Tailored: Living through Wearable Design

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ABOUT TAILORED: WEARABLE DESIGN

By

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ABSTRACT

*Tailored* is a graphic design experiment which explores clothing as communication. It tells the story of my life through my body and the “designed” skirts I wear. Clothing is a visual representation of who we are and what we do. Through *Tailored* I am pushing the boundaries of how people read what I wear. I have designed and made skirts that explicitly define (through words, fabric and image) the six main compartments of my life. This paper records and explores the visual experiences I create for those around me and myself. *Tailored* is a personal investigation of how clothing speaks about me through personally designed garments.

INDEX WORDS: Graphic Design, Clothing, Communication, Performance, Art and Design, Fashion
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements iv
List of Figures vi
I. Introduction 1
II. The Clothes We Wear & the Body We Cover 5
III. The Specific Clothes of Tailored 7
IV. The Inspiration and Motivation 14
V. Designing, Sewing and Thinking 22
VI. Wearing and Documenting the Skirts: The Effects Created 26
VII. Conclusion 44
Notes 46
Bibliography 47
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Lindsay Chenault, *The Skirts of Tailored*, 2008
Figure 2: Lindsay Chenault, *Observing Work Skirt*, 2008
Figure 3: Lindsay Chenault, *Skirt Detail*, 2008
Figure 4: Nikki S. Lee, *The Skateboarder Project [7]*, 2000
Figure 5: Nikki S. Lee, *The Hispanic Project [25]*, 1998
Figure 6: Andrea Zittel, *A-Z Uniforms*, 1991-2000
Figure 7: Varvara Stepanova, *Design for Women’s Professional Suit*, 1924
Figure 8: Joseph Kosuth, *Art as Idea as Idea*, 1967
Figure 9: Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (We Don’t Need Another Hero)*, 1987
Figure 10: Jenny Holzer, *from Truisms*, 1977-1979
Figure 11: Lindsay Chenault, *Figure, Form & Pattern*, 2008
Figure 12: Lindsay Chenault, *Skirt Detail*, 2008
Figure 13: Lindsay Chenault, *Wearing Learn Skirt Sewing Rest Skirt*, 2007
Figure 14: Lindsay Chenault, *Making My Bed in Rest Skirt*, 2008
Figure 15: Lindsay Chenault, *Leisure Skirt at Brunch*, 2008
Figure 16: Lindsay Chenault, *Shopping in Leisure Skirt*, 2007
Figure 17: Lindsay Chenault, *Tailored – gallery view*, 2008
Figure 18: Lindsay Chenault, *Library Learn Skirt*, 2008
Figure 19: Lindsay Chenault, *Barn Play Skirt*, 2008
Figure 20: Lindsay Chenault, *Tailored – gallery views*, 2008
Figure 21: Lindsay Chenault, *Mannequin View*, 2008
**Introduction:**

We live in a society dependent upon social interactions. First impressions often determine our place within the community, and those impressions of others are strongly focused on appearance. As Virginia Woolf has said, “There is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them...they mold our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking.” Woolf makes a profound and inspirational point about the clothes we wear; how they shape our interactions and us. Our clothes are powerful tools for communication and have a strong visual voice. They become a symbol of our identity, a visual representation of who we are or want to be. To put a spin on the well-known cliché, “we wear who we are.” Our clothes mold relationships between the outside world and ourselves. What we wear affects our internal consciousness as well as how we “fit in” with the world around us.

*Tailored* is a graphic design experiment which explores clothing as communication. It breaks down the story of my life through six personally designed skirts. Each skirt explicitly defines (through sewn-on words, embroidery, fabric and image) the main compartments of my life (see Figure 1). In this thesis I explored wearable design communication through making the clothes, wearing them for two months, and then recording the process of and impressions produced by these skirts.

Throughout this experiment, I observed and documented my interactions and the communications inspired through the designed garments. My interactions with people, while wearing the skirts, created a multi-dimensional performance piece, which affected the way I was viewed through clothing. My life revolved around the personal conversations, interactions and
situations created by the skirts (see Figure 2). Tailored’s goal was to create a personal and wearable design experience.

