and helped to validate those themes that were dominant and sub-themes that would require further research in perhaps another study. The two authors compared and discussed the coding and themes found repeatedly throughout the process of analysis. It was found that saturation occurred, or no new themes developed following careful review of the ten interview transcripts.

Selection process

An acquaintance involved in a ministry for the elderly at her church provided me with a list of possible participants along with their phone numbers. My criteria were that they be at least 70 years old and African-American women, regular church-goers. No particular denomination was required.

I also contacted other friends for participants. Several of them also responded and provided names and contact information. After contacting the first person, snowball sampling occurred.

Discussion

Demographics

With regard to demographic information, the preliminary questions were related to where they were born, when they relocated to Houston, their age, and what church they attended and for how long. Many of the respondents were born in small towns and moved to Houston in early childhood and others were native Houstonians. They were not asked directly as what their occupation was, however, all of them did talk about their education and family structure. Table 1 displays information about each respondent: occupation, age, birth place, and length of time in Houston. In reviewing Table 1, the profession of nursing seems to be most popular one, following by education. During the times that the respondents grew up, there were very few occupations that Negro women could succeed; the safest ones were education, medicine, and domestic work (Dill, 1983). Table 2 gives information on church denomination, church attendance history and reasons for attending church. Table 2 reveals that the intersection of denomination added to occupation, and geographic location don't necessarily influence church attendance in this instance. However, this can't be generalized across the entire United States or the state of Texas. All of the participants attended church currently and all indicated that they had consistently attended church throughout their childhood and most into their adult life. The women represented membership in five churches. The denominations included Baptist (n=6), Non-denominational churches (n=3), and Seventh Day Adventist (n=1). Their reasons for attending church were very similar; they liked to fellowship with other believers, the teaching ministries; and the close-knit congregations likened to family. These responses appeared to have

no bearing on the size of the church, since some churches were very small while others were large congregations. It was interesting that all of them were able to recount the various churches they had belonged to over their life span with the events surrounding them.

Church dress affected by attitude

Based on what is understood about symbolic interactionist theory, clothing speaks silently but clearly. In some cases, the clothing being worn does not send the intended message to others when there is a conflict between what is being worn and the state of mind of the wearer. In the case of these participants, church dress is an outward manifestation of an inward spirit. Thus the clothing was used to support and confirm their religion, that of Christianity and womanhood. In the cases of two of the participants, there were incidents that were considered turning points for them when the clothing they were wearing was not compatible with their new state of spirituality. One was from Arlene who told the story of her black pants and how her clothing played a part in her attitude change toward her beliefs in God.

Well, it started a friend of mine, a co-worker invited me there to a revival they were having and at that point, I was really stressed at my job and I thought that I could stay at home and not go to church because the job was so stressful. So, I just rested the whole weekend and stayed in the bed resting, but things just got worse for me by not attending church. So, she was a social worker there and she asked me would I come to her church to a revival. Well, anybody invite me to church, I go and so, I told her, sure. And she picked me up and we went and – and looked like the preacher was just preaching to me – that lesson was just for me – and so, she said, “How did you enjoy yourself?” I said, “Well, I loved it.” So, I went that whole week with her and every night the sermon was for me, every night. Sunday I wanted to go back, but she didn’t mention anything about Sunday. So, I said, “Well, I know where it is and I know where we sat, so I’ll just go on, on my own.” I got up and I didn’t dress because mentally I wasn’t there yet and every night that she picked me up, I wore the same black pants, but I changed the top, you know. I went to church with the same black pants and normally, I don’t wear pants to church. But this is the way my mind was at that particular time. I went to church and I enjoyed it. I came back feeling much better, kind of uplifting me and so, the next Sunday I went back again. And I went the next Sunday and then one Sunday I was sitting there and I began to look down ‘cause I’m still wearing those black pants and didn’t realize it, you know, but I’m still wearing the black pants. So, I’ll change the top but not the pants and they were all knotted up with little white balls, you know, and stuff. And when I

looked down there, I started getting embarrassed, ‘cause now my mind is clearing up would been better for me going back to church and I’m realizing – oh, and I just, I couldn’t hardly listen to the sermon for thinking everybody’s looking at those pants, you know” – I don’t even know where those pants are ‘cause when I got home, I felt like throwing ‘em in the trash.

The other story from Addie, 100 years old, told how she moved from a Baptist church to the Seventh Day Adventist church and the events leading up to that decision.

I was baptized, brought up in the Baptist church and that’s all I knew and I was baptized when I was 16 years old. Enjoyed going to church and everything and after I got married, my husband and I, we decided that we would start doing right on Sunday, ‘cause you know people do anything they want on Sunday. They wash – wash their stockings and wash your hair, whatever. So, we said I’m gonna start cooking on Saturday, start washing, get my clothes and everything ready and we’re gonna keep Sunday holy. About the time we made up our mind to do that, our insurance man came and told my husband, he said, “X” you’re trying to be a little preacher.” Say, “There’s a man over there on Louisiana Avenue – on Railroad Avenue – has a tent and you ought to go there and preach. You ought to go there so you can learn something.” So, we started going and now, we was reading the bible, but you know, if you don’t understand you don’t have no guide, you don’t – you just read it. So, I went there in the meeting, he was telling the scripture and everything and people were just turning to their Bibles and reading and I couldn’t hardly turn mine. So, they was helping me and everything and so, I followed the scripture that he was teaching, uh-huh. And then after that, they started giving us Bible lessons and that’s how I – when I learned more, I can get more.

Related to this story and dress, Addie told me how she stopped wearing jewelry and makeup after she moved to that denomination because it was against their rules for women to adorn themselves with anything decorative. In both of these cases, the women told about dress, or the ceasing of wearing particular forms of dress, were used to internally and externally demonstrate their new found faith.

Meanings of church dress

One of the key questions for this study was to find out why these participants continued to dress in this manner long after the influence of their mothers and the older generation had waned. We wanted to know what church dress meant to them. In other words, what compelled them to continue dressing this way? We also wanted to know if they had discontinued dressing

this way and what influenced them to stop. When reviewing answers related to what church dress means to them, overwhelmingly, they made statements about their being “right” with God and giving Him their best. Frances stated: “Well, I really think that the dress attire should be really according to the Bible – according to what the Bible says, women should dress – cover their heads, you know, cover their bodies – the revealing parts of their bodies and dresses shouldn’t be too tight, you know.”

Iris agreed with the “rightness” of church dress saying, “So, I just kind of wear something that makes me feel special, makes me feel good, makes me feel pretty and the better you look, you better you act for most of us.” She went on to explain that the better she was dressed, the better she felt about her manners, and how others perceived her. Faye, one of the few who still wears hats every Sunday says that she “feels good when I’m dressed up.” Many of them expressed that this is a tradition passed on to them by their parents and the church. They determined that church dress was an act of worship by giving their best to God. Only one lady, Iris, explained how her mode of dress helped to elevate her status within the church, by stating:

It really does. So, I’ve been there about a year and a half. So I was invited to join the women’s ministry. And then I got invited to teach a women’s class. People would ask me, how do you get to teach?

The remainder of the respondents did not necessarily associate their status with their mode of dress, but rather as a reflection of their belief in God.

Many of the ladies talked about the reactions of other church members to what their outfits looked like on a Sunday. Some of them noted that people actually made comments about their ensembles, while they, in turn, gave compliments to others. None of them considered this a competition but merely a politeness of acknowledging one another. Sally recounted this story.

Well, I would hear things. You always look so good. Where’d you get that? Even now, when I walk in my church, I hear something. It’s what you’re wearing, and who you

represent. And I hear that at church a lot. I wore the yellow suit I'm telling you about. A lady came up to me and said, "You're just it." Over and over. I hear that a lot. They can't wait to go to church every Sunday so they can see what I'm wearing. But yeah, it is important. I haven't done any research on this so I can't prove it. But I believe that the better you look, the better you act. People are going to treat you that way. A hat makes you feel better. That's what hats do.

After confirming that they did enjoy dressing up for church, the respondents were asked to discuss their satisfaction with being dressed for church. Alaska had the following statement about how it made her feel.

I have it – the Spirit gave it to me. My desire is to please God and to offer Him a clean heart, a clean body and my praise. I don't have anything – he doesn't require any more. He doesn't do it quiet. The new crop, first of the crop, all He requires is that we keep His commandments, that I love his creations and when I go into the sanctuary, I take – I don't have any hatred in my heart because there's no room for the spirit of God and evil. So, my heart is clean, my body is clean and that's all I have. I've kept his commandments and I offer him my praise.

