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Behind the Labels: Libby Payne, Fashion Designer for “Mrs. Main Street America”

The history of the American ready-to-wear (RTW) industry is filled with unknown fashion designers who worked “behind the scenes” for manufacturers. This was especially true in the mid-20th century between the advent of manufactured women’s clothing and the rise of the celebrity fashion designer. In downtown department stores and boutiques all over the country, consumers purchased moderately-price styles created by names that never appeared on a label. One of these was Elizabeth “Libby” Miller Payne (1917-1987), a prolific designer whose career spanned fifty years in the New York ready-to-wear industry. Libby Payne designed hundreds of garments for “Mrs. Main Street America” under well-recognized moderate price-point labels such as Bobbie Brooks, Jonathan Logan, Beau Baker, David Warren, and John Henry. Her designs “sold like hotcakes.” One of Libby’s most successful, Bobbie Brooks Style #862, sold 100,000 in its first two months on the market.

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the life and work of Libby Payne, situating her in the context of the mid-20th century American fashion industry, and utilizing her history as a vehicle for understanding the evolution of moderate price-point labels, designers, suppliers, manufacturers, retailers, and consumers during this critical time. Although the name, Libby Payne was previously unknown to few other than those she worked with, her creations filled the retail selling floors and closets of “Mrs. Main Street America” from the 1930’s through the 1980’s. Throughout her long career, Libby experienced the evolution of the fashion industry first-hand, from her first position in a manufacturer’s workroom to retirement as a sometime freelance designer with a showroom and offsite production. Her story can provide insights to the business behind accessible ready-to-wear clothing, the evolution of the fashion designer, and
secrets to success in this role. Libby Payne worked in fashion for more than half of her life, and her experiences can be viewed as a lens that reflects the American industry’s growth and change. Her legacy can inform us of the way the ready-to-wear industry has evolved into what it is today.
Introduction

Purpose

Elizabeth Miller Payne, also known as Libby Payne was an active ready-to-wear (RTW) designer in the mid-20th century New York City fashion industry. For over fifty years, Libby designed for well-known moderately-priced labels such as Bobbie Brooks and Jonathan Logan, yet, the record is silent about her experience, impact, or influence. What were Libby Payne’s perceptions of creating designs sold under a variety of manufacturers labels through such a critical time in United States manufacturing and retail history? How can her lived experience inform us about the evolution of the American fashion industry in the mid-20th century? What can be learned about the moderate ready-to-wear fashion designer from Libby Payne and her career?

Like other unknown ready-to-wear designers, Libby Payne could have been lost to history. But, she made sure that this was not the case. After her retirement, Libby carefully documented her life and career, including remembrances, images, and photographs. She considered her story worth telling, worth noting, and worth archiving. The purpose of this study was to explore the career of fashion designer, Libby Payne as an example of a moderate price-point ready-to-wear designer in mid-20th century America. Her experiences document the accomplishments of one individual and can inform our understanding of the evolution of this industry, the impact that creative talent had on a variety of national fashion brands, and the talents and qualities required for success.

The majority of history written about United States fashion designers has focused on those who worked in the couture and/or produced clothing with labels that bore their name. To date there has been little investigation of moderate price-point designers and labels, nor the
suppliers and manufacturers in this segment. Libby Payne’s story presents an opportunity to fill
the gap on a valuable part of American fashion industry history.

The primary objective of this study was to collect and analyze historical information on
the professional life of Libby Payne within the fashion industry, and to determine how her
creative talent impacted the brands for which she worked. This study examined her “life story”
which included her foundational development, how she became a ready-to-wear fashion
designer, and most importantly, the direct experiences of her 50-year career.

Because the ready-to-wear industry and its anonymous influencers are an often-neglected
area of fashion industry research, this paper will provide some of the first literature to fit that
category.

Leipzig, Parsons, & Farrell-Beck (2008) indicate that “without a doubt, most clothing carried
department store or manufacturer labels, and consumers had little idea of who created the U.S.-
designed apparel purchased by the majority of women” (p. 29). An unknown designer who fit
this description was Libby Payne.

The lives and careers of designers who have been fortunate enough to reach fame have
been researched extensively and regarded as significant industry contributor. Many books have
been published, including The Fashion Makers (Walz & Morris, 1978) and The Fashion Book
(Mackrell, 2014) highlighting recognized designers who worked in ready-to-wear such as Claire
McCardell, Bill Blass, Bonnie Cashin, Ralph Lauren, and Calvin Klein. While the story of these
“famous” designers is valuable to the fashion world, they are but a small percentage of the
creative talent in the American industry as a whole. Hundreds of “hidden hands,” whose lights
did not shine as bright were employed by manufacturers and made an impact on both the
industry and the consumers for whom they created clothing.
There is no former scholarly research on Libby Payne herself, and likewise, there is a gap in information about the numerous designers who created styles for manufacturers, especially those targeted at the moderate-price point consumer, those who Libby termed “Mrs. Main Street America.” Generally, consumers of the moderate-price point are considered to be a part of the middle class. Middle class not only includes income level, but overall lifestyle in the social class with which the majority of Americans identify (Blank, 2010). Because this consumer category comprises the majority of the fashion market, focused research is warranted.

Libby Payne made a mark in the fashion industry throughout her career under a variety of manufacturer’s labels. Her background and experiences, personal characteristics, career, network, and personal influence came together in a successful career as a moderate-price zone fashion designer from 1937-1987. This study focused on Libby’s life and career and will add to knowledge on market segmentation, the evolution of the American ready-to-wear industry, middle market brands and the promotion of labels, and the changing role of the designer within the supply chain. It will also inform us about the phenomenon of some designers who broke the mold and went from the anonymous to the well-known, while others remained behind the labels.
**Definition of Terms**

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<td>Bridge line</td>
<td>Higher end, designer clothing carried in department stores (Burns, 2011 p. 148).</td>
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<td>Contractor</td>
<td>Companies that specialize in the sewing and finishing of goods and usually specialize in a specific part of the production process; used by manufacturers who do not own any factories and contract all sewing and finishing operations; They are the many, usually small factories in which most apparel production actually takes place (Burns, 2011 p. 141).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Couture designer</td>
<td>Fashion designer for high-end couturiers.</td>
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<td>Designer</td>
<td>A person who conceptualizes and oversees the creation of accessories, childrenswear, footwear, jewelry, menswear, millinery, and/or womenswear (Sterlacci &amp; Arbuckle, 2008 p. 60).</td>
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<td>Department store</td>
<td>A large retail company that plans, buys, merchandises, and displays merchandise in groups/departments either by target market or by product category (Sterlacci &amp; Arbuckle, 2008 p. 59).</td>
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<td>Dressmaker</td>
<td>A skilled seamstress who is capable of executing a professionally finished garment. They often specialize in specific categories and price ranges (Sterlacci &amp; Arbuckle, 2008, p. 65).</td>
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<td>Fashion Group</td>
<td>International (FG) A nonprofit organization founded in 1930, originally comprised of women, whose mission was to increase awareness of the American fashion industry and of women’s role in that business (Sterlacci &amp; Arbuckle, 2008 p. 75).</td>
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<td>Garment District or</td>
<td>Garment Center Area in Manhattan, New York City, around 7th Avenue, where the fashion industry was most dominant (Troxell and Judelle, 1971).</td>
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<td>Jobber</td>
<td>An intermediary in the apparel industry who carries inventories of apparel for ready shipment to retailers (Burns, 2011 p. 571).</td>
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<td>Junior line</td>
<td>A term that applies to the sizing of sportswear for young girls (Sterlacci &amp; Arbuckle, 2008 p. 125).</td>
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<td>Licensor</td>
<td>A company that has developed a well-known image and sells the right to use the image to manufacturers to put on merchandise (Burns, 2011 p. 571).</td>
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<td>Manufacturer</td>
<td>A company that performs all functions of creating, marketing and distributing an apparel, accessory, or home fashions line on a continual basis. These companies may use outside contractors to perform the manufacturing function (Burns, 2011 p. 572).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moderate price zone</td>
<td>Includes nationally known sportswear brand as well as private label or store brand (Burns, 2011 p. 148).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Price Zone</td>
<td>Categories based on either approximate wholesale price or suggested retail price of merchandise. Categories include: designer; bridge; better; moderate; budget or mass (Burns, 2011 p. 147).</td>
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<td>Ready-to-wear</td>
<td>This is the term given to clothing that, unlike made-to-measure, is designed either for commissioned consumption or speculative sale at the retail level. When pertaining to retail consumption, another common term is “off-the-rack” or “off-the-peg” (Sterlacci &amp; Arbuckle, 2008 p. 222-223). RTW is made in large quantities using mass manufacturing processes that require little or no hand sewing. Also known as ready-made (Burns, 2011 p. 135).</td>
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Literature Review

To better understand the life and career of Libby Payne and her experiences within each, a review of the ready-to-wear industry (RTW) and many of its facets was necessary. In exploring the evolution of the ready-to-wear industry, we must begin with its foundations. Not only is the history of ready-to-wear important to understand Libby’s story, but many aspects within the industry such as, market segmentation, the fashion cycle, national brands and labels, the apparel manufacturing supply chain, manufacturing in New York City, and 20th century ready-to-wear designers are vital to discover the value of Libby Payne’s lived experience. For the purpose of this study, fashion can generally be defined as “a prevailing custom, usage, or style,” (merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fashion, para. 3a; Retrieved October 11, 2015) it is most commonly associated with the wearing of clothing. At its core, fashion is change.