*Tailored* reaches beyond the style and trends of traditional fashion, marketing and advertising. It is a one-of-a-kind wardrobe made by me for me – my own signature look. The entire process brought graphic design into a very personal, yet physical, realm of my life. The skirts of *Tailored* combine personal and creative expression with classic design elements to become livable and organic design. *Tailored* allows me to use my wardrobe to explore who I am in the community.
Lindsay Chenault, *The Skirts of Tailored*, 2008, Digital Photographs
Lindsay Chenault, *Observing Work Skirt*, 2008, Digital Photograph
The Clothes We Wear & the Body We Cover

Sandra Weber, a professor of Education who studies image and identity, writes that as humans, “we see dress mediating identity and the body as only clothes can.” Our clothing controls the middle ground between our inside and outside selves. It is a second skin.

Each Tailored skirt I put on became an extension of how I wanted others to see me at particular times and in certain locations. These hand-made skirts added a degree of control over the specific message I wanted my clothes to communicate. The act of wearing these garments became part of my daily routine as a regulated performance and created personal interaction which affected others’ perceptions of me.

Clothing classifies our place within the community and helps define certain roles. Celant, a curator for the 1994 Florence Biennial, once described this concept in Art/Fashion:

More than a frontier between first and second skins, clothing can be seen as an interval or area of contact between body and surrounding space, place or tertiary system of difference and similarity to the social and cultural, architectural and visual, natural and visible environments.

Inspired by Celant, I adapted through clothing changes. I was like a chameleon, changing my skirts depending on my routine and schedule. For example, while teaching I wore Learn Skirt, but as soon as I left campus to drive to work, I quickly changed into Work Skirt. These changes were not critical to my survival, as is the chameleon’s adaptation, but Tailored did confirm how much I depend on my clothed appearance to function within different sectors of society. It pushed my understanding of why I wear certain outfits and how different sectors of my routine stimulate these choices.
My livelihood as a designer often depends on public interactions. The way I dress affects the overall aura of each desired dialogue. In a way I “tailor” how people look at and react to me through appearance. This dress code makes bold and simple statements and can be summarized by the term “dress for success”. Tailored enables my occupation as a designer to become an integral part within all areas of my life.
The Specific Clothes of *Tailored*

*Tailored* moves beyond the basic fashion considerations of fit, style and fabric. The attention is on the unique and overt graphic qualities of the words and imagery that adorn the skirts (see Figure 3). These design elements lend focus to unique conversations based around the skirts.

I feel both liberated and feminine wearing the skirts. Technically they provided a nice background to design on and were comfortable to wear in both casual and formal settings. Throughout *Tailored*, people’s focus remained on the skirts, as they are the only modification of my overall outfits. Everything else I wore, such as shirts and shoes, are highly uniform so as to capitalize on the “quick-change” method and communication efforts of the skirts. Each transformation occurred as I changed tasks, environments, or purposes.

In *Not Just Any Dress*, Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell, co-founders of Image and Identity Research Collective, discuss the importance of particular garments in the lives, memories and stories of modern women. They write, “an item of clothing becomes a springboard, an axis of rotation, or a structural grounding for a detailed account of life events.”5 Indeed, since the pre-defined behaviors of *Tailored* limit what I wear, I better understand how I spend time. *Tailored* is a series of small anecdotes that combine to tell the story of my daily life. By sharing my personal experience of living in and through *Tailored*, others can begin to look at dress as an individual method of creative communication.

Each skirt is more than purely aesthetic design; each is an interactive work of self-portraiture. Roland Barthes, an influential semiotician and social theorist, writes, “human clothing [is] the ambiguous expression, both mask and advertisement, of the unconscious self.” 6 Ultimately the series of skirts in *Tailored* advertise how I spend time and hint at my internal
character. The design sparks interactions that lead to a better understanding of my unconscious self as an artist.

*Tailored* compartmentalizes not only my wardrobe but also my daily schedule. Nikki S. Lee, a contemporary photographer and amateur sociologist, experiments with blending into environments in a similar manner (See Figure 4 and Figure 5). She blends herself into different sub-cultures, such as yuppies, punks, and Hispanics, by adapting to their environment through wardrobe, speech, and activities. Lee has remarked, “essentially life itself is a performance. When we change our clothes to alter our appearance, the real act is the transformation of our way of expression—the outward expression of our psyche.”