In summary, for the research participants, dressing for church was primarily done as an act of worship and ceremony, not an intent (consciously, at least) to impress others or to garner compliments or compete with other churchgoers. They did indicate that they had the desire to be fashionable; that is, to wear clothing that was current and worn with accessories that enhanced their looks while being age appropriate.

Dressing age appropriately

The most predominant theme that emerged during these interviews was the use of the term, "age appropriate." All of the respondents were firm in their belief that a true Christian lady should dress appropriately for her age. One participant, Arlene, told a story about one of her friends who refused to conform to dressing in the expected way, despite her age.

Yeah, that's what I was thinking 'cause see she didn't wear stockings anymore to church, she just go bare leg, and I tell her, I say, "You know your mama would beat you up and down the road if she caught you with no stockings on," you know. And then she will wear her dresses short. And I told her, I said, "You don't need to be wearing that kind of stuff," and she likes to wear them leggings and all like that and I say, "Shoot, you too old for that kind of carrying on." She says she – she's not – she's not gonna ever dress old,

you know. I say, "It's not dressing old. It's dressing age appropriate." Everybody can't wear everything they come out with, you know, even if you're a young person. You don't have the body for it. You have to take all that stuff in consideration and she's too big for 'em and you need to cover up as much as you can cover up. Anything that I don't feel comfortable with and I don't want everybody to be looking and seeing, I'm gonna cover that up. And that's what she told me, she's not gonna ever dress old. I said, you know, "You can bring that dress down a little bit."

Alaska responded similarly.

I wished I could dress them. I would go in and put their size on them, that's right. They're too short, and you see the Bible says don't cause somebody else to sin and they know their body is a temptation to men and men deceive them because that's all they want is the body. They don't want the responsibility of taking care of it. See, so why show them your body for free. I think it's ridiculous.

Robin stated:

I adhere to the principles of how a lady dresses and that is to be covered and showing respect for God and the people in the church. How they dress for church, well, it tells me a lot about their home life when I see them. If their parents, if their mother is at church and I see how the mother is dressed, then that's why the daughter dresses the way she does. Too revealing. There's no respect for their temple, for their body.

Iris further stated: I really want to talk about that. Cause when I see them, I really want to ask them a question, but I don't. Do you have a mother, a husband, a mirror? Do you have children who see you walking out like that? All these questions. Any of these things would let you know that you shouldn't be dressed the way you are. It is disgusting. And before I left this church, I had a discussion with the pastor. To let him know where I was with the way people were dressing.

Clearly, the participants all had strong opinions about today's younger women who attend church. Some of them indicated that if they could change it, they would. There was a sense of frustration with today's opinion of what is in good taste for women dressing for church.

Modesty

Modesty was also a recurring theme voiced by each of the participants. It was very important to them to present themselves in a manner that they felt was honoring God and not to entice others. In a book written by James Laver (1969), modesty is defined as "a check on the impulse to self-aggrandizement, an inhibition of 'dressing up'; an attempt to damp down sexual

allure.” The goal of modesty is to dress in a manner that prevents sexual desire or impulses. Weinberg (1965) also states that modesty is dressing in such a way that one does not put themselves on display. Further, the *American Heritage Dictionary* (1982), states that modesty “consists of observing the conventional proprieties in speech, dress, and behavior.” Participants routinely mentioned the importance of modesty with regards to church dressing as well as a demonstration of the values they held.

Faye stated,

It’s terrible. First place, they ought to dress modestly, which means to me perhaps the pastor wouldn’t agree with me from what he says, but I think too many young women – certainly not all of them – but too many dress to attract men and it just be that I don’t like seeing that in church – anything that attracts people. Like fancy earrings that attract people, I don’t like anything that shows the form of a person. Most of those things are designed to bring out lust in men – don’t need to dress like a prostitute. You are in church. I think women dress like the prostitutes dress and that’s where it comes from, show business and prostitutes dress that way. When a woman in the church dresses that way, what is she trying to do? Is she trying to bring out the lust in some man? I heard – I’ve heard in the church – you know, don’t look sexy. Well, you are sexy. You are a woman. Whatever you got is yours and that’s it, but you don’t have to dress with that in mind and I really am opposed to that. I don’t think that needs to be in church.

Another point related to modesty for the women was showing arms or going sleeveless. Arlene stated she has never bared her arms in church, she stated:

Cause see, my mama was really adamant about that. Well, my dresses came back down in my 50s and 60s. I started dressing age appropriate. And then they have their sleeves out, their back all out, like if they’re going to a nightclub. That’s the way they – a lot of ‘em dressed like they’re going to a nightclub. Some of the dresses – all of the dresses that I used to wear to the nightclub and I know what they look like, you know. There’s a time and a place for everything.

In reviewing the comments made on modesty, it appeared that anything that stood out or demanded attention was considered a lack of modesty. The interesting conflict is the need to be modest and at the same time, accessorized and dressed in a way that definitely commanded attention from others.

Colors might be considered in this context; especially because each of the participants mentioned enjoying and wearing bright colors, and eschewing dull or even neutral colors.

Each participant talked about their favorite colors when selecting garments. A few of them talked about loving specific colors as children and continuing to like those colors. Two participants stated a liking of yellow and others enjoyed bright colors such as blue, purple and floral prints. With the intention of appearing modest, the colors did not appear to conflict with their appearance. Their notion of modesty might appear to be conflicted in that they want to be noticed but they don't want to "announce" their presence by wearing garments that call attention to them. The wearing of bright colors fit in perfectly with their idea of modesty.

Rules for church dressing

Rules for dressing for church were discussed at length and every interviewee had an opinion on this question. While some suggested that rules might discourage potential members from joining a church, most were unbending that rules should be implemented.

Patricia said,

I think you should still have Sunday clothes, you know. I think you should be appropriate. As far as church is concerned, but because we *come just as you are* some people don't have – some people don't think in terms of Sunday dress 'cause a lot of people didn't come to Christ as a child. I think things have changed in terms of our community because we don't emphasize [right dressing].

Iris commented about the rules of her church as a young girl and complained about them, however, she did think that dress rules should be implemented for today's women.

Arie did comment from the potential viewpoint of the church and the younger women:

Well, you know, in a way as long as they have something on– their butts are not out 'cause now, you know, you want to try to get people into church. So, you don't want to drive them away because of a short dress, maybe somebody don't – can't afford clothes and maybe this is all they got. I don't think you should put a dress code like that.

Discussion

This study sought to investigate church dress of African American women who have engaged in church dress and in some instances, still dress in this manner for church. The participants discussed how they started dressing a certain way and what compelled them to continue wearing it throughout their lifetimes. Some of them have modified this look by not wearing hats and gloves. But all of them still dress in a special way for church with matching accessories (jewelry, handbags, and shoes). Although the respondents don't voice any hidden meanings behind their dressing, it was implied that while church dress can be fashionable, it must be suitable and appropriate for one's age, body size, and church. The mode of dress is an outward manifestation of their inner beliefs that to dress well is to present their best to God. While it does seek to send a message to others, it appears that the received message is an expected one; that being, others recognize that this must be a "Christian woman," thus potentially becoming an unspoken message. Another modification indicated by a couple of the participants was the discontinuance of wearing pantyhose to church. These two felt that it modernized them by complying with current fashion trends while the others indicated a high level of discomfort with not wearing pantyhose to church. They felt that wearing pantyhose completed their look. No hidden meanings surfaced other than "habit" of wearing them despite current acceptable fashion trends for bare legs.

When asked why they continue to dress in this manner, most of the respondents stated that this was the acceptable way of dressing for church, despite fashion trends. Garment descriptions included longer dresses (in one case, ankle-length), hats, matching shoes and handbag, and jewelry.

Some of them indicated that they no longer wear hats as a matter of course, but they were unable to tell me exactly when or why they stopped wearing hats. It was a gradual process for them. With regard to others' perceptions of church dress, it was noted that although they were aware of what other people wore, and accepted compliments on their clothing, this was not a primary concern for them nor was it a reason for dressing up.

If the received message of the wearer becomes secondary to the intended message (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992), then it might be concluded that the respondents were more concerned with their focus on worship and God rather than trying to impress others. Impressing others was merely coincidental in these cases.

Another interesting theme that emerged was the need for modesty in dressing for church. And attached to this notion was the expressing the opinion that there should be dress rules imposed for church. For the most part, nearly all of them were appalled at the way women currently dress for church. The responses ranged from mild disdain to viewing them as loose women.