Market Segmentation and Fashion Change

“Fashion implies newness and freshness, yet as a fashion is copied, modified, and sold at lower and lower prices, it loses its newness, quality, and other essential design elements” (Frings, 2008, p. 71). There are many theories of fashion change, the most prevalent being the fashion adoption theories. The fashion adoption theories include the Trickle Down (Traditional) theory, the Trickle Up (Reverse) theory, and the Mass Dissemination theory.

According to Frings (2008), The Trickle Down, or Traditional theory is the most common of fashion adoption theories. The Trickle Down theory indicates that new fashion styles are worn by fashion leaders and widely publicized among magazines and other sources of fashion media. As more consumers are exposed to these styles, manufacturers produce less expensive versions affordable for the mass population. These styles continue to be copied repeatedly until the least expensive versions can be found at discount stores. At this point, consumers usually grow tired of the style or trend which then dissipates.
Market Segmentation. An essential framework for understanding the fashion industry is the concept of market segmentation. Market segmentation involves viewing a heterogeneous market as a number of smaller homogeneous markets, in response to differing preferences, attributable to the desires of consumers for more precise satisfaction of their varying wants” (Smith, 1956 as cited in Wedel & Kamakura, 2000, p. 4). Zakim (1999) indicates that standardizing consuming habits was necessary to support the “rate of growth even faster than the great increase in commerce and population justify” (p.2).

Market segmentation was reflected in the development of the department store and price zones in fashion goods, primarily clothing. “By the late 1920’s, increased consumer interest in ready-made clothing fostered the importance of retailing and the department store” (Leipzig, 2008, p. 32). Department stores enabled shoppers to purchase ready-made garments quickly and efficiently which eventually helped to create identifiable consumer behaviors. Ready-to-wear clothing was not designed with an individual in mind, but for a target market or a group of consumers who would be drawn to purchase identical items. Particular consumer behaviors and characteristics divided the fashion industry into market segments, known as price zones, which affected and still affect the production and sale of ready-made clothing today.

Price Zones. Throughout her lengthy career, Libby Payne primarily designed for manufacturers who produced moderately priced apparel, or clothing that suited for “Mrs. Main Street America”. As the availability of ready-made clothing grew, varied price zones that appealed to different markets emerged (Figure 1). Wholesale price or suggested retail price of the merchandise determines the price zone categories (Burns, 2011). The categories are as follows: Designer, Bridge, Better, Moderate, Budget or mass. Typically, apparel companies specialize in one or more of these price zones (Burns, 2011).
The most expensive price zone is Designer and includes the collections of brand name designers. Bridge falls just under Designer and just above Better price zones. The Bridge category is often where the less expensive collections of brand name designers are found. Within the Better category, nationally known brand names are often found. This includes store brands and department stores’ exclusive brands (Burns, 2011). The lines found in the Moderate price zone tend to be nationally known sportswear brands along with the more “reasonably priced” lines. Lastly, Budget or mass categories are considered the least expensive price zones. These categories are often found at mass merchandise or discount stores (Burns, 2011). The organization of price zones in the industry has traditionally been connected to the dissemination and acceptance of fashion trends, known as The Fashion Cycle.

**The Fashion Cycle and Price Zones.** The product life cycle model is often used as an analytical tool for determining the methods of consumer decision making. The product life cycle includes five stages including introduction, rise, peak, decline, and obsolescence (Sproles, 1981). Figure 1.1 illustrates The Fashion Cycle which fuses the product life cycle model with identified price zones in the fashion industry. In the introduction phase, a product, or in this case a fashion trend is adopted by fashion leaders. Fashion leaders are typically the consumers of products that fall into the Designer price zone. The fashion trend then enters the rise, or growth stage where public acceptance increases and slightly less expensive versions appear within the Bridge category. When a fashion trend reaches the peak stage of the life cycle, it has reached the masses and experiences phases of maturation. The peak stage is where consumers of Better and Moderate price zones typically purchase a fashion trend. By this point in the fashion cycle, the trend has been adapted from its initial stages so that it fits the needs of the consumers of the
Better or Moderate category. Finally, a fashion trend goes through the decline stage and eventually becomes obsolete where it can be found within a Budget price zone.

**Figure 1.** The Fashion Cycle (TQS Magazine [http://www.tqsmagazine.co.uk/the-fashion-cycle-101/](http://www.tqsmagazine.co.uk/the-fashion-cycle-101/); Retrieved November 10, 2015).

The concept of fashion change is the main driver of the industry. This became especially important with the rise of the ready-to-wear industry. With manufactured clothing increasingly available in the early 20th century, “The desire to keep up with rapidly changing styles led to a philosophy that quality was less important than being up-to-date” (Blackwelder, 1997 as cited in Keist, 2012, p. 28). A general consumer focus on acquisition of “new” over well-constructed clothing, spurred considerable growth in the American ready-to-wear industry.

**Consumer Behavior and Ready-to-Wear.** The ready-to-wear segment of the industry is largely determined by mass consumer behavior. Clothing manufacturers seek to identify fashion trends and meet consumer needs by producing what the consumer wants, when they want it, at
prices they can afford, and are willing to pay. The success or failure of this initiative is
determined at the retail level, where a fashion’s acceptance is measured by purchases. In the
traditional apparel industry supply chain, the manufacturer’s customer is the department store
buyer and the department store’s customer is the public. The ability to design and produce
clothing that is desirable and marketable to these stakeholders is a key to success. Consequently,
in the ready-to-wear fashion industry, designers skilled in developing ideas that appeal to
consumers at an attractive price point are much in demand.

**Branding.** In *Designing Brand Identity* (2013, p.6), Wheeler defines branding as “a disciplined
process used to build awareness and extend customer loyalty. Branding is about seizing every
opportunity to express why people should choose one brand over another.” Keller and Lehmann
(2006, p.740) state that “branding has emerged as a top management priority in the last decade
due to the growing realization that brands are one of the most valuable intangible assets that
firms have” and that “brands also play an important role in determining the effectiveness of
marketing efforts such as advertising and channel placement.”

The reason for effective marketing is likely related to successful branding. According to
Berger (2013) the reasons “things catch on” are because of the emotion the subject evokes, if it
has useful or practical value, or because of “social proof.” “People tend to conform to what
other people are doing and so to help resolve our uncertainty, we often look to what others are
doing and follow that” (Berger, 2013, p.128). Berger (2013) also indicates that whether products
or ideas catch on has a lot to do with “observability”, because what we observe is likely what we
discuss with others. “Cues in the environment not only boost word of mouth but also remind
people about things they already wanted to buy or do” (Berger, 2013, p.136). “When done well,
brand content answers questions, inspires, and motivates audiences to take action” (Roetzer, 2014, p.10).

The Ready-to-Wear Industry in the United States

For most of human history, clothing was constructed by hand and made for individuals. This changed in the mid-19th century, when many different factors including the invention of the sewing machine by Elias Howe in 1846, development of standardized sizing, mail-order catalogs, and the emergence of the department store created an environment where “ready-to-wear” (RTW) could emerge (Burrows and Wallace 1999 as cited by Rantisi 2002; Helfgott 1959; Tortora & Eubank, 2010; Zeitlin 1961;). Where previously the production and procurement of clothing required a significant labor and cost outlay, availability of ready-made garments substantially changed the way clothing was acquired and consumed. What was once the domain of home and cottage industry became supplanted by production.

Before Ready-to-Wear. Zakim (1999) states that as early as the 16th century, there is evidence indicating the inventories of pre-made garments by English tailors, yet for the most part, up until the mid-19th century, responsibility for production of clothing was almost exclusively done on an individual basis (Keist, 2012). Dresssmakers and their clients formed close, collaborative relationships with one another. The customer was actively involved with the dressmaker in the styling and overseeing production of her garment, which in turn gave the customer a unique, or one-of-a-kind piece (Gamber, 1997).

Dressmakers and home sewers could purchase fabric and notions necessary to make clothing items for the family, along with other staple goods for the home at dry goods stores. One example, Lord & Taylor opened in 1826 as a dry goods store (Ley, 1975). In The Female Economy (Gamber, 1997, p. 97), a “fashion spectator,” from the period is quoted as saying: “No
woman wants a hat like any other hat that has ever been made.” This co-design between
dressmaker and customer is the opposite of ready-to-wear where one garment is mass-produced
and available in numerous sizes. The designer of ready-to-wear clothing must meet needs of the
masses, producing clothing with “hanger appeal.”

**Early Ready-to-Wear.** The first appearance of a clothing industry in the United States was on the
8th Census in 1860 (Rantisi, 2002). The first ready-made garments were for men and children as
the majority of women’s fashionable dress was far too complicated for factory production. Most
women’s apparel continued to be made by dressmakers or in the home with the exception of
outerwear. In 1860, the “women’s wear industry” included 96 manufacturers who produced
cloaks and mantillas (Richards, 1951).

The 1850’s marked the beginning of “department stores” when owners of dry-goods
stores began expanding their merchandise variety in order to fulfill the diverse needs of
customers (Keist, 2012). Department stores made purchasing easy and readily available, and
offered other goods such as household items and furniture at affordable prices. With the
expansion of product categories, this allowed a “one stop shop” for customers. Store owners
grouped like-items together, hence creating departments. This larger volume of goods equated in
lower overhead for the store and in turn, lower fixed prices for the customer (Keist, 2012).