Similar to Lee’s work, *Tailored* allowed me to dress in order for people see me in a certain manner. Instead of fitting into different sub-cultures, I designed clothes that fit my existing life. It was a personal endeavor that challenged the norm of simply blending in. While the skirts helped me conform with society to a certain extent, the words and images grabbed the attention of all viewers and made them aware of the artistic intent and personal nature. For those who know me and see me frequently, dressing in this manner was an obvious change. Again, this attempted to provoke many questions in order to understand my intentions. Throughout the project I found that most people wanted to know two things. Why was I wearing skirts with words and definitions on them, and why I made them by hand and how? In response, I explained the desire to simplify my wardrobe into a well-designed and communicative personal uniform. By doing this I hoped to design livable art that would minimize anxiety over dressing, merge my creative vision into my everyday life, and question the social views and attitudes around clothing. The skirts proved to be a form of unspoken art and design as well as a conversation starter about design.
Through these wardrobe-driven conversations I learned a lot about how others perceive me and hope that people began to understand the motives and goals of Tailored. As I wore and changed skirts, I brought attention to my fragmented and complex daily schedule. This awareness helped me sort out the chaotic routines in which I live.

Due to the reduction of my wardrobe choices, I felt liberated from the expectations of both media and society. Tailored eliminated the need and/or desire to try out several outfits before heading out into the community. The possibilities of wardrobe disasters and malfunctions were erased. Decisions were somewhat nonexistent. By eliminating choice, I actually merged my private life with my public one. What you saw at home was what you saw in public, as my second skin remained basically the same throughout. The consistency of Tailored and the order it provided to my life helped simplify the outward message of my dress.

The series of skirts used actual sewn-on words and embroidered definitions to establish the purpose of my behavior when wearing them. Just as in many pieces of graphic design the skirts have a typographic focal point. These words became a central focal point and stated environment, task and intention. The visual elements became secondary to the word but were vital in building the overall concept of the piece. In the end the skirts functioned as untraditional creative communication since they expressed a personal narrative instead of a consumer item or value. However, Tailored still embodied the overall impact of traditional design. It attracted attention by channeling the viewer to think about the new concept of a clearly defined and communicative wardrobe. The design’s strategic purpose seemed to remain in the viewers’ mind and enabled them to thoroughly analyze my purpose for wearing them: what does a wardrobe like this mean in the scheme of life? Is there a way to dress in
order to ignore social structures? By becoming an integral part of my life, Tailored answered these questions for me. In fact, I simplified my wardrobe and communicated from it through careful design strategies.
Lindsay Chenault, *Skirt Detail*, 2008, Digital Photographs
Nikki S. Lee, *The Skateboarder Project* [7], 2000, fujiflex print, 30” x 40”
from – www.mocp.org/collections/permanent/lee_nikki_s.php
Nikki S. Lee, *The Hispanic Project* [25], 1998, fujiflex print, 30" x 40"
from – [www.tonkonow.com/lee.html](http://www.tonkonow.com/lee.html)
The Inspiration and Motivation

The wearable work of Andrea Zittel is a driving inspiration for Tailored. As an artist, Zittel believes in creating functional and livable art. For over a decade she has created personal uniforms by hand, which she then wears continuously for three to six months (See Figure 6). Her uniforms began as a product of her lifestyle as a gallery assistant and her personal budget restraints for professional attire. Similar to Tailored, A-Z Uniforms streamlined wardrobe choices. I decided that, if Zittel could wear one A to Z Six-Month Uniform for a determined period surely I could come up with a set wardrobe to interchange repeatedly.

Of course, I ignored societal pressures to wear a new outfit everyday and rejected any phobia about how people may pass judgment on my repetitive wearing of clothes. After extended consideration, I decided on six categories general enough to encompass a substantial portion of my day yet specific to the tasks for which they will be worn.

Anne Hollander, author of Sex and Suits, writes, “Most fashion in dress is adopted with the conscious wish not to look fashionable, but to look right.” Tailored eliminates personal anxieties about choosing “the right” and “fashionable” thing to wear.

The choice of skirt was dependent on the environment where I wore it and the actions I performed while in it. I defined a personal and unique uniform that embodied the “right” look in order to mix in with society. This ensemble became my own signature look much like Warhol’s wig, Twiggy’s eyelashes and Elton John’s glasses, and allowed personal statements to be made public in a memorable, communicative manner.

During the Constructivist art movement in early communist Russia artists such as Varvara Stepanova, who explored textile and clothing design (see Figure 7) created costumes
with similar ideas in mind. According to Larentiev in Stepanova constructivist clothing was designed “to demonstrate and emphasize the inflexions and movements of the individual parts of the human body.”