It might be suggested that these participants might reflect Goffman's idea (1959) that they were dressing this way to receive validation from the dominant group; that group being their White Christian counterparts who attended church and dressed appropriately in a parallel timeline. Goffman's thought is that the marginalized groups will aspire to reach the ideal by actions and behaviors. It is not conclusive that this is what was happening here, perhaps, initially, as young girls and teenagers, but as they moved away from maternal influences, they held onto these beliefs of modesty, decency, and even into what they called "age appropriateness."

Because they attended segregated churches and still do, it might not be valid to say that these women were trying to emulate or get approval from the dominant group in terms of their church dress. These ideas of rightness with God seemed to be more dominant than trying to aspire to fit into a group.

For the most part, they all stated that their mode of dress for church is directly related to their beliefs in giving their best presentation to God. Performance did not seem to come into play here. Nor did competition with other church women seem to be a strong issue. Most of them were not aware of a competitive spirit; merely an acknowledgement by others as to how they were dressed.

Conclusion

This research added to the body of knowledge in that it explored the lives of these respondents in the context of dress and also shed some light on the reasons for dressing for church in a special manner and continuing to do so, even in the face of modern influences of dress. It also allows us to look into how their beliefs influenced their lifestyles and how they still hold fast to those beliefs about how proper ladies should dress for church.

Further study might be indicated for comparing the church dress practices of African American women and White women in the same age bracket. The geographical limitations of this study might also serve to somewhat affect the findings since all of the participants were born and raised in the South. Perhaps northern states might indicate different church dress practices and attitudes tied to these beliefs.

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Table 1 –Occupation, Age, and City of Birth

Pseudonym	Age	Where born	How long in Houston
IS- School Principal	76	Native Houstonian	
FHO- Nurse	86	Alton, IL small town	Since 2000
AP- Nurse	92	Franklin, LA small post-slavery town	About 10 yrs
FHU- Teacher	86	Marlin, TX small town	Late 1950s
PW- Pharmacist	70	San Antonio, Tx	Late 1960s
AR- Nurse	71	Sealy, Tx near Prairie View	Mid 1960s
BS- Homemaker	75	Native Houstonian	
AC- Foundry worker	70	On a farm near Tyler, TX Still lives in Tyler	Never moved to Houston
AM- Nurse	100	Star Hill, LA- very small town	Since 1949
RG- Retail Buyer	69	Pecos, TX-small town	Since 1960s

Table 2 – Denomination, Church attendance history, and Reasons for attendance

Pseudonym	Denomination	Church attendance history?	Why attend church they do today
IS	Previously Baptist; now non-denominational	Consistently since childhood	To fellowship with other believers and praise God
FHO	Baptist and non-denominational	Consistently since childhood	Fellowship and learning Teaching ministries
AP	Baptist	Consistently since childhood	Fellowship and friendly
FHU	Baptist	Consistently since childhood	Teaching and learning about God
PW	Baptist	Consistently since childhood	Small congregation- more close-knit
AR	Baptist	Stopped in 20s and returned in her 30s	Likes Sunday school
BS	Baptist	Consistently since childhood	Close-knit – like family
AC	Baptist	Consistently since childhood	Small church- like family- fellowship
AM	Baptist in early childhood. At adulthood, moved to 7 th Day Adventist-1947	Consistently since childhood	Fellowship and learning the word
RG	Non-denominational	Always in childhood; on and off in early adulthood; consistently now	Not judgmental; encouraging and learning the word

Church Related Questions

1. What church are you affiliated with?
2. How long have you been a member of this church?
3. For what reasons do you attend this church in particular?

Today's World

1. What is your opinion on how today's young women dress for church? Or other special occasions?
2. What are your thoughts on dress rules for today's modern church? Should they remain or be changed? Why, or why not?
3. Describe what a complete church outfit looks like? What are the required accessories to complete the look?
4. Why are these components necessary?
5. Why have you continued to dress in this manner? If you no longer dress like this, why did you stop?
6. What compels you to dress in this manner? Is it tradition or habit? Is it important? Why?
7. What is the payoff for church dress? Or what satisfaction do you get from dressing in this manner?

Self-Concept

8. How do you feel about yourself when you enter the church dressed up?
9. How do you think others perceive you? And does it matter what others think?

10. Do you observe other women and what they wear? Is there a mild competition to see if one person can “out dress” the others?
11. How do you dress for weddings, funerals, graduations, and fashion shows?
12. Is there a time where you have felt overdressed? What made you feel that way?
13. Do you sometimes feel that this form of putting together these ensembles is not considered modern and up-to-date with current dress trends?
14. What effect, if any, does the quality, styling, and colors of your garments have on your status in the church?

CHAPTER FIVE**Church dress: Acquisition, influences, and change in fashions of older African American women**

Prepared for Clothing Cultures

Abstract:

This study explored church dress of African American women. Through an oral history approach, ten participants ranging in age from 70 to 100 years old provided narrative which revealed major influencers on their style and what they have worn throughout their life span. The study explored the women's experiences within the African American church and the importance it played in the lives of the community providing social, political, and educational support. Data gathered from the participants also disclosed how garments were acquired and the attachment of status to the methods of acquisition. Symbolic interactionist theory helped in understanding the meanings behind the women's methods of assembly of garments and accessories. Oral narratives were analyzed using open and axial coding by the researcher. Evaluation of the data revealed that expected intersectionalities such as social status, education level, and geographical location along with church denomination did not play as important a role for the participants in this study. Age seemed to be the most significant theme that linked the ideas of church dress.

Key words: African American, church dress, appearance, Negro church

The chapter related to this submission will focus on the oral narratives of the participants with regards to what they recall wearing for church dress from childhood up to their current ages, and the people or events that influenced this way of dressing. There is also a significant discussion regarding the perception of today's modern woman and how she dresses for church. The article will document church dress within the context of the specific decades and look for common themes among the participants.

Church dress is described as a mode of dress that is different from everyday clothing; meaning a more elaborate dress usually accompanied by some type of headwear, jewelry, shoes, and other accessories that are more formal than every day wear. This style is often punctuated with what is referred to as "loud" colors, unexpected features of garments and noticeable accessories of matching shoes, flamboyant hats, gloves, handbags, handkerchiefs, and jewelry (O'Neal, 1999). This way of dressing has been popular throughout the 20th century, but has noticeably diminished in use by looking at what magazines, web sites, and retailers offer to customers and by observation of other female churchgoers within Protestant congregations. This research sought to track the development of this dress phenomena and to examine it from an historical point of view.

Church dress typically represents the best clothing an individual owns, reserved for religious events and other important special occasions such as weddings, funerals, and more formal celebrations. Clothing serves many purposes; a way of identifying a personal self and a communal self (Foster, 1997). It is a silent messenger that tells others what an individual is or thinks about themselves. Clothing seems to be a sort of universal language for mankind; it serves to mark gender, age, and status. So, it does more than protect humans from the environment.

Church dress appears to have taken hold during slavery and developed into a tradition of wearing your “Sunday best” for special occasions (Foster, 1997). Dress worked in more than one dimension, i.e., not just providing protection, but by creating a way to determine what their attitudes were about their own bodies as well as the attitudes of the slave masters. Fully understanding this aesthetic can be challenging because of the assumed effects of slavery, which caused a lack of self-knowledge of the culture and background, especially as more time and generations moved away from origins in Africa (O’Neal, 1998).

There is a limited amount of scholarly evidence published on church dress. While this study did not focus on particular Christian denominations as related to church dress, it is important to note the existence of some studies which have alluded to dress from various denominational perspectives. Klassen (2004) examined the Methodist African American church with respect to women using dress as a tool for communicating both political and religious messages. Collins (1971) studied a group of Black converts to Catholicism while exploring the decline in involvement of members in the Negro church. A key point in this study is that the Negro church served the Black community’s social, political, and economic needs as well as religious needs. However, dress was not examined. Additional researchers have focused on doctrines, educational level, and social status, but have largely ignored dress (Frazier, 1964; Starke, et al., 1990; Nelson & Nelson, 1975).

The church supported the African American community and served as a social meeting place, a political format, and provision of education of many African Americans (Frazier, 1964). The church was almost the “hub” of Black society because it was the only institution where Blacks had a great degree of control (Wilmore, 1972, xiii). It might be appropriate to conclude that because the church was a respected institution and it offered respite from daily work, and the

routine of struggling, that it served as a platform for dressing up. Hence, this change of clothing, albeit, once a week, provided an escape, of sorts, for the churchgoers, wearing their best clothing and showing creativity in how the garments were assembled and accessorized (Jones & Holloman, 1990).