A big boost to ready-to-wear coincided with the production of uniforms for the Union
soldiers in the American Civil War (1861-1865) (Keist, 2012). As the industry grew, size
standardization became necessary to produce large quantities at garment making facilities or
what we now know as mass production (Zakim, 1999). Standardized sizing could be achieved
through a grading-technique in which sizes could be increased or decreased (Waddell, 2004).
Demand for uniforms dropped after the war and manufacturers shifted to women’s and children’s clothing production. The number of apparel manufacturing firms steadily increased with 562 and a total 25,000 employees in the year 1880 (Helfgott, 1959; Meyer, 1976 as cited by Rantisi 2002). Manufacturing also influenced the styles that were offered for sale. More elaborate dresses were not conducive to mass production without costing the manufacturer time and money, so early ready-made women’s garments were largely of simple construction (Keist, 2012). Most were produced by tailors and dressmakers for individual retail stores (Richards, 1951).

Department stores played a significant role in the development and evolution of ready-to-wear or mass-produced clothing. They were the place to find the latest fashions, and since these goods could now be produced at a much more rapid speed, merchandise turnover became faster and faster. “In the U.S., leading department stores became powerful interpreters of what it meant to be fashionable” (Welters & Cunningham, 2005, p.3). Some of the most important in the United States were Lord & Taylor, Marshall Fields, and Wanamakers, first opened in the late 1860s and 1870s (Keist, 2012). Department store “palaces” became known as leisurely destinations for middle- and upper-class women. (Keist, 2012).

Department stores offered customers a wide variety of merchandise including custom-made and ready-made clothing. Stores began publishing mail-order catalogs for those customers who were not able to come to the city to shop. Mail order catalogs were first set into motion by Aaron Montgomery Ward in 1872 and by 1893, Sears, Roebuck, and Co. had produced their own catalog as well (Tortora and Eubank, 2010). These mail-order catalogs aptly served as advertisements for the department stores and the goods they offered.
**Early 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Ready-to-Wear Industry.** The industry continued to grow, especially with the development and expansion of store and mail-order retailing, making ready-to-wear clothing more and more accessible. There were 1,823 apparel firms in 1900 and 84,000 Americans working in manufacturing by 1905 (Helfgott, 1959; Meyer, 1976 as cited by Rantisi 2002, p.26). Marketti and Parsons (2007) point out that between 1900 and 1917, the number of women’s apparel companies grew 350%, with 6,392 firms in 1917. Gone was the loyal relationship between a dressmaker and her client. “Custom production required a degree of intimacy that the sale of ready-to-wear did not” (Gamber, 1997). Unfortunately for dressmakers, ready-to-wear clothing comprised the bulk of the United States production at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

The evolution from hand-made and custom-made clothing to mass-produced ready-to-wear was not unexpected as ready-to-wear clothing proved to be both more convenient and cost-effective (Gamber, 1997). Ready-to-wear provided convenience, affordability and required much less time (Gamber 1997). As it became a more accepted and favored industry, dressmakers, milliners, and seamstresses began to fade away and, as the decades passed, the RTW industry seemed like a natural transition for women who wanted or needed to work.

Waite (1981) points out that “at the turn of the century, 60\% of all women workers were in occupations in which at least half of their co-workers were women” (p. 24). As RTW became more readily accepted, and the role of the department store grew stronger, traditional female occupations related to apparel or garment making, such as dressmakers and milliners found their work shifting to the department store (Gamber, 1997). Retailers of ready-made garments posed a major threat to independent dressmakers because they shifted the accessibility of fashion away from custom, one-of-a-kind designs (Lazaro, 2011). As Gamber (1997) states, “consumer palaces” provided the services of a majority of the millinery and dressmaking population.
Milliners who worked in a department store found themselves constructing exclusive order work and dealing with factory made hats. Because of the department store’s tendency to stock ready-to-wear pieces, milliners would then be judged solely on the speed at which they worked, or quantity over quality (Gamber, 1997).

Dressmakers too, found themselves in a similar position as the milliners. Instead of a dressmaker making a garment from scratch, she would find herself doing alterations to ready-to-wear pieces. To some dressmakers, this was rather demoting because a dressmaker’s sense of craftsmanship was the motivation of her trade, and gave her a “sense of pride” (Gamber, 1997). The fact that middle-class consumers were more likely to purchase ready-to-wear garments that were inexpensive and ill-fitting created the need for an alterations worker, or an alteration hand. An alteration worker provided an alternative to the dressmaker since department stores usually offered alterations at minimal cost or even free of charge (Gamber, 1997).

Demand for ready-to-wear in the United States was substantial, and with it came rapid growth in the size and complexity of what would become the fashion industry.

Ready-to-wear is a fast-moving, complex industry in which patterns of operation as well as styling and timing, must constantly adjust to the changing tastes and preferences of its consumers. Only those who interpret and satisfy those changing tastes and preferences succeed (Troxell and Judelle, 1971, p. 120).

An increase in garment manufacturers and availability of ready-made clothing in the market meant that styles could be made in larger quantities in a shorter amount of time. This in turn caused the demand for style turnover to increase. The turnover of fashions also resulted in higher demand to offer the latest trends. In order to keep up, manufacturers began producing garments at even speedier rates driving down prices with lesser quality goods (Richards, 1951).
It was in the 1930s, that consumers began to experience the influence of mass production of RTW allowing the prices of garments to be lower and, therefore available in every price point so all classes of Americans could purchase ready-made garments (Tortora & Eubank, 2005). A greater availability of ready-to-wear in the 1930s and 1940s may have actually been the beginning of “bargain shopping” by persistent consumers. Women who were accustomed to paying $16.95 for dresses started to shop around for a dress that cost $10.95. The $10.95 customer then began to look for a dress that would cost them $6.95. In 1933, the wholesale price of 79% of all dresses was $4.75 or less (Richards, 1951, p.25). Continual consumer demand and style turnover fueled America’s garment trade, especially in the nation’s top industrial cities including Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and of course, New York. (Jarnell and Judelle, 1974).

**New York City Manufacturing.** New York City’s fashion industry’s beginnings were in manufacturing and production of ready-to-wear, a mass-market endeavor (Rantisi, 2002). New York’s well-established central position in the manufacturing and production industry and its large concentration of immigrant workers differentiated it from the rest of the U.S. In addition, other industry stakeholders such as fashion magazines, department stores, designers, and art institutions helped to establish New York City as a fashion capital (Silva, 2014).

New York City had perfect genetic make-up for the establishment of a ready-to-wear industry. Its geographic location is home to a seaport, which is ideal for importing and exporting goods, it was close to the woolen mills of New England, and not too far from the cotton mills of the South (Jarnow & Judelle, 1974). This also meant that it was the gateway for many European immigrants, primarily Jews and Italians. Both cultures were made up of traditionally skilled craftspeople, especially in sewing and tailoring. The Jewish immigrant population began to
dominate the women’s wear industry while the Italian population dominated men’s wear because of their specialization in tailoring (Rantisi 2002).

Between the years 1880 and 1920, over 2 million Jewish people immigrated to America from Eastern Europe to escape persecution and take advantage of the greater economic opportunity to be found in America. Not surprisingly, these immigrants found their way to the garment center where many fit in quite naturally due to their prior skills and experiences as factory laborers, artisans, and small scale entrepreneurs (Yeshiva University Museum, *A Perfect Fit*, 2005). Their skills were further enhanced by improvements in technology such as new machines that made it possible to cut, sew and press clothes in a fraction of the time (Yeshiva University Museum, *A Perfect Fit*, 2005). The Jewish immigrant population of the 20th century is often credited with building the groundwork for the success of the NYC garment business as well as the creation of American style, making it possible for the average American woman to appear as the best dressed woman in the world (Yeshiva University Museum, *A Perfect Fit*, 2005). The garment industry allowed immigrants to work their way up in the world (Cline, 2012).

By 1920, U.S. apparel manufacturers had become the major producer of clothing for American women (Fashion United, 2014). Ready-to-wear production was greatly boosted by the invention of manufactured fibers which were more cost-effective and less-affected by environmental conditions. The first of these was Rayon which became widely used by the 1920’s, followed by Nylon, which reached the market in 1938 (Tortora & Eubank, 2010).

**Mid-20th Century Ready-to-Wear Industry.** Manufacturing and the New York City garment district were greatly affected in the wake of the Great Depression, especially in terms of unemployment. More than 1/3 of New York manufacturing firms were forced out of business
from 1929-1933 (Ley, 1978, p.87). It was during this time too, that women did not stop their buying habits with clothing, they only started buying more inexpensive, and cheaper clothes because with or without the Depression, women still wanted to look as fashionable as they could (Ley, 1978). This added further fuel to the growing moderate price ready-to-wear industry.

At first, “the role of American designers employed by manufacturing firms and custom salons in department stores was to create salable adaptations of prevailing French fashions that were in tune with American tastes” (Marketti and Parsons, 2007, p.80). During the Depression, the American government sought to protect domestic industry by levying import duties on a variety of goods, including Parisian fashion. This meant America was cut off from Paris and had to rely on its own design inspiration (Ley, 1978).

Perhaps as a blessing in disguise, American designers excelled when ties from Paris were severed, especially in moderately priced clothing. By the 1940s, the U.S. was no longer dependent on Paris for styles and inspiration and the “American look” was inevitably born during the Second World War years. The “American look” creation was mostly credited to Claire McCardell, and based on separates, or what was previously known as sportswear. McCardell’s separates were conducive to the central, practical lifestyle of women during the war years (Ley, 1978). American women now needed fashion that involved function and practicality because a majority entered the workforce since the men were at war. Albeit, “in America, ready-made clothes were no longer a substitute for custom-or couture-made clothes but were considered a desirable commodity in their own right” (Ley, 1978, p. 106).