Proxodezdha, the formal name for such Constructivist outfits, used specific occupations to drive functional design in order to maximize productivity and bodily movement through choices of fabric and style. Movement, productivity and communication are extremely important within Tailored and lead to the controlled productivity I desire. The functionality of the skirts is in my ability to move freely and perform the diverse number of tasks I face daily.

Larentiev quotes Stepanova:

Individual details are introduced through the material and the detailing of the cut, depending on whether the clothing is for an engineer in a printing shop, on a steamship or in a metallurgical factory.

Stepanova’s uniforms were slightly different for each profession within the community. Today’s post-modern world makes “universal” clothing seem outlandish and ridiculous, but I do not expect them to be a “universal” manner of dressing for anyone but myself.

Tailored is a personal portrait of how I simplified and controlled my life through clothing. Much like the Russian Avant Garde who began creating new and challenging art during the socialist era, I created a new way to think about clothing in a capitalist society comfortable with fashion media as it is. Both the Russian Avant Garde and myself challenged the current ideals and perceptions of society through livable design. These skirts stood out from the norm and caused those around me to think about my clothing choices and how they relate to their own. Just like the Constructivist Proxodezdha tried to adapt to the socialist lifestyle, my skirts become an adaptation into the environment instead of purely about modern fashion.
By using words and letters to define each skirt’s meaning, I compelled people to literally “read” the garments. Each design used words along with dictionary definitions and abstracted, supporting imagery.

For a long time I have been interested in how modern artists such as Joseph Kosuth, Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer (see Figure 8, Figure 9, and Figure 10) use simple statements and dictionary definitions to create thought-provoking art. *Tailored* explores straightforward communication. The simple and explicit nature of the wording is intended to trigger deeper questions from the audience about my overall purpose. People literally read the clear message of each skirt and wonder why I am labeling my life in such an explicit manner. While wearing the skirts these questions from others triggered chance interactions - both stares and conversations - I had hoped for.
from – www.andrearosengallery.com/artists/andrea-zittel, ©Andrea Zittel
Varvara Fedorovna Stepanova, *Design for Women’s Professional Suit*, 1924, recreated and worn by E. Khudiakova, 1986 from ARTSTOR ©Estate of Varvara Stepanova / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
painting, n. 1. the act or occupation of covering surfaces with paint.  
2. the act, art, or occupation of picturing scenes, objects, persons, etc. in paint.  
3. a picture in paint, as an oil, water color, etc.  
4. colors laid on. [Obs.]  
5. delineation that raises a vivid image in the mind; as, word-painting. [Obs.]
Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (We don’t need another hero)*, 90” by 117” photographic silkscreen/vinyl, 1987
from Jenny Holzer’s *Truisms*, 1977-79, T-shirt worn by Lady Pink, NY, 1983

from – microrevolt.org/reblog/archives/2007/09/this-is-my-fav0.html
Designing, Sewing and Thinking

The evolution of *Tailored* relied on my advertising background. I was able to recognize exactly how my skirts communicate. Since my lifestyle brings me into contact with a wide range of environments and demographics, each skirt catered to the relevant viewing group. The diverse people I mingle with during my daily schedule drove the looks and feel of each skirt. My understanding and perspective of my community informed the messages and images. My colleagues at work are vastly different from my peers at school. Each group has certain expectations, styles and tastes in clothing. By understanding these different groups within my life and their expectations about wardrobe, I created *Tailored* to communicate appropriately.

While I used written words to draw viewers in initially, the way the skirts are sewn became the focus upon closer investigation. Each skirt was sewn by hand, each letter was hand-cut and embroidered, and I stitched each object. This intensely hand-made aesthetic became the heart of the piece and empowered its message. These skirts were made by me to fit me. In *Art/Fashion*, Celant writes about the making of clothes,

> The cut is the soul of clothing. It severs the endless thread of a garment as the simple container and portrait of the human figure and transforms it into a creative act, a language that builds new objects.

I directed the pattern as well as each cut and stitch. I not only communicated my place and activity through the day, I gave a glimpse into my life as a designer.