A study completed by Nelson & Nelson (1975) examined Black churchgoers and how attending church encouraged or discouraged involvement in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Evidence was provided to support the idea that the Black church is one of the major institutions of the Black community. A more recent publication completed by Starke, et al (1990) viewed clothing of African Americans from a cultural perspective. Along with other topics of African influences, cultural, social influences, the book examined dress and adornment, although it was a limited study because it relied on secondary sources. The study also explored how slaves obtained clothing, what the apparel looked like, and how they felt about the clothing they wore. Church dress has also been a topic of interest of popular press books. However, these books feature staged photographs of African American women in church hats with some documentation of the stories told by the wearers explaining the role hats play in their lives (Cunningham, et al., 2000).

With these gaps in the literature, the present research sought to address how this type of dress evolved within the twentieth century, how it changed with fashion trends, and reflected the zeitgeist of those times. The article also explored the influencers of the respondents and how they adopted traditions of dress that still remain a part of them. Finally, the research examined the opinions of these respondents about today's African American women's church dress.

The study used in-depth interviews on the subject of church dress as worn by African American women. In order to provide additional evidence and information, the interview transcripts were compared to pictures shown by the respondents as well as substantiated by information found in magazines, online libraries, and books. Rather than concentrating on one specific decade, because of the age span of the respondents, it was necessary to give attention to decades beginning in the 1930s through the current decade (2015). The ages of the respondents ranged from 70 to 100 which includes birth years of 1916 to 1946. There is an underlying urgency to examine church dress because of the older ages of the respondents who can tell us first-hand what they wore, how they wore it, and the experiences they attached to church dress. This study is also important because it seeks to document a tradition that is dying out, in part, because of the current age of the proposed respondents. This could be a problem since we have evidence from some observation and commentary from the participants that the general population younger than 70 years do not consistently engage in the type of dress (Jones & Holloman, 1990). Because it appears to be waning as a tradition in the African American church, it is vital that this story be told and documented.

The research questions that were addressed in this article included:

6. How did these women dress for church as children and how have they changed their dress throughout their life span?
7. Who were the major influencers of their way of dress from early childhood to adulthood?
8. What methods did they use to acquire clothing and accessories throughout their life span?
9. What are their perspectives regarding younger women's dress for church today?

The following literature review will include information based on topics important for understanding the phenomenon of church dress among older African American church-going women.

Literature Review

Influence of Slavery

While it does not necessarily explain the current meanings of African Americans church dress, the influence of slavery and slave dress may show some historical antecedents for the practice. Previous studies found that when brought to the United States, slaves were dressed to conform to the European standard of decency (Camp, 2002; White & White, 1995). Researchers' report that slaves were given clothing and also created their own clothing. Regardless of means of acquisition, there is evidence that slaves reassembled them in combinations according to a different aesthetic code from that worn by the Whites (White & White, 1995). Oftentimes, this outward appearance caused curiosity, amusement, and even contempt among Whites, while it was viewed by other slaves as a way of conveying identity. One source points out that ex-slaves took great care with what they wore in an attempt to dress "correctly," that is what was acceptable by White society (Foster, 1997). Dressing for Sunday best and other special occasions continued as a tradition for many African American church goers (Starke, et al, 1990).

Symbolic interactionist perspective

The study of dress can be perplexing, especially in the context of slavery and oppression. Since dress is one form of nonverbal communication, it serves as a backdrop for other forms of communication such as facial expressions, movement, or body language (Damhorst, et al., 2005, p.68). The reason that this is perplexing is that one must remember that slaves were not allowed

to speak freely and express themselves, thus, dress served the purpose for communication, albeit subtle, but nevertheless, apparent.

Symbolic interactionist theory purports that individuals live in a symbolic environment as well as a physical one and that behavior is stimulated by symbols as well as physical acts. Clothing and adornment are seen as symbols with meaning (Horn, 1981). Kaiser (1998) describes symbolic interactionist theory as one that deals with both appearance management and appearance perception. It can be understood as the degree of consistency between the two messages sent and received, such that sometimes the received message is different from the message that is intended. According to some researchers, individuals develop a notion of how they think people will react to what they are wearing, in advance of the interaction. If a person's predictions are accurate, then the identity that is intended coincides with what others perceive (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).

If this concept is applied to what has been found about slave dress on Sundays and special occasions, then the symbolic interactionist theory may have some bearing on what was seen by others and the effect of Sunday dress on the wearer. Individuals acquire identities through social interaction in various social and physical settings thereby communicating identity by relating the dress to a social position of the wearer and to the observers as well (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). According to an article written by Jones & Holloman (1990) wearing hats was a tradition that African American women participated in from teenage years through adulthood. They contend that the hat was an indication of reverence for God and literal interpretation of the Bible. These researchers point out that even though the church hat symbolized reverence in the early days of the Negro church, it evolved into an artistic expression.

O'Neal (1994) undertook research to investigate if an African American dress aesthetic, existed. In this context, aesthetic is related to preferences in dress and accessories and how it can be tied to cultural roots. She concluded that no attempt had been made to develop this idea prior to 1994. She explained that the argument for an African American aesthetic could be based on African culture, further stating that the aesthetic of dress was shaped by specific cultural experiences of having descended from Africa and survived in spite of slavery (O'Neal, 1994, p. 212). An African American aesthetic of dress would include the clothing as well as the artifacts that compose the entire look and appearance. Blassingame (1972) referred to a "cultural memory" of slaves that despite being removed from their cultures and forced to wear European dress, the way they assembled the clothing they were given, and how they mixed the colors and the textures was not explainable, especially to the White culture who did not understand it or accept it as proper or appropriate clothing.

Self-concept

According to Charles Cooley (1902) self-concept is developed through the process of using reflections of responses and evaluations of others within a specific environment. This was called a "looking-glass" self. In simple terms, the individual imagines how they appear to others and then they imagine others' judgment of that appearance. According to Felson (1985), self-concepts are shaped by actual and reflected appraisals of others, not in isolation. If we consider self-verification and self-enhancement as they relate to identity processes, it might further explain the reasons behind the church dress phenomenon of the study participants.

Considering a study by Ascencio (2013), self-verification seeks to bring perceptions about the self in line with the meanings or expectations for the identity held in the identity standard. In simpler terms, the woman will dress in a way that meets the standard for being

considered well-dressed by others (including those outside of one's community). Studies conducted by Stets and Burke (2005), Swann, Rentfrow, and Guinn (2003) explain that self-enhancement has a goal of exceeding the identity standard. If this is put in context with church dress, self-verification would suggest that if a Black woman dressed according to the expected norm of a White woman, that she would then be perceived to be on the same social level as that White woman. Whereas, in self-enhancement, the expectation would be that the Black woman would dress in such a manner as to exceed or elevate herself to a higher social status than the White woman.

Methods

The data for this study were collected from oral narratives with ten African American female participants whose ages ranged from 70 to 100. Permission to conduct the study was secured from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the respondents were provided a full disclosure of procedures before starting the interviews. A semi-structured interview protocol was followed in that respondents were allowed to talk freely and many of the participants answered questions not necessarily in the order of the interview schedule. The interviews were recorded and lasted between 40 minutes to an hour and were transcribed verbatim. The recordings were placed in a secure locked computer file so that privacy of the respondents was ensured. The manuscripts were read by the researcher and the major professor several times to look for common themes or frequency of topics and words. Once this was completed, open and axial coding was done by comparing and reviewing each manuscript to identify the most prominent themes. Pseudonyms were provided to research participants. The researchers found theme saturation, in that no new ideas were present at the conclusion of the tenth interview.

Periods of fashion 1930s – late 1940s

This section will discuss elements of fashion in various decades. We start with the 1930s because the oldest participant (who was born in 1916) was in her teen years during this time and had memories about what was fashionable. As American society moved into the 1930s under the Great Depression, the shape of women's clothing changed with the new decade. The waistline went back to its anatomically correct placement, the hemlines went below the knees, and clothing was shaped to the natural contours of the body with the bust line again being prominent (American Heritage Eds, 1987). One source says that there was a stronger orientation toward traditional values than before the First World War (Lehnert, 2000). There was societal expectations for women to be feminine and be primary within the home environment. Movie stars had some influence on what was considered fashionable, including Jean Harlow, Joan Crawford, and others. By the end of the 1930s, the styles became simpler and appeared with more angular lines. Dresses were shorter, tighter, and plainer. The L-85 limitation orders were passed in order to channel materials such as wool and nylon towards the War effort (Tortora & Marcketti, 2015). Because there was limited variation in clothing, there was great creative output in the realm of accessories, including hats. The restrictions did not include hats, so many women made or recycled their own hats as well as clothing (Lehnert, 2000). This period of influence with regard to the lives of African Americans was known as the "Jim Crow" era generally considered to be between the late 1930s and the 1950s. The culture of this period was a time of overt racism, economic exclusion, substandard education, and social attitudes that accepted notions that African Americans were less than full citizens (Jim Crow law, 2016).