By the 1950s and 1960s, the American ready-to-wear industry had grown significantly in size. “The number of American ready-to-wear designers and manufacturers, was, by this time, far too large to list them all” (Ley, 1978, p. 111). Designers and manufacturers were becoming
well-known. Some of the firms that produced “moderately priced separates and dresses developed multimillion-dollar businesses” (Ley, 1978, p. 113). Among these multimillion dollar businesses, also listed on the New York Stock Exchange were Bobbie Brooks and Jonathan Logan.

By the 1960s and 1970s, knock-offs were prevalent mainly because of the utilization of off-shore manufacturing. Labor supply in other countries was plentiful but made it difficult for domestic firms with little capital to compete (Horn, 1968). The growth of ready-to-wear industries off-shore, in particular Asian countries with high labor supply and low labor cost was problematic for the American ready-to-wear industry (Ley, 1978). Rather than being directly involved with the production of styles they created, fashion designers were increasingly distanced from manufacturing. They provided ideas which were made by strangers across the world. With lower labor costs abroad, American stores began to import from these countries and mark-up goods to sell at viable prices. “The complex interaction of the clothing industries in a global economy affects the variety, cost, and quality of goods available to consumers in all parts of the world” (Horn, 1968, p. 384).

At this time in America, the attitude toward expensive clothing shifted. Women no longer felt the need to pay exorbitant prices just to be fashionable, as high-quality ready-to-wear clothing could be found (Ley, 1978). “Inexpensive, well-made ready-to-wear has changed the way of life for millions of people.” (Ley, 1978, p. 147). At the same time, it created a “race to the bottom,” with manufacturers continually seeking lower and lower cost talent to get their styles to a market that was increasingly unwilling to pay for domestically produced goods.

**Off-Site and Off-Shore Manufacturing.** Beginning in the 1970’s, a majority of apparel manufacturing no longer took place in the United States, let alone New York City. Designers
and manufacturing firms began to outsource their production methods or move facilities offshore. The higher demand for more inexpensive clothing was the driving force of this change. Domestic production costs were rising and wages for workers were too high for the growing, necessary quantities (Cline, 2012).

In *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*, Elizabeth Cline speaks with Andy Ward, whose father owned the menswear brand, New York Sportswear Exchange. Ward describes offshore manufacturing:

> When everybody went offshore to the Orient, we opened Pandora’s box. After that, you couldn’t manufacture clothing without being in Asia. You can never shut that box and say we can go back to where we were. It’s open. It’s done. It’s finished (p. 41).

It is this off-shore outsourcing environment in which the ready-to-wear fashion industry finds itself today.

**Apparel Manufacturing Supply Chain**

Although a common experience today, the availability of ready-to-wear clothing is a fairly recent phenomenon. Over the history of ready-to-wear, the speed at which clothing could be produced grew faster. With it came higher consumer demand and the development of essential jobs and industries. An increasingly varied and complicated supply chain emerged. Yet, despite its expansion, throughout its history, the RTW fashion industry has included virtually the same categories of participants “who collaborate to design, manufacture, and sell clothing, shoes, and accessories” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012, para. 2). For the purpose of this study, players in the supply chain will focus on those close to manufacturing, specifically jobbers, contractors, and designers.

Middlemen between manufacturers and retailers were known as “jobbers.” The “jobber” purchased lots from manufacturers to sell to retailers. Jobbers were also responsible for
purchasing fabrics, deciding on styles, coordinating, and selling (Richards, 1951). The jobber eventually replaced traditional manufacturers as the central players in the industry (Zeitlin 1961 as cited by Rantisi 2002). In an attempt to provide rapid response to a somewhat insatiable market, jobbers carried huge amounts of merchandise to make swift deliveries to retailers. The need for jobbers dropped when retailers began to send buyers directly to New York and the role of resident buyers gained popularity, thus cutting out the middleman, who was the jobber (Burns, 2011)

Companies that specialize in sewing and finishing of goods are known as contractors. Contractors are generally used by manufacturers who do not own factories or who lack internal capabilities to get the job done. In essence, manufacturers were the main contractors of apparel production because many had internal production capabilities (Burns, 2011). Although contractors can render flexibility for manufacturers, their inclusion in the supply chain also adds greater risk because of additional movement of goods. This can involve significant costs as well as losses due to a lack of effective communication between parties (Frings, 2008).

Other players in the fashion supply chain include piece goods, findings, and trimmings firms. Salespeople from these companies work closely with creative talent in the product development process. New York City had a “nerve center” that included production operations, showrooms, sources, and designers on Seventh Avenue. According to Jarnow and Judelle (1974), “Skilled labor and availability of supporting industries is important for fashion manufacturers. Equally important is availability of design talent and production know how and opportunity to exchange ideas with others” (p. 112). All of these were present in mid-20th century New York.
Ready-to-Wear Designers within National Brands. Milbank (1989) points out that “fashion in this country was a blend of hand and machine work, with the distinction between retailers, manufacturers, and designers blurred” (p. 8). In Fashion for Everyone, Ley (1978) describes the ready-to-wear fashion designer as someone who works for a wholesale manufacturer who then sells the clothes to the retailers. Figure 1.2 was adapted from information found in Fashion Merchandising by Troxell and Judelle, 1971. Its purpose is to more clearly define the role of the typical RTW designer and the process of bringing concept to consumer. The designer would prepare a line for a given season in the process shown in Figure 1.1, which was then shown to buyers in New York City for nationwide distribution in stores. Buyers would place orders for the items from the line and those items that did not receive as much recognition from the buyers would not be produced.
Designer (works for manufacturer, if not independent)

- Designer designs ideas based on trends, materials, or previous fashion successes and failures
- Ideas are sketched or made into muslins
- Suitable designs are made into a SAMPLE HAND (by the designer's assistant)
- Finished garment samples are examined by executives (sales, purchasing, production heads, cost experts)
- Designs are accepted or modified for production
- Pattern maker makes production pattern for sizes offered
- Wholesale price/cost is determined (per garment)
- Style Number is assigned
- Becomes a part of manufactured line
- Buyers view the line and place orders
- Garments are made (Sewn, finished, pressed, inspected)
- Finished garments are ready to ship
- Retailers re-order

Figure 2. Designer's Role in Ready-to-Wear Apparel Industry (Adapted from Troxell & Judelle, 1971).
Throughout the early 20th century, house designers for ready-to-wear manufacturers always worked anonymously. The designs they created were sold to department stores who sewed store labels into the garments to portray “exclusivity” to the customer (Ley, 1978). This habit was changed largely due to Dorothy Shaver, president of Lord & Taylor. In the 1940s, Shaver kick-started an American designer revolution, promoting Americans for their designs rather than giving exclusive credit to the department store or manufacturer. Manufacturers were of course not pleased with the promotion of individual designers because it would threaten their business by enabling designers to stand on their own two feet (Ley, 1978). “This quandary still exists, and many manufacturers have trouble deciding between the various merits of promoting an individual or keeping the designers more or less anonymous and promoting the name of the manufacturer only” (Ley, 1978, p. 89).

**Fashion Designer Success Factors.** According to Granger, (2015) a fashion designer is dedicated to the creation of apparel and accessories. With various paths available for a fashion designer to pursue such as working under a major designer or manufacturer, working as a freelance designer, or producing designs under their personal name, all paths demand similar requirements, especially higher education and work experience in areas such as sketching, garment construction, and pattern making. Beyond education and experience, a fashion designer should also possess certain personal characteristics to help attain success. As stated in *The Fashion Industry and Its Careers: an Introduction*, these personal characteristics include an eye for color and aesthetics, knowledge of historical fashion, and awareness of balance and proportion. In addition to these, a fashion designer must be aware of current happenings of the business of fashion in order to flourish in a design career (Granger, 2015).
Numerous articles exist on the topic, “what makes a designer successful,” with the majority providing similar traits. Artistic or creative ability is top ranked only next to an understanding of the fashion business and possessing a sense of color or strong ability to visualize. Sewing skills and being a team player are also qualities cited as requirements for success as a fashion designer (Alyson, n.d.; Fitzgerald, 2015; Kokemuller, n.d.; Loretto, 2014; “Top 10 Qualities of a Great Fashion Designer”, 2016).

**Networking.** Networks can be a beneficial method for finding a job, because they can offer information that may be difficult to find otherwise (Drentea, 1998). Pierson (2009) suggests the best way to establish relationships and therefore build a network is through authentic conversation. In an authentic conversation, interests are often shared and the focus is on information (Pierson, 2009). It is these authentic networkers who find jobs and consequently enhance their reputation. For a relationship to continue to be beneficial after it is established, it must be maintained. Kramer (1998, p.95) points out that “maintaining relationships is crucial to long-term success, and it takes time and careful thought.”