During the process of making the skirts I investigated the idea of dress and how it relates to my daily routine. It took hours, sometimes days, to complete each skirt and the tedious and time consuming hand-stitching enabled quiet time to think about how the skirts would look, feel and work within my lifestyle. I discovered how fragmented my life really was. I bounced between
work, school and home (multi-tasking is the perfect description) sometimes multiple times a day without hesitation. While sewing I dug deeply into the minutes of my day and consciously recognized the activities that fill my time. Through these understandings I was able to create designs that accurately illustrated my life.

The skirts aesthetically work together, through color and layout, to form a wearable series. The individual fabrics for each garment relate to the task defined by each skirt. Some fabrics overlap across multiple skirts for a visual connector. The palette is modern. The color scheme is serene and subdued, and creates a sense of sublime acceptance of whatever life throws at me.

Texture, shape and typography play an important role in every skirt. These formal design elements differ throughout yet they are all connected through the overall pattern and placement scheme. The skirt’s pattern, a modified A-line, is designed to work with my height and figure (see Figure 11). It remains simple so the added embroidery of text and illustration remain the focal point. However, I added length to flatter my figure and bulk at the bottom of the pattern in order to enhance movement as I wore them. As for placement, the image wraps around both the front and back, creating a full 3-dimensional experience. This placement creates interaction between the viewer and myself, as they have to acknowledge my whole figure. The type also pushes interaction by requiring the viewer to closely read the secondary text. For example, the defining word, play, is large, bold and can be read from a distance. However, in order to read the supporting text/definition the viewer must approach the skirt and me, thereby encroaching on both my personal space and their own comfort level of contact (see Figure 12). Furthermore, the aesthetics of my skirts and the subsequent interaction encourage my acquaintances to begin to question how they themselves dress.
Lindsay Chenault, *Skirt Detail*, 2008, Digital Photograph
Wearing and Documenting the Skirts: The Effects Created

One day in late December 2007, I decided it was time to start wearing my finished skirts. This day stands out as a defining artistic memory. I committed myself fully to fulfilling the goals of Tailored and in doing so temporarily abandoned my love of trend-setting fashion, my fear of standing out in a crowd, and my desire to comfortably predict what would happen during this process.

In order to prepare for the next couple of months, I readied my body to be the canvas of the project. My accessories, such as shirt, shoes, tights, and jewelry, were controlled by wearing neutral colors (mostly gray). This maintained focus on the skirts. I wondered how people would react to clothing so obviously different from what was considered normal? Would people really come up to me inquisitively? How would I respond?

I was surprised at how self-conscious I was about the act of wearing my skirts. For months I prepared the project and knew what it required, but I had never thought about how it would feel to actually do it. At this moment I realized how relaxed I am in my everyday clothes. I had to find a similar level of comfort through these skirts in order to properly complete the process. For the most part, I wear comfortable and fashionable items in colors that define my mood. Typically, I avoid garments with bold wording, iconography, imagery and branding, which are exactly how I designed these skirts. Tailored pushed my comfort level to new heights by forcing me to talk about my activities, my body and myself because of the skirts I wore.

Fortunately, I was visiting my family in Houston on the inaugural day of wearing a skirt. Being in my childhood home, surrounded by people who truly care about me, provided the comfort needed to ease some of my nervous energy. As I suspected, as soon as I put on the skirt
it became just another article of clothing but one I really cared about. The nervousness and anxiety was replaced by exhilaration and motivation. I wanted to capture and explore the true essence in each of these skirts by wearing them in public. Would all the hard work be brought to fruition?

This first instance of wearing Learn Skirt put Tailored directly into the daily routine of my life and began the performance portion of the project. I lived in and through these designs hoping that through wearing them influential design conversations would occur and evolve the ideas of clothing as communication and wearable design.

On the first day I wore Learn Skirt as I finished the final two skirts, Rest Skirt and Leisure Skirt, and thought about how my thesis was coming together. I was both wearing and making the skirts (see Figure 13). I was more conscious of everything I did because of the specific parameters defined by the skirt I was wearing. The skirt communicated an explicit message to me and affected how I thought and acted, but I still wondered how it would impact others.

The skirts proved to make vivid impressions on everyone who saw me wearing them. Since the first week of wearing fell over the holidays my family and our close friends were in and out of my parent’s house, which meant Tailored received plenty of attention from a wide range of age groups. I was pleasantly surprised that virtually everyone asked about the skirts even if they had no prior knowledge of the project. People questioned why I was trying to communicate through these skirts, how I felt with such a limited wardrobe, and how I wanted people to notice the skirts.