Periods of fashion – late 1940s through 1950s

Not long after the end of World War II, the fashion world was overcome with changes in women's clothing, specifically Dior's "New Look" with emphasis on femininity and luxury. The look focused on a woman's curves with small waistlines, full hips, and gently sloping shoulders. According to Lehnert (2000, p. 43), women were craving a new reality that was in contrast to the years during the war. One of the drawbacks of this new look was the extravagant use of fabric. Women who could not afford these looks were innovative and selected less expensive fabrics with which to sew their own versions of what was being shown from Paris. One of the key changes during the 1950s was a more relaxed attitude toward strict dress codes (Lehnert, 2000). For example, less differentiation was made in terms of various social events and the form of dress that was required. This was not an overnight change, but a gradual relaxing of dress rules. Dress outfits still required gloves, hats, and matching shoes. Within the Black church, strict dress rules continued, for the most part, which demonstrated their reverence for the worship experience (Jones & Holloman, 1990).

1960s

The fashion of the sixties represented the first post-war generation to reach adulthood. The old customs and ideals of the previous generation were challenged by this new cohort, not only with regard to lifestyle and morals, but certainly with regard to dress. What emerged was "style tribes" (Tortora & Marcketti, 2015), where people who shared similar interests or ideals began to dress in a way that identified them with a specific group. With regard to African Americans, the Civil Rights movement had begun and militant groups such as Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panthers formed and were easily identified by the way they dressed. During this time, African Americans sought to identify with

their African roots by changing the hairstyles, wearing garments such as dashikis, and jewelry with African symbols that spoke to others about their identity and self-concept. The decade was also punctuated with bright colors, much shorter skirts, boots, and platform shoes. More and more people at all income levels dressed fashionably, oftentimes by sewing garments. Others were able to purchase fashionable clothing in stores that were more moderately priced. The silhouettes were being knocked off more easily by retailers and gave women the opportunity to look fashionable at any income level (Layman, 1994).

1970s

The period known as the “Second Black Awakening” between 1956 and 1975, is most remembered for the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power. The Civil Rights Movement sought to remove entrenched ideas related to social and political placement in America’s society while the Black Power movement was more focused on almost every aspect of American culture. So, very similar to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, there was a new sense of Black identity and determination to claim a rightful place in society. According to Mellowes (2010), church affiliation served as a conduit for creating cohesiveness, and heightened the sense of community. And because the church was so strongly entrenched in the African American lifestyle, these served as the foundation for efforts to transform the political and religious landscape of America which would become the Civil Rights movement. This is probably a pivotal point in relation to apparel for African Americans. The earlier years of this period were marked by the adoption of what was considered proper clothing in order to be accepted and included by White society. Rooks (1996) describes this focus as “proper behavior,” which included dress and hair as a prerequisite for middle class status within the African American communities. The sense of more freedom to choose apparel including accessories and hairstyles gave people the opportunity to

express themselves as individuals without being held to strict rules of dress by society. Because of the variety of clothing styles that were offered by retailers, there was no “one” trend or style that dominated.

Fashion of the 1980s

The clothing of the 1980s was marked by success, achievement, wealth, and prosperity which manifested into elegant suits and dresses with oversized shoulder pads. The clothing is often described as “power dressing”, because of the size of the shoulder pads. This time period of fashion had such variety that the notion of a specific fashion trend was abandoned by the fashion designers and consumers, thus women were freer to be individuals in how they dressed. The ideal woman of this decade exercised routinely, changed her diet with the intent of becoming healthy and achieving a toned, muscular, and slim body. Women preferred suits with broad shoulder pads, for business attire and dresses that emphasized the female figure in strong, vibrant colors. High heels and stockings were required to appear well-dressed. One source (Konemann, 2000, pg. 90) is quoted as stating, “the pleasure of inventing oneself is regarded as typical of the 1980s, the decade of unlimited narcissism.” Women, for the most part, were free to re-invent themselves using dress as the creative medium. Dressing up was encouraged by the fashion designers of that time and the entertainment industry (movies and television). As far as dressing up, African Americans followed mainstream fashion trends and imitated clothing styles seen on television and in movies.

Fashion of the 1990s to 2000s

The post-civil rights time period was marked by greater opportunities for a large segment of the Black community which included integration of schools (grade school and colleges), more interracial contact, the emergence of an urban underclass, and covert racism practiced more and

more because of society's rejection of overt demonstrations of racism (Brown & Brown, 2006). As the trend of wearing "Afro" hairstyles waned African American women became very creative in the types of hairstyles they wore. Once again, straight hair started to emerge but it wasn't the only mode of style and women started to display versatility and constant change in hairstyles.

As relates to apparel, this period was marked by most people wearing mainstream styles that neither stood out nor identified them with a specific group. More inclusive styles were adopted as the structure of the Black church started to change and evolve. Changes in rituals and practices allowed a less rigid atmosphere and so followed the acceptable dress norm, not only for church but for special occasions as well. During the late 1980s, a megatrend developed known as "Casual Fridays". The implications for this mode of dress had enormous impact not only on the workforce in America but also other social venues (Brannon, 2010). The dress codes for church and businesses began to relax as churches and employers adopted a more laid-back attitude and became less stringent on dress codes. Many of the participants supported this notion that it was more important to attract worshippers than to focus on what they were wearing.

One source mentions that the idea of casual dress was not considered acceptable in the 1980s but during the 1990s, this trend took off within the fashion industry (McConnell, 2001). This period was marked by relaxed dress codes, especially in the workplace, but this concept trickled over into other venues, one of them being church. Suddenly, it was acceptable to wear casual garments to church. While the overall silhouettes for garments didn't change drastically from the 1980s, items such as pantsuits became popular while the lengths of skirts started to drop, often reaching the ankles. There was a decided difference of what women wore, based on their age group. For example, younger women wore short skirts in bright colors while older, middle-aged women wore longer skirt lengths and more classic silhouettes (Konemann, 2000).

No one style defined women's fashion; skirt length was all over the place, pants were tailored or wide-legged. This trend of casual, comfortable dress took hold and women stopped having the need for hosiery as a daily requirement for work or dress. McConnell (2001) states that this casual dress trend caused some confusion in the workplace because women were not sure how casual was to be interpreted because they were also being told to dress conservatively and casual.

Results

Early Childhood- 1930s to late 1940s

When the respondents were asked to describe their earliest memory of dressing up, most of them recalled that their parents had separate categories of clothing even though they might have been poor. They indicated having church clothes and school clothes. Iris stated,

My earliest memory of dressing up for church is like maybe three years old. I *always* had a Sunday dress; *always* had Sunday shoes and Sunday underwear and my mother – my earliest recollection is I didn't have store bought clothes until I was maybe seven or eight. I didn't have any kind of store bought dresses or clothes other than maybe shorts or tops, but my Sunday dresses were made by my mother.

The events that they recalled were related to primarily dressing up for church. Some of them did attend special programs at school, concerts or symphonies and special birthday parties. Most of them indicated that church was the main reason for dressing up because there was really nowhere else to go. Keep in mind that this timeframe was from 1930s to late 1940s where for the most part, Blacks were restricted in their movement of social events. Social venues such as movies, drive-in theaters, and restaurants were segregated. So, if Blacks were not able to have comparable facilities to support their social events, there was no outlet or reason for dressing up except church. If the family income was higher, they also had "play clothes."

As far as what was worn to church, the respondents recalled wearing frilly dresses, with ruffles and bows. One person, (Iris) mentioned a pinafore. All of them remember that the dresses

had to be “starched and ironed.” Beverly recalled that her dress had to be stiff enough to stand alone when placed on the floor. The outfits almost always were accompanied with accessories of white socks with lace, patent leather shoes (both white and black). When asked what she recalls wearing, Robin replied:

It was a little pink dress. We were going to church for Easter and my mother had bathed me and had put me on this pretty little pink dress. I had wanted to put it on the night before and she said, ‘No. Easter is tomorrow.’ So, that morning she got me up and gave me a bath and combed my hair, put my dress on and told me to ‘sit and be still.’

When asked about the accessories, she said,

I had on little ruffled panties and ruffled white socks with pink lace and white patent leather shoes. And I had two pink barrettes that held my two little pigtails. The older ladies in the church were dressed, always with hats and nice dresses that were not revealing any parts of their bodies. In fact, the dresses were long, well over their knees. They had stockings on. They had on comfortable shoes. They had their gloves, their handbags and beautiful lace handkerchiefs.