**American Moderate Price Zone Ready-to-Wear Labels and Fashion Designers.** As outlined in the literature, most moderate-price zone American ready-to-wear designers worked under a manufacturer’s name and, with few exceptions, did not receive mention on clothing labels. Hundreds of “hidden hands” employed by manufacturers made an impact on the industry and the consumers for whom they designed. To characterize the professional environment and provide context for this study, a selection of manufacturer labels under which Libby Payne designed (indicated with an *) along with competitors in the moderate price zone are shown in Table 1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manufacturer</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bobbie Brooks*</td>
<td>Founded in 1939 by Maurice Saltzman and Max Reiter in Cleveland, Ohio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Originally called Ritmore Sportswear, Inc., the company was purchased by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saltzman in 1953.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jablow</td>
<td>A New York manufacturer of fine suits, dresses and coats. The company was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>established in 1931 by George Jablow, and carried on by his son Arthur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>Formed in 1946 by Jack and Helen Lazar and was trademarked in 1947 in New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>York. Their first product was wool sweaters and soon matching knit skirts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>were added.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laird-Knox</td>
<td>Established in 1960, having evolved from Ben Gershel &amp; Co., and both at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>512 Seventh Avenue, NY. By at least 1944 Robert (Bobby) Knox was designing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for a coat and suit manufacturer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMullen</td>
<td>A dressmaking company that specialized in the shirtwaist dress. The company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>was founded in 1937 by Nathan Sheinman and was headquartered in Glen Falls,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New York.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salymil</td>
<td>A ready-to-wear line designed by Sally Milgrim. These clothes were sold at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the Milgrim store in New York City, and also in up-scale department stores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and shops throughout the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzy Perette</td>
<td>Not an actual person, but the name of a dress manufacturing company that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>made affordable versions of Parisian designs in the 1950s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailored Junior</td>
<td>A mid-priced line of dresses for teenage girls and young women located in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New York City.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although individual American designers were not especially recognized in the early 20th century, especially in the moderate-price zone, there is evidence that writers, manufacturers, retailers and designers believed in the importance of promoting the names of young American designers and their work (Picken, 1941). Industry insiders recognized that design talent existed on both sides of the Atlantic, not just in Paris (Jarnow & Judelle, 1974). Some even suggested the development of specialty chain stores focusing solely on American merchandise (Marketti and Parsons, 2007).

Visible credit for creative contributions would not have been possible without the prior foundation of achievement the U.S. ready-to-wear industry laid, most notably in the mass market (Marketti and Parsons, 2007). Coupled with conditions of war, especially the German occupation of Paris created the opportunity for the U.S. to show the fashion world the value of domestically designed style (Buckland, 2005). Prominent industry figures such as Claire McCardell, Adele Simpson, Anne Klein, and Bonnie Cashin emerged. Yet, these are exceptions to the typical professional experience of the unnamed and unrecognized creative talent in the ready-to-wear fashion industry. American “design” was recognized, but American designers, especially women, were still largely in the shadows prior to the 1960’s.

Even trailblazers such as Bill Blass found himself in this role. As stated in “Fashion Makers” by Walz and Morris (1978), Blass remembered:

When I started working, the designer was kept in the back…we never emerged to meet the buyers and the press. As soon as we finished a collection, we were encouraged to take a month off. That’s so the clothes could be “modified” or “adapted” and we wouldn’t be around to complain. At that time—the late 1940’s and early 1950’s—the designer generally worked for a manufacturer whose name was on the door and on the
label too. The woman who bought the clothes was aware of the manufacturer rather than the designer, who was as anonymous as the seamstress who sewed the garment (p. 42).

Overview

There are many areas of study that pertain to the life and career of Libby Payne. The most important are the historical overview of the American ready-to-wear industry, including manufacturing, New York City, and factors contributing to successful professions in fashion design. These aspects directly relate to the career experiences of Libby Payne and the years she contributed to the industry, along with the people who played a role in her success as a ready-to-wear designer. Obtaining knowledge of this background provides a foundation for what can be learned about the American ready-to-wear industry through the eyes of a designer for the moderate market, an area seldom focused on within the study of designers and the fashion industry.

Research Questions

This study employs the story of Libby Payne to answer the following questions:

1. How did Libby Payne’s background and experience influence her fashion design ambitions?

2. What personal characteristics did Libby Payne possess that contributed to her success over a fifty year fashion design career in mid-20th century America?

3. What creative strategies did Libby Payne enact that made an impact on the firms she worked for such as Bobbie Brooks and Jonathan Logan?

4. What factors contributed to Libby Payne’s success as a moderate RTW designer in New York in the 1930’s through the 1980’s?
Method

To answer the research questions, a historical study with a qualitative approach was used. Data were collected through content analysis of Libby Payne’s personally written memoir notebooks about her life and experiences, one-on-one interviews with daughters Penny and Holly Payne, and review of advertisements and personal artifacts in relation to Libby Payne’s fashion design career. The purpose of content analysis is to “attempt to uncover or capture the telos (essence) of an account. This approach provides a means for discovering the practical understandings of meanings and actions” (Stemler, 2001, p. 239).

Data Collection

About 1992, Libby Payne and her husband, Frank became interested in genealogy. Libby had a strong desire to ensure that her life and accomplishments were not lost to history. To that end, she created four volumes containing 456 pages and 153 images of personal and professional remembrances in the form of stories, diary entries, images of designs and sketches, advertisements, fabric swatches, and family photographs. Upon Libby’s death in 1997, daughter Penny took control of these memoir notebooks and her personal artifacts which are housed in her New York home. In 2014, Penny presented the notebooks to the Kent State University Museum. Although not accessioned into the collection, with Penny’s permission and encouragement, the memoirs were photocopied and transcribed.

The memoir notebooks begin with Libby Payne’s family history and conclude with retirement from her 50-year fashion design career in 1987. The years covered encapsulate experiences and memories of her entire life and career, including specifics on friends, family members, co-workers and managers. Also specified are particular designs in which Libby felt especially proud or which brought incredible success to the companies for whom they were
designed. Additional sources of data collected included personal conversations and phone interviews with Libby Payne’s daughters, Holly and Penny, as well as content analysis of Libby’s personal artifacts such as sketches, magazine and newspaper advertisements and articles written about herself or the companies for which she worked.

**Data Analysis**

All salient information of instances that Libby Payne made referring to her personal background and career experiences including employment as a fashion designer in the Midwest, but primarily focusing on New York City were identified and transferred into a Word document to serve as data for analysis. This was combined and cross-referenced with personal conversations and phone interviews with Libby Payne’s daughters along with Libby’s personal artifacts (Appendix A and B). After pertinent information was transcribed, data was analyzed and employment history coded. Emergent themes were identified and used to answer the research questions of this study.
Results

Introduction

This research centered on the life and career of Elizabeth “Libby” Miller Payne (1917-1997), a moderate price zone fashion designer with a career spanning more than 50 years. From an early interest in sewing and fashion, Libby began her design career in Chicago after specializing in stage costume at Northwestern University School of Speech where she audited a course in fashion merchandising taught by the Fashion Director of Marshall Fields. In 1937, a young designer told her she could “bluff” her way into fashion designing and make $100 a week, which at the time “seemed like a fortune” during the Depression era. Employing her acting training, debate skills, and costuming background, Libby landed a design position in Chicago under her maiden name, “Betty” Miller. After her marriage in 1941, relocation to New York, and adopting a new name, “Libby Payne” was a successful designer who did not retire until 1987. All told, she held creative positions in 30 different moderate price zone firms including legendary companies such as Bobbie Brooks, Jonathan Logan, Toni Edwards, and Dartford Deb. Libby Payne not only “bluffed” her way in to the fashion industry, she parlayed her personal background and foundational experiences, personal characteristics, career aptitude, network, and personal influence to design marketable dresses and make herself a career.

A total of 456 pages from four volumes of Libby Payne’s memoir notebooks were analyzed along with information provided by her daughters and personal archives. Specifics about employment history were used to develop a timeline of Libby Payne’s career. This timeline included the years of employment, manufacturers for whom she worked, the labels under which her designs were sold, names of the firm’s owners and managers, individuals and co-workers in her network, how Libby was hired, and how she left the company.
To add richness to this data and answer the study’s research questions, selected aspects of Libby Payne’s personal and professional remembrances along with information obtained from her daughters were coded into emergent themes. Five major themes emerged which were then divided into 19 sub-themes. Results will be presented with the timeline of Libby Payne’s career, followed by the emergent themes developed from analyzing the content of her memoir notebooks, interviews, and artifacts.

**Timeline of Libby Payne’s Career**

Any mention of Libby Payne’s employment history contained within the memoir notebooks was collected and utilized to develop Table 2. In total, she worked for 30 manufacturers over the period from 1937-1987. Under the name, “Betty Miller,” she was employed as a fashion designer for 17 firms in Chicago (1937-1945 non-consecutively) and two firms in St. Louis (1938-1939) before relocating to New York with her husband in 1945. She did the majority of her notable design work as “Libby Payne” (1945-1987), yet this name never individually appeared on a label.

Throughout this long career, Libby was never unemployed for longer than two months. She utilized a variety of means to secure employment and left for a variety of reasons. Although Libby had ten different jobs in New York City, she relocated only to different floors in two different garment center buildings. She worked at 1400 and 1407 Broadway for the majority of her New York City design career.