As I continued wearing the skirts, I became aware of the ever-changing parameters and boundaries of space, communication, and interaction surrounding me. My thesis skirts adapted
into an accepted part of my daily life. As my attitude and emotions changed, different interactions came about. The input, thoughts and feelings of others were vital to the success of *Tailored*. My life and my project worked together simultaneously. As my thesis continued, it seemed the skirts were actually becoming my “second skin” (see Figure 14). As time went on, my peers and colleagues began to understand the depth and possibilities of *Tailored*. The more I wore the skirts, the more I realized how they were altering my perceptions on clothing, time, body image and my belief in design.

*Tailored* changed my views on what is considered stylish and inspirational dress. Until this project I was prey to media driven fashion. I believed that the newest trends and high fashion design were the best way to make effective, visual statements. By wearing the hand-made skirts of *Tailored* I made powerful statements through their simple and conceptual designs. My presence became a point of conversation. Since it was the platform upon which *Tailored* was seen, people believed they could discuss my figure as they discussed the wearable design. I have never been comfortable talking about my outer appearance and was shocked that *Tailored* created conversations around this topic. It took time but I realized that I put my life and body into the public eye with this project. This meant that I had to listen to and accept anything that came from it. In the end *Tailored* provided me with a most accurate perception of personal body image, how others perceive how I fit in to the greater community.

Throughout the duration of the project, individuals from multiple age, cultural and social groups became part of *Tailored*. Each group provided a different outlook on the project and helped me visualize *Tailored*. Everyone who interacted with the skirts was a contributor to the final outcomes.
One example is my seventeen-year-old brother and his friends, who all saw the skirts as an edgy commentary on the trends in the places they shop: places like Abercrombie and Fitch and American Eagle. This high school age group was purely interested in the visual and material quality of the skirts. They saw humor in the explicit words and their definitions. I received comments such as, “Ha – I get it, you are wearing a skirt that says “play” and we are playing the Wii.” It was somewhat refreshing to hear this comic relief, and I actually heard this reaction a couple of other times throughout the process. The straightforward nature of the words and definitions are unexpected and overtly obvious and therefore seem to have a humorous undertone. This realization helped me have more fun with wearing the skirts and reminded me to be light-hearted with my reactions.

Many older women (especially those who sew) saw Tailored closely related to quilting and home-sewn clothing. They were impressed with the detailing and wanted to touch and feel the skirts.

Many traditional businessmen saw them as a marketable idea. They asked about mass-production of the skirts, the business plan behind them and the possible commodity factor available within them.

Family, friends and colleagues, similar to me in age and interests, were the most critical. The twenty-something age group questioned the overall purpose of the project by asking why I needed to change the way I dressed and how was it going to change the way others saw me through dress? For the most part this age group was right on target with the things I questioned and wanted to explore. This is, more than likely, a product of my generation’s approach to life. We think we are surrounded by prosperity and many of us have a “buy now” mentality. Why would we want or need to wear hand-made clothes when we can buy mass-produced items?
Also, this group similarly questioned the overt wording. They thought it was overly obvious, slightly humorous, and very direct. They understood how it streamlined my outfits but questioned how this benefited my lifestyle in a positive manner?

Some of the most interesting connections occurred at random moments with unexpected contributors, whom I either did not know well or had never met. These chance interactions often caught me by surprise and resulted in reactionary responses. Since there was not an existing relationship or previous knowledge of Tailored the dialogue between these strangers and myself were uninhibited and basic. For example, early into the daily wearing of the skirts a Georgia State campus security guard, in his mid-twenties, randomly stopped me to ask what my skirt meant. The question came at a time when I was not thinking specifically about my clothing and it initially caught me off guard. As we began to talk I explained how I was trying to limit my wardrobe, and these skirts defined my actions and intentions. He began to open up about many of his anxieties surrounding clothes; how he wished clothes communicated in a more direct way. His responses were so honest. They impacted Tailored tremendously because he was the first stranger to admit his stress around appearance, and to admit that a controlled communicative wardrobe would be a benefit to his lifestyle.

There were many interactions similar to this one. The skirts, through their wording, gave people a reason to discuss clothing (beyond the superficial ideas of shopping, style and trends) openly. Obviously different from a normal outfit, people were not afraid to approach the skirts and ask personal questions about the meaning of clothes, body image, and how this wardrobe altered my daily life (see Figure 15). Several other responses occurred at a distance through obvious stares and whispered comments between friends. Although, not a direct form of
communication these observations solidly demonstrated Tailored’s ability to impact
the community.