Teenage years between 1950s and 1960s

The teenage years would have placed the respondents in the 1950s and 1960s. Every one of them recalled wearing a “poodle skirt.” They remembered the particular color of the skirt and the accessories that they wore with them; white blouses, bobby socks, and saddle oxford shoes. They confirmed that all skirts and dresses were worn below the knees. Some of the silhouettes mentioned were shift dresses, Gilbert dresses, Shake Lady dresses, usually with small floral prints. Stockings and spool heels were worn when dressing up.

Accessories included gloves and small hats. When discussing what they wore in their early adult years, in the twenties and thirties, all mentioned wearing suits and dresses for church, still worn below the knees. These were accessorized with stockings, gloves, small hats, purses and small heels. All of them said that it was the expectation that the arms were covered; either with short/long sleeves or suit jackets. As the respondents moved into their 30s and 40s, they recalled that their church dress did not change dramatically. They were still wearing conservative and

classic suits and dresses, although the length was somewhat shorter. Stockings and low heels were trendy. They did indicate that they did not wear hats and gloves every Sunday. This habit became more occasional based on what event they were attending. Another term mentioned often was “age appropriate.” Their dress changed according to fashion trends, however, they remained true to what they believed was appropriate for their age such as length of skirts, covered arms, and silhouette of the garment. Patricia stated,

My mother and daddy did not dress for people but they dressed for the image of the time. I don't know how to put it. It's not trying to be like making people look at you. It's just about being appropriate and you look nice.

Patricia also talked about what she wore to church in her 30s and 40s. She stated, “When I started going to [a particular church] I was wearing heels, stockings, suits, dresses with jackets, skirts and matching blouses, no – no sleeveless stuff, always a jacket or coat.” The dresses were worn below the knees. None mentioned wearing pant suits to church during this time.

Accessories were jewelry, hats, purses, and matching shoes.

Alaska stated the following about pants:

When I first went over to visiting this particular church, they had rules. Pastor said he didn't want – and I heard him with my own two ears: ‘Members of the church, don't come in this sanctuary with pants on.’ I heard it! But later on, you see they give into that and they shouldn't. He should have kept it like that!

Adulthood in 1970s

With regard to the participants in this study, the youngest one would have been around 29 years old with the eldest being 59 years old during the 1970s. For the most part, most had married, started families, and were pursuing careers. What is interesting is that all of them noted that they continued to dress up for church during this time period. None mentioned the influence of the Civil Rights movement on dress, however, it was mentioned that skirt lengths did go up

somewhat. What is notable here is that once the participants reached adulthood, their dress tended to stabilize and they were not heavily influenced by fashion trends with respect to what they wore to church. No mention was made of hairstyles during this period. However, according to the history books, many African Americans sought to identify with their African roots and they did so by wearing an “Afro” which showed their natural hair. At some point during this time period, it became acceptable for women to wear pants to church although, there is no documentation to support this change in dress from their own photographs, however, there are many sources of images in the fashion press that show the pant suit as acceptable. Those who dressed in this manner usually had complete pant suit with jacket and pants matching that they wore with heels, and sometimes, hats. Iris stated the following:

You know in the days we just talked about, I was really wearing lots of hats. My husband’s sister was making me hats. People were giving me hats, his sister was making hats. And just all of a sudden. And I can’t tell you the last time I wore a hat. The last time I remember was wearing a fur hat and coat. I wore them because I had them. I haven’t worn a hat maybe since I wore the black one. Which I wore to my husband’s funeral. I don’t know why. A skirt feels more like church to me. The suit I wore Sunday was about 15 years old and when I walked into the lobby, a woman said, we’re dressed just alike. Let’s take a picture. Classic like I said.”

With regard to wearing pants to church, Arlene responded:

Wednesday night bible study’s about the only night that I’m really casual like this because it’s not that many people that come, you know, and I wear these jeans sometimes, or some longer jeans. That’s the only time I wear pants. I don’t wear pants on Sundays. I wish I could find a good nice pantsuit, you know. With the long jacket. But I probably be uncomfortable wearing it. I see a lot of ladies look nice in their pantsuit because then they don’t have to be worried about their dresses too short and all like that. But I still just like to wear dresses or skirts to church.

Middle-aged 1980s to present

According to studies related to church attendance, (Hunt & Hunt, 2001), it has been observed that during the 1980s to now, more and more African Americans attend integrated churches; that is, congregants that are predominantly White. This might account for the more casual and conservative mode of dress of the post-modern African American woman. It is also

common to see these women wearing casual slacks and flat shoes. The participants indicated that they do dress casually for everyday events since they are all retired, however, they continue to dress up in their fancy ensembles with accessories for church and other events such as concerts, parties, holiday gatherings, etc. Most of them still wear hats with matching shoes and handbags. Gloves are no longer part of the ensemble requirement. They also continue to wear hosiery with the exception of one person who said she never liked wearing stockings and was glad when they went out of style. One interesting fact that emerged is that they continued to wear the same garments from the 1980s, 1990s, and into the 2000s, only replacing pieces that were the wrong size or had worn out. Their explanation was that these were classic suits or dresses and remained in style despite the trends. They updated these outfits by changing accessories and their hairstyles.

Major influencers

When asked about who dressed them as children and who influenced their style, all stated that their mothers were the major contributors to dressing them properly as children and had major influence on what they wore even into adulthood. Arlene chided one of her friends who is the same age, saying:

You know your mama would beat you up and down the road if she caught you with no stockings on. And then she will wear her dresses short. And I told her, I said, 'You don't need to be wearing that kind of stuff,' and she likes to wear them leggings and all like that and I say, 'Shoot, you too old for that kind of carrying on.' She says she not gonna ever dress old, you know. I told her, I say, 'It's not dressing old... It's dressing age appropriate.'

All respondents mentioned not only being dressed by their mothers as young children but also how the mothers' influenced how they put outfits together later in life. Some of the same habits were repeated such as starching and ironing garments, always having dresses with sleeves

for church, and the dress lengths. Mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and even elder women of the church made sure that the dress rules were instilled within them. Dressing well for church was a tradition and connected to giving their best to God on Sunday. During the decades between 1930s and 1970s, society also influenced how women dressed for church. The expectation was that Black women would dress as a proper lady in spite of the fact that churches, for the most part, were still segregated. One respondent, Patricia, tells how her mother had two etiquette books that she followed faithfully to ensure that she and her daughter were dressing properly for all social events. In terms of influencing others, Iris pointed out that when she was a principal at a high school, she kept a drawer of belts so that any young man whose pants were sagging because they didn't have a belt would have to come to her office and get a belt. The dress rules were strictly enforced; all males wore shirts tucked in their pants, with a belt. Young ladies wore dresses only and they had to be below the knees and not tight-fitting. Her words were that "when you dress better, you act better." Beverly mentioned a mentor during her college years who taught her how to coordinate her wardrobe and make sensible purchases for clothing.

Questions were posed about musicians, performers, or movie stars as influencers for their way of dressing. Only one mentioned a movie star that she wanted to dress like. The other respondents did say that they liked the music and the dances of their young adulthood, however, none were influenced to dress like the people that were popular. One person, Fay, did say that she liked to look at "Seventeen" magazine as a young adult to get ideas and learn about current fashion trends. Most of them did not have access to these magazines and were not aware of their existence.

Garment acquisition

With regard to using slave narratives as a source for understanding the acquisition of clothing, it was revealed that the job of making clothing for the master's family and other slaves was the responsibility of female slaves. From the spinning, weaving, dyeing, and sewing of garments, these chores were completed on a daily basis by the slave women (White & White, 1998). However, this allowed them to infuse to some degree their sense of aesthetics into the designs and ornamentation of the garments, albeit subtle in most cases, especially with respect to the slaveowner's clothing. For many decades, Black women were challenged to be creative and innovative when it came to acquiring clothing and wearing fashionable garments, in spite of financial constraints. According to Jones & Holloman (1990), women used castoff garments from White employers, feed sacks, fertilizer sacks, and anything else that they could find, to make both patterns and garments in order to stay fashionable. Having Sunday clothes was a high priority for these communities, so lots of attention was given how one assembled an ensemble for church. The ensemble included not only the dress or suit, but hats, gloves, shoes, handbag, and jewelry. Therefore, much energy was spent sewing, creating fashionable garments and accessories.