**Table 2. Overview of Employment History of Elizabeth Miller Payne, 1937-1987.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Job #</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Years Active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Marshall Field’s-The College Shop</td>
<td>Summer 1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Saks Fifth Avenue –The College Shop</td>
<td>Summer-Early Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Dates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Carson, Pirie, Scott &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Fall 1937</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Franklin Dress Co.</td>
<td>November 1937</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Helena Dress Co.</td>
<td>November 29-December 17, 1937</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>Barney Wolk Dress Co.</td>
<td>December 28, 1937-January 18, 1937</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>Gilbert Ribback/ “Gilbert Originals” Blouses</td>
<td>January 18-February 11, 1938</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>Michel, Inc. Coats and Suits</td>
<td>February 16-March 1, 1938</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>Abert Sportswear</td>
<td>March 1-13, 1938</td>
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<td>#10</td>
<td>Joyce Frocks Eveningwear</td>
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<td>#11</td>
<td>David Roth &amp; Co. Dresses and Gowns</td>
<td>March 26-April 17, 1938</td>
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<td>#12</td>
<td>Nick Kovler Coats and Suits</td>
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<td>#13</td>
<td>London Dress and Suit</td>
<td>May 25-June 2, 1938</td>
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<td>#14</td>
<td>Debutante Frocks</td>
<td>June 3-17, 1938</td>
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<td>#15</td>
<td>Lorraine Frocks</td>
<td>June 18, 1938-August 27, 1938</td>
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<tr>
<td>#16</td>
<td>Reich Dress Co.</td>
<td>September 1-16, 1938</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

St. Louis, MO

| #17| Bernard’s-Junior Dress Firm                     | September 16-                |
#18 Schickman and Frager-young Jr. Dresses
Chicago, IL
October 7, 1938-
October 20, 1939

#19 Johara, Inc.
New York, NY
October 22, 1939-
February 11, 1945

#20 Dartford Deb
February 1, 1945-
December 10, 1950

#21 Peggy Caswell
Spring 1951

#22 Bobbie Brooks
July 20, 1951-January 20, 1956

#23 Toni Edwards
January 30, 1956-
November 1, 1958

#24 Parade Dress
November 1, 1958-
January 1, 1960

#25 Jonathan Logan
January 1, 1960-July 1979

#26 Kay Windsor
July 1979-Decemer 1980

#27 Tracy!/St. Bart’s
December 1980-April 1984

#28 David Warren
April 1984-April 1985
Note. Libby Payne’s memoir notebook started counting her fashion jobs with Marshall Field’s in 1937, although she held two retail sales positions prior to attending college.

Libby Payne’s (Betty Miller’s) first fashion related jobs were in the summer of 1935 in West Virginia, where she lived with her family before going to Chicago for college. She was employed at Telford’s Dress Shop, selling dresses part-time and at the Diamond Department store as a sales associate. Upon graduating from Northwestern University, Libby worked briefly for Marshall Field’s of Chicago and Saks Fifth Avenue in the College Shop, although she did not count these in the 30 jobs documented in her memoir notebook.

It was during this time that she met Virginia Spears, a friend of her landlady, “Mom” Lewis’ daughter, who helped Libby get started in the fashion industry. Virginia went to the Vogue School of Design and worked as a designer of junior dresses in the moderate price zone. She told Libby:

If you have good taste, a good sense of color, know how to make your own clothes, sketch a little, bluff a lot, and have “half a brain” you can bluff your way into the business. You have to be able to ACT like you do have the experience and that you KNOW what you’re doing.
With her formal schooling at an end, an entry in Libby’s diary reveals great ambition for getting a job. “I thought to myself, if they can do it, I can do it! I will! I have to be a success! I have to!” Though trained in stage costume, Libby found a way to “bluff” her way into fashion designing.

In November 1937, Libby Payne (Betty Miller) began working as a designer for Franklin Dress Company. She claimed extensive experience to owner Sam Reich. According to daughter Holly, Franklin Dress Company was the only design job that Libby found from a newspaper advertisement. All in all, Libby Payne had 30 fashion design jobs in 50 years; the first 19 within two years, six of those within six months. After Franklin, every other job came from word of mouth, often through the fabrics and trimmings salesmen she so easily befriended.

Libby worked in Chicago for just over a year from summer 1937 until fall 1938, after which she took a job at Bernard’s in St. Louis, Missouri and increased her salary from $50 to $60 per week ($823. to $988. in 2016). St. Louis was a career turning point. Although Libby was only with Bernard’s for three weeks due to management changes, she experienced design success when buyers from department stores such as Famous-Barr, the biggest department store in St. Louis at the time, enthusiastically bought her designs because they said they would be “big sellers.”

Being the persistent young woman she was, Libby pounded the pavement and quickly had three job offers after Bernard’s let her go. Of the three, she chose Schickman and Frager, a young junior dress company headed by Mr. Schickman who had a reputation of being a kind manager who would train designers. A friend who had previously worked for the firm told Libby that she should take the job with Mr. Schickman, that it would not be exciting, but that she would really learn the foundations of designing because it was like a post-graduate course.
The choice of Schickman and Frager, a firm specializing in the emerging category of “junior” clothing was important for Libby’s career. It was during this time that dress companies, such as Bobbie Brooks, were beginning to recognize a financial incentive to enter this market. Junior dresses were in demand and cheaper to produce than misses dresses. Libby Payne was truly at the right place at the right time. The post-graduate course with Mr. Schickman benefitted Libby. Especially when she returned to Chicago and, after much persistence, was hired at Johara, Inc., a new firm that manufactured the type of junior dresses she liked to design. The job with Johara lasted six years, from October 22, 1939 until February 11, 1945 which was the longest design job Libby held up to that point. With every job Libby held previously and including Johara, she used the name Betty Miller.

It was not until moving to New York that she began to go by “Libby Payne” at the suggestion of her husband, Frank, whom she married in 1941 just after World War II began. Libby and Frank Payne moved to New York City in 1945 due to Frank’s relocation assignment to the Signal Corps Photographic Center (Army Pictorial Center) in Long Island City, New York which was just across the East River from Manhattan. Throughout her career, Libby Payne consistently created designs for the moderate consumer category, primarily junior dresses. In her memoir notebooks, Libby credited Chicago designer, Louise Mulligan with being the creator of the junior dress market in the Midwest. “The Midwest is the everybody”, and since the Midwest was known as the everybody, the moderate category was consequently for “the everybody.”

Although the move was precipitated by Frank’s assignment, Libby Payne’s experience designing junior dresses in the Midwest gave her an advantage. Her career really took off in the fashion capital of the world, New York City. Libby called her friend Virginia Spears to say she...
had just relocated and was looking for a job in New York. Virginia helped her get an interview with Ed London of Dartford Deb because they were looking to hire a “Midwestern designer.” Just two days after arriving, Libby landed a fashion design job which she held for five years.

After being fired from Dartford Deb for having her second child with management expressing that Libby had too much on her plate, she took a position with Peggy Caswell which Libby only held for one year, leaving because she wanted more recognition for her work. The line that Libby designed for Caswell was presented to buyers with management taking credit for her ideas. From 1951-1956, Libby Payne worked for Bobbie Brooks, a manufacturer based in Cleveland, Ohio. At first, Libby was skeptical about working for a firm called Bobbie Brooks because she thought the name sounded too “cutesy.” When she interviewed with Maury Saltzman, Libby asked for $500 a week which was a hefty salary in the 1950’s (almost $5000. in 2016). Initially, Maury said he would start her salary at $400 a week and re-evaluate in six months.

To Libby’s surprise, Maury later admitted that he had been knocking off the designs she created for Johara in Chicago years earlier. Maury had no idea that “Libby Payne” and “Betty Miller” were the same designer. At Bobbie Brooks, Libby Payne designed several highly regarded dresses that sold very successfully. From August 1951 until August 1956, the same years during which Libby was designing for them, Bobbie Brooks’ annual gross sales grew from $12 to 19.5 million. Despite the company’s success, somewhat attributable to Libby’s creative talent, she was fired from Bobbie Brooks in 1956 and replaced by a male Fashion Director.

Libby’s next position was as fashion designer for manufacturer, Toni Edwards, which she held for two years. As Libby was searching for a job after Bobbie Brooks, she went to see Mr. London at Toni Edwards who she previously worked for at Dartford Deb, letting him know that
she was job searching and had used him as a reference. Mr. London jokingly told Libby that he would give her a “terrible recommendation” because he would like to have her for himself. She responded, “Oh Mr. London, working for a large volume company, I’ve learned to make a lot of money. With your volume, you couldn’t possibly pay me that much!” London’s accountant chimed in to say, “Ed, you’d better pay her what she’s asking. She’s the only designer you’ve ever had who made money for you.”

A professional recruiter presented Libby with an opportunity at Parade Dress, although Mr. Messner, a fabric salesman warned her they were “untrustworthy scoundrels.” She took the job because they offered her a good base salary and a percentage of each dress sold. Libby helped the company grow and was promised a bonus, which was never paid. Management said, “Libby, it is true that we have done $3,000,000 worth of business—three times as much as we expected. However, you are not the only one responsible for this large amount of business.” Within a couple of years, Libby was on the job market again, leaving Parade because, as she had been cautioned, they were indeed “scoundrels.” Looking back on the $8,000 she felt she had been “gypped out” of, Libby stated that she could have sought retribution. Instead, she moved on.

Her next fashion design position was with Jonathan Logan, Inc., a moderate label sold at retailers such as Gimbels, B. Altman, and Bloomingdale’s. Jonathan Logan was a large firm with twelve subdivisions as seen in Table 3. For 18 years (1961-1979), Libby worked for Jonathan Logan, Inc. making it the longest single employer of her long career. At Jonathan Logan, she experienced her first trips to Europe, gathering inspiration for designs that she had not been exposed to previously.