Each individual or group who responded to my wearing of Tailored helped expand my thesis
vision and define my methods. As the project culminated the conversations continued. Each one
clarified and solidified my early suspicions that people want to discuss the importance of clothes
and how the affect our lives.

The reactions of the community were stimulating. Wearing the skirts became second nature.
On many days I felt liberated by them – no longer did I have to think about wardrobe choices.
On other days I felt confined and restricted by the monotony of them. Tailored elevated my
clothing to a level beyond daily fashion. The skirts were approachable. They communicated
directly from my female body in a very open, non-sexual manner. Both men and women came up
to me to get closer to and observe detail. I often felt like an object but it was never in the
negative, judgmental or sexual way one might have expected. It was almost as if people forgot
about the etiquette of personal space and not approaching the female body. The skirts sparked
gazes and reactions from people all around me. Most of the time I was comfortable in the skirts.
But there were days or certain environments when I continued to feel self-conscious about my
explicit clothing.

I was not expecting so many people to ask about the marketing, sales and purchase of the
skirts. I had never thought of them in that manner. To me each skirt is a piece of art closely
related to myself and only to be worn on my body. However, most people who approached me
about the skirts asked about the purchase and sale of them. These reactions tell me just how
dependent our society is on the commerce of fashion. The general (non-artistic) public is less
concerned with the origins and authorship of hand-made, artistic items as long as they can buy
and/or market the work for themselves. People could not understand why I would not make these skirts for anyone else and why they remained one-of-a-kind art. The wearable performance frustrated many until finally, after long conversations, they understood this clothing related to me as the designer and wearer. A marketable idea is certainly somewhere behind the skirts and I believe this improves their power to communicate and be approached. In the future, I may use this design concept for something mass-produced, marketable and profitable. For my thesis, however, Tailored will remain focused on the designs as art.

Throughout the entire process of wearing Tailored documentation was a key part of the process. During the two months that I wore the skirts I wrote personal accounts of my interactions and the internal emotions they created. A narrative began to emerge from these notes and the emotive stream of conscious responses drove the final visualization of the gallery product. These quotes were an honest account of my experience with Tailored. If I wanted people to relate to this idea, in order to rethink clothing, I needed to be openly personal and allow observers into my thoughts and space. Photography and my writings combined to build the exhibit into an experience of wearing the skirts and to exhibit the time frame of the project. Everywhere I went in the skirts I carried my point and shoot digital camera to photograph unique moments, environments and interactions. This series worked around a snapshot aesthetic and documented random and chance moments (see Figure 16). Many of the shots I took myself with the self-timer, but I also asked people around me to help. By allowing others behind the camera, I eliminated virtual control over the visual and expanded the artistic authorship into the community. Again, this allowed for interactions with others to become part of an entire performance experience. Once the camera was involved those around me became active participants and contributors to Tailored. This documentation solidified the skirts as art. It
is amazing how people need artifacts in order to understand the conceptual side of livable art and design.

The snapshots were developed into a five-minute film. The moving image explored time as an important theme in my self-portrait. The wide range of environments, in which the different skirts were worn, is also showcased through the large-scale projection. In the gallery these images filled the back wall (see Figure 17) and engulfed the space. This invited viewers in. The slide show film is silent yet still allows viewers time to again become part of the experience.

Combined with the snapshot projection is a series of traditional self-portraits. The digital images highlight the personal relationship between the skirts and myself, both the designer and wearer (see Figure 18). While the interactions created with others are important to Tailored the foundation of the whole project was my ability to live in and define my life through them. These self-portraits expose this concept in a sublime and solitary manner. The photographs are quiet, simple and thought provoking. They capture the different environments of my life and how the skirts became a part of each. The 16 x 20 inch photographs contain a quote from the notations mentioned earlier (see Figure 19). These personal comments help describe the environment and my emotional connection to it. The words and images both combine to tell my story through Tailored.