It is appropriate to add something about Black consumption studies since they seem to agree with statements made by the participants. All of the participants except two, went into areas of education and nursing; fields that afforded them the opportunity to make more income and support families, whether single or married. With regard to the early 1970s, along with the Civil Rights Movement and women's liberation, there was a rapid growth in the middle class of Blacks because of higher education, more choices of careers and better paying jobs. While some of the participants indicated that they chose nursing or education as careers, quite a few of them

indicated that Black women were somewhat restricted in career choices. With higher educations, the obvious choices were nursing and teaching; even though both fields were still segregated in the workplace. So, as they made advancements, they had the financial means to spend money on clothing and accessories and there was no longer a need to have to sew garments because they could now shop at higher-end status stores for quality clothing. With that said, the lower classes were motivated to purchase clothing with brand names that indicated status or wealth, even if they couldn't afford them. This purchasing behavior by Blacks may have confused marketers and retailers because a study conducted by Branchik and Davis (2009) noted that the Black middle class divided into several groups; namely, Conventional Middle-class, Traditional elites, and Nouveau riche. The participants in this study fit into the Conventional Middle-class since it is described as people with college educations, better paying jobs, and who came up during the Civil Rights movement. The people who were considered poor continued to place importance on expensive clothing and accessories and have been noted to buy beyond their financial means in order to appear to belong to a higher social status. This was and remains somewhat confusing because there is no pattern of consumption that can be pinpointed among this group. Research conducted by Stafford, Cox, & Higginbotham (1968) asked a basic question as to whether a Negro market really existed. They did not have enough evidence to support the notion of a Negro market because there were several components related to this market including social, geographic, and psychological characteristics that made it difficult to get a definitive answer. With regard to the statement about the poor spending money on clothes, Stafford, et al. suggested that one reason for these consumption patterns of the poor is to compensate for the inability to accomplish goals in occupation, education, etc. They refer to this as "poverty of opportunity" (Stafford, p. 97). So, they concluded that Negroes who were insecure about their status were

likely to engage in this overt consumption pattern to compensate for voids in other areas of their lives. The research participants appeared to engage in this behavior by figuring out how to acquire the status clothing that they felt was important to wear to church. While many of them sewed clothing, others remembered putting garments in the layaway until they could pay for it, borrowing clothes from friends or family members, or buying used clothing and re-making the garments.

After examining pictures from several of the participants, it is evident that they were sewing well into their young adulthood until they moved into higher income brackets through developing their careers and better-paying jobs. Further sources (photos and scrapbooks) explain how many of these women designed and created their own hats for church, as well as for other clients. When questioned about how they acquired clothing, every one of them mentioned either their mother sewing or they learned to sew because they didn't have the money to buy clothing from stores. Many had memories of specific stores they shopped in as teens and young adults such as Neiman-Marcus, Foley's, Battlestein's, and Sakowitz. By this time, most had entered the workforce or were enrolled in college and had developed their own style of dress. It was significant that they learned to sew in order to make stylish, quality garments that they otherwise could not afford. An interesting statement is that they started out with simple patterns such as Simplicity and "graduated" to more complex designs using Vogue patterns. Vogue patterns featured couture designers such as Yves Saint Laurent, Cardin, and Dior. Others indicated that they would put garments in layaway in order to pay for garments out of their price range. As they progressed in the workplace and started earning more money, most indicated that they did stop sewing and started to shop at these high-end stores.

After being asked what she was wearing as a wife and mother of young children, Beverly stated the following:

Oh, I sewed then. So, if I could – well, it was really great for me. I'd go to Sears on maybe a Monday night 'cause I think Sears stayed open at that time until nine o'clock. I'd get the kids all ready for bed and everything and they would stay at home and do their homework and I said, 'Well, I'm gonna run to Sears.' I'd go to Sears and either get me a pattern and some material or just get me some material and I would make me something and if I went out – at that time I was going out a little bit more – and I would make me something to wear that Friday night.

When asked about favorite stores to shop and budget restrictions, Beverly replied

I don't have a budget restriction because of the fact I can buy clothes at Target or Walmart, but I think it's the way you put them together, your accessories. So, I never did have a specific place. I can't remember the name of some of the stores that my mother bought my clothes at but I know Sears and Foley's were the main stores especially for dress up – really dress up stuff. All those, yeah – never bought anything out of Battlestein's, never bought anything out of Sakowitz until I got older and even now when I go to stores like that, if I walk in there – 'cause I like to go to outlets – and if I walk in there and I don't see a clearance rack or a mark-down rack, I'm gone.

Many of them voiced the same sentiments so it might be concluded that their everyday clothing was either sewn by them or purchased at budget or low-end stores while the church dress (dressier outfits) were purchased from the higher retail stores. This seemed to be the norm with no regard to what social status or financial level they were in. All of them spent money on church dress. It was the expectation of society that they made every effort to dress well for church. Because of this notion, it was difficult to determine what a person's income level was based on their church dress.

Conclusions

The expectation of this study is that it will provide more understanding of this dress phenomena and document these respondents' stories. One of the questions that might be answered is why do people continue to dress a certain way even if it is no longer fashionable or trendy. This research looked for themes that explain these dress habits and how they adapted to current fashion trends while remaining true to the original concept.

As the details of what was worn through the decades beginning with the 1930s and into current times, the apparel that the respondents recalled was historically accurate when compared to dress history text (Tortora and Marcketti, 2015). It was evident that in spite of their family's economic status, every effort was made on the part of the parents to dress the family appropriately for church. So, economic status was not always a determinant in acquiring church clothes. Some of them had to sew garments because they couldn't afford ready-made clothing. This seemed to be the norm for extending wardrobes for females during these decades. It was expected that someone in the family could sew and duplicate what was fashionable during those times. And it appears that they made every effort to be fashionable in spite of economic or social status.

Clearly, the mothers, grandmothers, and other female figures influenced these women from early childhood and some of the "rules" of dress became so ingrained in them, that they still dress by these rules today. For example, covering your bare arms in a place of worship was mentioned by many of them as a rule that they still adhere to. Other "rules" were skirt length below the knee, not wearing pants, and cleavage not shown. With regard to sewing, this was their primary source for acquiring clothes; buying fabric and patterns, and making fashionable clothing. The status associated with sewing was the quality of the fabric (high-end fabric stores) and using Vogue patterns. Some mentioned that they did not shop at high-end stores because they couldn't afford it, and one respondent stated that only White people shopped at certain stores in Houston because "colored people" would not be waited on if they tried to purchase goods.

While it might be a stretch to assert that slavery directly influenced church dress, it is evident that this particular group of African American women in the study loves to dress up.

Church gives them the opportunity to be seen and to see others. So, there is a performance of sorts with church dress. Here, clothes actually serve as a mode of communication to others; actually sending and receiving messages. What the participants wanted to communicate is that by their dress, they were recognized and treated as Christian “proper ladies” by others. And it appeared to be very important to them and in the society in which they grew up to be respected. From the length of the dress demonstrating modesty; the covering of the arms was almost a symbol of reverence to God; the rule of not wearing pants so as not to appear masculine; even to the body language of crossing their legs at the ankles and not at the knees; all of these things symbolized decency and proper behavior. While these were not obsessive behaviors, they were the expected norm of that culture, so the reasons for dressing this way became a part of who they were and the women that they are now. When the idea of symbolic interactionist is considered, communicating with dress is a dominant theme from the participants, sending messages of proper, classic, formal, and age appropriate. From their explanations of interaction with other women churchgoers, the sent and received messages were in agreement. Perhaps this reinforcement is a factor that might explain why they have continued to dress in this manner with only slight changes over the decades.

And it was clear from the narratives that they enjoyed dressing up, planning what they would wear, and what planning the accessories that would complete the ensemble.

The tendency to dress up, not only for church, but for most special occasions is clearly what these participants liked to do, and without apology or explanation. O’Neal (1998) talks about this with respect to an African American aesthetic. She says, “Dress is used to signify that which is set apart, revered, or respected, and that which is not to be made common.” (p. 171).

In the context of my research, one might consider that the participants talked about their reverence for God, for the assembly of other worshippers as well as respect for other non-church events that require dressing up. So, they all felt strongly about giving special attention to their attire for events such as weddings, funerals, parties, concerts, etc. whereas for European Americans, the attire for these events is casual (O'Neal, 1998).

The researcher was able to understand what the respondents were saying because I am close to that age group and I also grew up in an environment very similar to what was disclosed, so it was easier to understand; however, it still does not explain why these things were so important.

Implications for future studies might be related to differences in church dress among specific Protestant denominations or other religions. Geographical locations might also yield further knowledge about church dress particularly looking at southern states and northern states. Additionally, exploring current church dress trends with younger churchgoers might provide further insight as to how today's zeitgeist impacts or affects church dress.