Table 3. [Jonathan Logan Subdivisions](#)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Logan</td>
<td>Junior dresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;K Originals</td>
<td>Moderate price Misses dresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bleeker Street</td>
<td>Budget dresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butte Knit</td>
<td>Knitted suits, dresses and ensembles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act III</td>
<td>Knitted sportswear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modern Juniors</td>
<td>Junior sportswear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misty Harbor</td>
<td>Rainwear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis Sportswear</td>
<td>Auto coats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Accent</td>
<td>Better Misses dresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Guild</td>
<td>Better Junior dresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy Adams</td>
<td>Half-size dresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Stuart</td>
<td>Blouses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Issues</td>
<td>Misses better sportswear</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Libby first worked for the Betty Barclay division of Jonathan Logan, a junior and petite line that was eventually dismantled. Because the designer hired to produce budget dresses for the Logan label, Bleeker Street moved at a very slow rate, Libby’s bosses asked her if she would design 25% of the Bleeker Street line because she “ran a very fast and prolific design room.” Bleeker Street did so well that they “practically owned Bloomie’s misses dress department,” according to Libby. Everyone at the firm was amazed at how the 25% of the Bleeker Street line that Libby designed carried 90% of their orders. Libby indicated that in the mid 1960’s, over a short amount of time Bleeker Street’s annual sales reached $62 million, with a 19% profit.
Ed Weiss and Danny Pressner, Libby’s bosses, asked her if she would like to continue designing for Betty Barclay or take over Bleeker Street and she told them, “I always want to go with the ‘new’!” all while thinking “and where the emphasis and advertising money is.” Her job at Bleeker Street for Jonathan Logan ended after being told she did not know how to make young dresses and the company felt they needed a younger designer’s perspective.

After Jonathan Logan, Libby Payne designed for Kay Windsor for a little more than a year. Fired from this position, Libby surmised that she was “perhaps too efficient.” She found her next job by calling Nat Marcus, one of her favorite fabric salesmen. From 1980-1984, Libby worked for Tracy!/St. Barths under Beau Baker, son of Jack Baker. First, she talked to Jack Baker of the Sue Brett Company and he asked her if she would be willing to design junior dresses again. Libby responded honestly that she was not sure anyone would want her to after Bleeker Street basically told her she was too old to design young dresses. Jack Baker reassured her that “once a good designer, always a good designer.” He proceeded to tell Libby that he actually wanted to hire her to work for his son, Beau at his firm Tracy! because they had recently started to suffer financially.

It was Beau Baker who taught Libby to shop the SoHo stores for inspiration that would appeal to the contemporary young consumer. Libby taught Beau how to go to Paris and interpret trends and scout colors instead of just copying what could already be found in the market. Libby did help to turn Tracy! back around. After designing her first successful line for Tracy!, Beau told her that the buyers said the line had not looked “so good in years,” that he must have hired a young “swinging” designer. He concluded, “You’ve brought me good luck. You’re my good luck charm!”
Soon after Tracy! was back on its feet, Beau Baker decided to open his own firm called St. Barth’s and wanted Libby to come with him to design Junior Dresses and Sportswear. The two of them worked very well together and experienced success with the St. Barth’s label, which earned a reputation of being a trendy label on the cutting edge of fashion. Their success reached a point where Fashion Directors and Buying Offices requested they add missy dresses and sportswear as a way to increase sales for the stores and for the St. Barth’s label.

It was while working with Beau Baker that Libby Payne finally accomplished the one thing that many American moderate price zone designers wish to accomplish: their own name on a label. Libby’s was “Baker-Payne,” added as a secondary label to St. Barths clothing. Unfortunately, not long after her name appeared, the label disappeared. When Beau’s business partner decided to break off, St. Barth’s began to slow down. Therefore, Libby was once again let go. Beau told Libby the company was again having financial difficulties and to take a vacation. When she returned, “Baker-Payne” was removed from the building directory, and along with it, the label removed from St. Barths clothing.

Figure 3. St. Barths Label with Secondary Baker Payne Label.
This was followed by DWIII, a division of David Warren for which Libby Payne designed moderately priced dresses. She remembered it as her “least interesting designing job” that lasted “one dull year.” She never received any good or bad information on the sales of the dresses she designed. Her biggest complaint was that the “business ran by committee action.” About this job, Libby wrote in her memoir notebook, “BORING!” She left DWIII because the business closed.

In 1985, Libby Payne began freelance designing, working for three different houses over a two-month period, an activity she did not enjoy. She concluded, “freelance was definitely for beginners” and it is clear that at that point in her career, Libby was far from a beginner. Her memoir notebooks include:

> After “running the whole show,” working side by side with my bosses on an executive level, making presentations to the top Fashion Directors and Buyers, setting trends or interpreting them, designing fabrics and trims as well as choosing them, running large Design Rooms, putting on Fashion Shows, making judgments that brought millions of dollars to the large firms whom I had helped build, this was “penny-ante” stuff. Frank said, “it’s like asking Michelangelo to ‘paint by numbers.”

One more time, Libby Payne sought full-time employment with a moderate manufacturer.

Libby finished her career by taking a position with John Henry on their Spring and Summer dresses, which she held for a little more than a year. After 40 years in the fashion industry, working behind more than 30 labels, and finally achieving her name on one of them, Libby Payne retired in 1987. Her daughter Penny said that by that time, she was ready to pass the design torch. When asked if she thought her mom missed designing upon retirement, Penny said “I think she was ready to retire. She said that by that time, the business just wasn’t the same
anymore. It wasn’t as glamorous to be a designer as it was when she had started.” Libby Payne died of breast cancer at the age of 80 in 1997.

Themes and Sub-Themes

To complement the employment history and answer the study’s research questions, emergent patterns from selected aspects of Libby Payne’s personal and professional remembrances were organized into five major themes and twelve sub-themes. The five major emergent themes: Background and Experiences, Personal Characteristics, Career, Network, and Personal Influence and their parallel sub-themes are shown in Table 3 and detailed in the following sections.

Table 4. Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes from the Memoirs of Fashion Designer Libby Payne.

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<th>Sub-Themes</th>
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<td>(a) Family</td>
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<td>(b) Education</td>
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<td>(c) School Experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Characteristics</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(b) Creative Strategies/Originality</td>
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Background and Foundational Experiences

Libby Payne’s personal background played an integral role in her development as a passionate and successful fashion designer. Within the theme are the sub-themes of Family, Education, School Experiences, and Marriage and Children. Elizabeth Norrah Miller was born in Havana, Cuba on April 2, 1917 to American parents, William Bricen Miller and Melvah English. First known as “Betty,” her family immigrated to the United States in 1923. Libby’s daughter, Holly described her mother as a “product of her parents,” meaning she was a child of the Depression, yet came from a very educated environment. Although her father was an accomplished minister with a doctoral degree, his salary came from the church congregation and therefore, his salary was minimal. Libby felt a strong connection to “the everybody” and a strong sense to be successful in life. Simply put, she wanted to make her family and herself proud.

Throughout her memoir notebooks, Libby Payne casually describes many different experiences that can be recognized as notable in the context of American history. She
remembered seeing “The Jazz Singer” of 1927, the very first talking picture to be released. More foundational to her development was the Great Depression, when Libby and her family were living in Cleburne, Texas. Like many Americans, Libby went to the local cinema two to three times a week, finding great inspiration from the movies, for clothing she would make herself. Libby noted that the Depression hit Texas later than it did the eastern part of the United States, and therefore, a lot of people still held delusions of grandeur. Her experience in difficult financial times made Libby question unnecessary buying. One example was the $2.00 stationery package she charged at a drugstore when with a “wealthier” friend. Libby remembered,

I felt guilty because I knew our money was limited and that I could have bought stationary at Woolworth’s for 25 cents or maybe even splurged for $1.00. I felt so guilty, I couldn’t sleep that night. I never enjoyed using that stationary! I felt sick at my stomach every time I thought about it, and still do! That’s what the Depression did to me.

Like other Americans in her generation, Libby’s early years were greatly shaped by not only the Depression, but also by World War II.

The war permeated all aspects of American life, and Libby was no exception. In her memoir notebooks, she references meeting three men in St. Louis who worked for Shell Oil Company. They talked about a friend named Jimmy who was their boss and also a pilot. Libby discovered that this was Jimmy Doolittle, who led the first American strike against Japan on April 18, 1942. During the war, Libby went dancing with one of these men and saw a Latin band whose band leader happened to be Desi Arnez. This brush with celebrity was an experience worth noting, having danced to the music of the Cuban who would eventually marry actress Lucille Ball.
*Family.* Libby Payne came from a well-educated family. Her father, Dr. William Bricen Miller was a Baptist Minister who worked at many different college institutions and congregations. Her mother, Melvah English was a college-educated school teacher who worked until she was 75 years old. A number of Libby’s family members, including her maternal grandfather had gone to college, something fairly uncommon at the turn of the 20th century. Both William Bricen and Melvah grew up on prosperous farms which Libby accredits as the reason why her parents had the opportunity to have college educations. Many of her family members—aunts, uncles, and cousins graduated from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and became successful professionals with productive lives.

The oldest of four children, Libby had two younger brothers, William Bricen Jr. and Ryland Duke and a younger sister, Barbarita Lloyd. In 1923, Libby, her parents, and William Bricen Jr. immigrated to the United States from Cuba, first settling in Nashville, Tennessee where her father taught and completed his Master’s degree at Peabody College. Due to the fact that William Bricen Sr. was a minister, the family moved quite often. Libby lived in six different cities throughout the United States before she was sixteen years old including Nashville and Jefferson City, Tennessee; AltaVista, Virginia; Las Vegas, New Mexico; Cleburne, Texas; and Charleston, West Virginia.