As Tailored moved into the gallery space, I tried to maintain the essence of the experience, performance and narrative. It was a challenge to recreate a two-month dynamic project into a static space (see Figure 20). The six skirts were placed on mannequin forms, which gave the constant feeling of human presence within the space (see Figure 21). In order to observe the photography and projection you had to interact with the mannequins and their space. This recreated my personal interactions while actually wearing the skirts. When the gallery was
crowded it was difficult to differentiate the mannequins from the observers. The mannequins activated the space and, when combined with the large projection, pulled viewers into the gallery.

Placing my work in the gallery offered me a completely different experience from the preparation and performance side of *Tailored*. Once the show opened I finally looked at the project objectively and was able to interact with visitors solely as the artist since I was no longer wearing the six original skirts. The response I received was overwhelming. The people in attendance, even those who witnessed some of the actual wearings, seemed more receptive once the work was in the gallery. Upon seeing everything in one space the full story came together. It became evident to me that I really lived in these designs. They were my “second (designed) skin.”
Lindsay Chenault, *Wearing Learn Skirt Sewing Rest Skirt*, 2007, Digital Photograph
Lindsay Chenault, *Making My Bed in Rest Skirt*, 2008, Digital Photograph
In order to stay true to the skirt’s intended purpose, I eliminate multi-tasking. This creates a high level of productivity while researching.

Georgia State University Library, Atlanta, Georgia

Lindsay Chenault, Library Learn Skirt, 2008, Digital Ink Jet Print, 16" x 20"
The horses did not notice or care. Everyone else did. Skirts are not often worn to the barn especially to groom.

Little Creek Farm, Decatur, Georgia

Lindsay Chenault, *Barn Play Skirt*, 2008, Digital Ink Jet Print, 20" x 16"
Lindsay Chenault, Tailored - gallery views, 2008, Digital Photographs
Lindsay Chenault, *Mannequin View*, 2008, Digital Photograph
Conclusion

Humanity has always and will always communicate through clothing. We do this, for the most part, subconsciously, without ever thinking about what our clothes really say. Most of us, myself included, desire our experiences, emotions and in this case clothing to embody a clearly understandable meaning. This, however, hardly ever happens. Most everything we encounter can have multiple interpretations that depend on different situations. Tailored attempts to eliminate these mixed messages through the use of explicit labels. Tailored correlates clothes to the tasks and actions at hand. In doing this, Tailored proves that a simple wardrobe can simplify one’s life.

Tailored also establishes that by wearing overtly defined, action specific and graphically designed skirts, I can build interactive conversations with various people about why we dress the way we do and how our clothes speak to those who view us. I also prove that fashion and dress dramatically affect the public and myself. Looking back on the project allows me to confidently say that by wearing the skirts daily I gained an acute awareness of my surroundings and tasks. This helped streamline my lifestyle. I also believe that the viewers of the project were equally affected.

Through adding various graphic elements, notably typography, on my clothing, people opened-up about their anxieties, opinions and emotions that revolved around their own wardrobe. This process continued to alter how I felt and thought about dress, and how clothing communication affects humanity. Tailored proved that clothing is a strong form of communication between people that is totally outside verbal language. Clothes can build judgments, opinions and desires.
The reactions I received were both positive and negative. My skirts made some people uncomfortable because they were different. They made others question the importance of uniformity and individuality. Others acted like they didn’t even notice. We read clothes just as we read any information or advertisement, and like other forms of communication we form opinions instantly.

*Tailored* is a personal body of work. I was very devoted to the concept but was anxious about presenting such a personal portrayal of my life as a body of design work. The criticism from peers and colleagues made me even more proud of the work. Many commented on *Tailored* as being a fresh and innovative release from ordinary graphic design, which was precisely my intention. People also commented on how overtly impacted they were by the direct communication through these clothes. They were made to question why we wear the clothes we do and what they communicate. Through their obvious wording the skirts commented on my streamlined lifestyle to others. I believe that *Tailored* successfully took an everyday necessity, clothing, and pushed it into a creative and communicative realm.

In conclusion, *Tailored* taught me that I could alter my productivity and lifestyle through wearing a compartmentalized wardrobe. My personal investigation made others aware of the power within clothing communication and affected how they view and think about clothing choices. At the end of this process I still agree with Virginia Woolf. Our clothes “mold” who we are, they help shape our identity, they create personal interactions, and they can directly affect the way we live our lives.
NOTES

1. Virginia Woolf often wrote about clothing and fashion in her work. Clothes help give depth to her characters. My thesis attempts to visibly define my character traits, and this quote sparked this inspiration.


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