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Interview Questions

Childhood

1. What is your earliest memory of dressing up?
2. Did you attend church as a child?
3. If so, what church?
4. What memories do you have about your dress for church?
5. What memories do you have about the older women of the church and the way that they dressed?
6. Who dressed you for church and other special occasions?
7. Were there events besides church that you remember dressing up for?
8. If not addressed in the previous questions, ask them to describe the whole look: hair, shoes, accessories in addition to dress.

Adolescence and Teen Years

9. What are your memories about how you dressed in high school? (Ascertain dates of high school attendance).

10. Did you attend church as a high school student? Tell me about what you wore to church. How was it different from the adult or older ladies?
11. Did you have a favorite church/ dress up outfit?
12. What popular events, such as movies or musicians influenced your dress?

Adulthood

13. Talk about what you did after high school – college, vocational school, homemaking?
14. Talk about the church dress during those years – what church did you attend, what did you wear to church – did you have a favorite outfit?
15. What happened next in your life – in your 30s and 40s? What decade was that? What do you remember about the ways that you dressed for church and special occasions. Where did you purchase the clothes/make the clothes? What about accessories?
16. Can you talk about your life in your 50s? What decade was that? What do you remember about the ways that you dressed and what was going on in your life?
17. Can you talk about your life in your 60s? What decade was that? What do you remember about the ways that you dressed and what was going on in your life?
18. Can you talk about your life in your 70s? What decade was that? What do you remember about the ways that you dressed and what was going on in your life?
19. Can you talk about your life in your 80s? What decade was that? What do you remember about the ways that you dressed and what was going on in your life?

Today's World

15. What is your opinion on how today's young women dress for church? Or other special occasions?

16. Where do you shop for your church clothes? What are your budgetary limitations for church dress? Is quality a factor in making a purchase? How important is color and styling?
17. What are your thoughts on dress rules for today's modern church? Should they remain or be changed? Why, or why not?
18. Describe what a complete church outfit looks like? What are the required accessories to complete the look?
19. Why are these components necessary?
20. Why have you continued to dress in this manner? If you no longer dress like this, why did you stop?
21. What compels you to dress in this manner? Is it tradition or habit? Is it important? Why?

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of observations

Without a doubt, the Black church has played a primary role in the African American culture from slavery to post-slavery to modern times. It has served as a backbone of the community from social, political, educational, and cultural perspectives. Because of its significance, the Black church has been a keeper of the culture (O'Neal, 1999). According to some studies, African Americans are more likely to be church members, attend services, and consider their religion as important compared to White Americans (Barnes, 2014; Hill, 2013; Ward, 2005). The importance of the church in African American communities has a great impact on their daily lives (Ward, 2005; Schulte & Battle, 2004). The church served as a stage for creative expression without restraint and has kept the tradition of dressing in a special way for church intact, especially for older citizens. With modern times and post-modern societal influences, that traditional hold has loosened to the point where church dress is not important or expected. However, this research found that within the Black community, this mode of dress is still important for women who are 70 years old and older.

Church dress is an important element of African American culture and dates back to slavery as research confirms that even with the restrictions of clothing during slavery, with the conversion of slaves to Christianity, putting on their best clothes for Sunday was an expectation that became the norm despite one's status as enslaved or free. O'Neal (1999) suggests that African Americans approach to dress in the context of the church is based on core values of freedom, justice, equality, and an African heritage.

As African Americans began to thrive and become active and productive citizens in America, it was documented that they were just as influenced by fashion as any other group of people in America. This research attempts to document from ten participants, what they recall about their clothing from early childhood throughout their lifespan with focus on church dress; how they accessorized their outfits; who influenced them in developing their sense of style; how they acquired garments; and what meanings are attached to dressing up for church and how this mode of dress is related to their religious beliefs. Church dress has been a topic of interest of popular press books. However, these books feature staged photographs of African American women in church hats with some documentation of the stories told by the wearers explaining the role hats play in their lives (Cunningham, et al., 2000). Additionally absent from the published literature is information regarding the social and psychological elements of this dress phenomenon, possible hidden meanings, and implications for change in postmodern culture, especially among older African American women.

Because of these gaps in the literature, the present research sought to investigate how this type of dress evolved within the mid twentieth century and how it has remained in the African American churches.

This research format is written such that it will allow publication of two journal articles. Each article has a different focus that is based on topics and themes that emerged within the data. The research questions that guided the study for each article are:

Article 1

1. What does church dress mean to the respondents? Why do they continue to dress in this manner?
2. How is their dress related to their Christian beliefs?

3. What are their opinions of what is worn today by younger women and how does it relate to Christian beliefs?

Article 2

1. How did these women dress for church as children and how have they changed their dress throughout their life span?
2. Who were the major influencers of their way of dress from early childhood to adulthood?
3. What methods did they use to acquire clothing and accessories throughout their life span?
4. What are their perspectives regarding younger women's dress for church today?

Article one explored what church dress means to the participants and how it is related to their religious beliefs. The purpose of this study was to understand the reasons why African American women today wear church dress and the significance of this dress. The importance of this study was to document a tradition that appears to be waning as the postmodern church has changed the structure of the worship services and to whom they are appealing. A more casual, relaxed attitude pervades the modern church where the clothing reflects the attitude of today's society. Church dress as it was worn in past decades seems to no longer be the expected way to dress with the younger demographic (Huffington Post, July, 2012). This is not just about the dress but its deeper meanings for these women and what it symbolizes in their lives. Research related to symbolic interactionist theory and literature on effects of slavery on church dress were used to make a connection of how church dress evolved in the Black church. Data collection was conducted by interviewing ten African American female participants who were aged 70 and older. Analysis was conducted by open coding and axial coding of oral narratives to identify emerging themes. Evaluation of the data revealed that their mode of dress is an outward manifestation of their inner beliefs that to dress well is to present their best to God. Despite new fashion trends, they continue to dress in this manner. Their stories further revealed that major

influences on their style of dress were mothers and mother-figures from early childhood into adulthood. The stories told by these women of their lives through dress explained how their clothing was symbolic of strong religious beliefs as well as a way of life for proper women and disclosed meanings about their self-concept related to dress.

Article two investigated what participants recalled from early childhood to adulthood in clothing and accessories. It further examined who influenced them in terms of what they wore and how they assembled their ensembles, how they acquired clothing and how those methods of acquisition changed over the years. Finally, the research examined the opinions of these respondents about today's modern African American women's church dress.

For each of these studies, ten participants were interviewed. Their age ranged from 70 years to 100 years old. Each identified as African American women. The oral narratives were analyzed using open and axial coding by the researcher and the major professor.

While both articles focus on church dress, although from different aspects, it is important to note that slavery did have an influence on the development of church dress, however it is not evident that this influence remained so strongly entrenched in Black society as the reason for it continuing well into the twentieth century as is stated by the study participants. What is found in the first article is that dress played a major part in the self-concept of these women and it is important to them as to how they are perceived by others in society.

The second article focuses more on the historical aspect of church dress and shows that the participants did follow the fashion trends of whatever era they were in, albeit, keeping their own personal style intact.

Limitations of the study

It is not clear that church dress phenomenon is associated only with African American Protestants. It was the expectation of the study that evidence of church dress would most likely be found in African American Christian churches. No assumption was made about geographical location or denomination. The number of respondents (10) does not allow the findings to be generalized, even for this entire age group. The restricted location of the respondents; that is, just interviewing people in one city, was a further limitation.

Implications for further study

Studying various geographical areas where there tends to be a high concentration of African American churches might yield further understanding of this way of dress as well as urban versus small town settings. Further study might also be indicated for comparing the church dress practices of African American women and White women in the same age bracket. The geographical limitations of this study might also serve to somewhat affect the findings since all of the participants were born and raised in the South. Perhaps northern states might indicate different church dress practices and attitudes tied to these beliefs.

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APPENDIX

IRB APPROVAL FORM

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-4207
515 294-4566
FAX 515 294-4267

Date: 3/4/2016

To: Beverly Gatterson
15207 Ridgwood Dr
Missouri City, TX 77489

CC: Dr. Sara Marcketti
1060 LeBaron hall

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: "Sharper Than a Tack"- Dissertation

IRB ID: 16-094

Study Review Date: 3/4/2016

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures with adults or observation of public behavior where
 - Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; or
 - Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation.
- (4) Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

The determination of exemption means that:

You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.

You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application. Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.), modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. Changes to key personnel must also be approved. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

Non-exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on the Exempt Study Modification Form. A Personnel Change Form may be submitted when the only modification involves changes in study staff. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans Form will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review. **Only the IRB or designees may make the determination of exemption**, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

Please be aware that **approval from other entities may also be needed.** For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required