In her memoir notebooks, Libby refers to her mother as “the original Pollyanna” because she would often say, “you’re just the age you feel.” Libby and her mother had a close relationship, bouncing ideas off each other about clothes and how they could make clothes similar to what they saw in the movies. Libby also stated that she and her mom were great friends, regularly making and doing various things together. In 1945, Libby and Frank Payne had their first child, a son named Noel. Their first daughter, Holly was born in 1950. She was
followed by Penny, born in 1956, the same year as Noel passed away at age 11 from a brain tumor. Penny continued her mother’s legacy by pursuing a career in the fashion industry. Holly and Penny both felt so strongly about their mother’s story that they attempted to donate her archived items to various museums.

Libby first learned to sew from and with her family. In her memoir notebooks, she remembered how she and her cousin, Melvah Burnette, would make their doll clothes out of Aunt Emma’s scraps of fabric. “Melvah and I loved to rummage in the small attic up over the kitchen and find interesting scraps of fabrics for doll clothes…I presume this, along with my mother’s sewing was my early inspiration for my ultimate career in Fashion Design.”

**Education.** At the age of sixteen, Libby was already living on her own at Virginia Intermont Women’s College in Bristol, Virginia which she attended from 1933-1935. Her father gave the commencement speech at her May 1935 graduation, personally presenting Libby with her diploma. When Libby walked on stage, she surprised both her father and herself as she silently handed the diploma back to him as they both fought away tears. Prior to graduation, from Virginia Intermont, one of Libby’s teachers, Miss Nunnally, recommended her to Dean Dennis, a guest speaker from Northwestern University. He later sent Libby a letter offering her a scholarship, ministerial rebate, and a job to “work for meals” at Northwestern School of Speech. She took this opportunity, specializing in stage costume from 1935-1937.

**School Experiences.** When first at Northwestern, Libby worked at the library for 50 cents an hour (about $8.65 today). She later interviewed at the home of renowned Chicago architect, Daniel Burnham to be a live-in assistant but decided she did not want the job. Instead Libby began work at Cooley’s Cupboard Tea Room in Evanston, close to the Northwestern campus. Libby was always very interested in extra-curricular activities during school and
worked on the costume crew or on stagecraft at both Northwestern and Virginia Intermont. Throughout the two years at Northwestern, Libby lived in an off-campus home with “Mom” Lewis, with whom she grew very close. “Mom” encouraged Libby to translate her dressmaking skills to the stage. While attending Northwestern, Libby audited a fashion merchandising class taught by Helen Sisson, the fashion director of Marshall Field and Company. Libby remembered: “This is what really set me on my way.”

**Marriage and Children.** “Betty Miller” married Frank Payne one month after Pearl Harbor and they moved to New York City because Frank was assigned to the Signal Corps Photographic Center (Army Pictorial Center) in Long Island City, New York. Six weeks after their marriage, Frank was sent overseas for 32 months as a Medic and then Combat Photo Officer and “Libby Payne” made her way into the center of the American fashion industry. Frank was promoted from Second to First Lieutenant and also worked as a producer of motion pictures for the Army Surgeon General, Chief of Chaplains, and Military Police. When Frank and Libby Payne first moved to New York City in 1945 they lived at 272 W. 91st Street, east of West End Avenue. Their apartment was on the fifth floor of a private brownstone and was $90 a month. At the time, it was difficult to find apartments because of government restrictions on rent prices and therefore rent was required to be paid “under the table.” After living in their apartment in New York City, Frank and Libby relocated to Long Island where they both lived for the rest of their lives.
Figure 4. Libby Payne on her wedding day (December 13, 1941)

**Personal Characteristics**

Another theme to emerge through data analysis of Libby Payne’s story were traits she possessed that contributed to personal success. Within this theme are the sub-themes of Personality, Ambition, Persistence, Resilience, and Passion. Through stories in her memoir notebooks, these traits surfaced as evident contributors to why Libby Payne became a successful fashion designer.

*Attitude.* One of the first noticeable things that emerged from Libby Payne’s notebooks is her fun-loving, charming and magnetic personality. Throughout her memoir notebooks, there is evidence that her positive attitude remained intact. In her personal memoir notebooks, Libby Payne describes herself as “ready for anything.” Libby was a go-getter, a doer. In elementary school, Libby described an instance where she was seated alphabetically next to Elizabeth Moore
who had beautiful penmanship. Libby believed herself to have “atrocious handwriting” and thought that if Elizabeth Moore could do it, so could she. Young Libby Payne described this experience as one that “became an attitude of mine for life.”

This attitude secured her first position as a fashion designer. She pounded the pavement for a good portion of her thirty jobs and worked hard at each one. Libby wanted to get things done and did not want to waste any time waiting around for the people. When Libby was a student at Northwestern, she had been shopping at Marshall Field’s and “fell in love” with a dress she saw that she could not afford. The label read “Louise Mulligan,” a Junior dress designer who happened to be designing in Chicago. Libby admired her dresses so much that she decided she wanted to meet her and find out how she got started in the Junior dress business.

Taking the advice of her friend, Virginia Spears about “bluffing” and stating, “I hadn’t been studying acting ‘for nothing!'” Libby called Louise Mulligan posing as a Northwestern Journalism student interested in interviewing her for the Daily Northwestern. Louise Mulligan agreed to meet her for an interview where Libby asked her exactly how she began in the Junior dress business. Not only was Libby able to interview Louise Mulligan herself, but she was also given a tour of the factory which allowed her to witness first-hand what it was like and who was responsible for what at a manufacturing firm. This experience only solidified Libby’s interest in Junior dress designing and her aspiration to succeed in that market.

Though Libby Payne was fired from the majority of her design jobs, including seven of the ten she held in New York City, she maintained her positive attitude through each upset. Upon arriving in New York City in 1945, Libby was quickly given a job at Dartford Deb where she worked for five years. In 1950, she was fired at her home by boss, Ed London. Ed London told her that the business had not been doing well, and that he and partners, the Goldman brothers,
felt she would be very busy with two children and probably would not want to come into the city
to work, and also that they had already found another designer who would work for $50.00 less a
week than Libby. Libby replied gracefully and of course with a positive attitude toward the
situation.

I understand perfectly. I don’t blame you. I have enjoyed my five years with you.

However, I’m not about to stay home. I will get another job and continue my career in
Designing. We have a good housekeeper for the children. I am only 35 minutes from the
city by train, as you saw yourself. I read Women’s Wear Daily and the fashion magazines
and sketch on the train. Besides, we need a lot of furnishings for the house and
landscaping. I’m glad you found someone with whom you all are happy. Don’t worry
about me. We’ll manage! I wasn’t belligerent, just self assured and more determined than
ever.

**Ambition.** Libby Payne coupled her positive attitude with ambition. Toward the end of
her time at Northwestern University, she became “obsessed” with getting a job by graduation.
Several diary entries from this period reveal both her ambitions and fears.

1/31/37: “I’d like to quit school right now and start in with design. Everything I see or do
gives me an idea. It’s all I think of!”

2/18/37: “I’m worried about what I’m going to do when I get out of school. I lack will
power to make myself do things instead of procrastinating.”

4/3/37: “I’ve got to get a good job! I have to! I simply have to!”

5/2/37: “I must be a success! I must!!!”

5/16/37: “I can’t think of anything but getting a job and how!”

5/21/37: “I can’t even think of my exams for thinking of my job-finding.”
Libby Payne’s first fashion related job out of college was for Marshall Field’s College Shop working as a sales associate but she was determined to work for the Fashion Department at Saks Fifth Avenue, managed by Helen Sisson, who taught a fashion merchandising class at Northwestern that Libby audited. Libby continued to ask Helen if there were any openings and that she was eager to work for the Fashion Department. Though she did not get promoted to the specific position, Helen did agree to hire her part-time for the College Shop at Saks Fifth Avenue.

Libby Payne’s memoir notebooks, show many examples of her ambition, but one example stands out. She set her sights on being a fashion designer, but would not be content with only that, stating that her goal was to be “the great American designer.”

**Persistence.** Libby Payne was persistent in her goal to become and stay employed as a fashion designer. Though most of the first 19 jobs she had in Chicago and St. Louis did not last very long, she continued finding work because she was determined to become a great American designer. In her memoir notebooks Libby said, “I’d like to be the great American designer. I don’t think I have it in me, but I still would like to achieve some measure of prestige.” At the start, Libby did not have experience, but her memoir notebooks indicate that she learned something from every job she had. In addition to on-the-job training, she took pattern making and draping classes at Washington University in St. Louis, determined to improve her skills.

Libby became even more persistent in 1939 when her younger brother, William (Jr.) was preparing to enter Northwestern University that September. This made Libby eager to return to Chicago and find a job to help her father with college expenses and be nearby for her brother. Libby had continuously seen ads in fashion magazines such as *Mademoiselle* for a new dress firm in Chicago called Johara. She described their dresses as “just the kind of dresses I liked to
design.” Libby wrote Johara a letter of interest and received a response that the firm had two designers with whom they were happy and would keep her letter on file. In October that year, Libby visited Chicago to help her brother move into college. While there, she dropped by Johara to meet the heads of the firm, Mr. Burr and Mr. Minsky. She said, “I happened to be in Chicago for the weekend and wanted to meet you. I also thought you should meet me, in case you should ever have an opening for me. Some day, I intend to be your designer.” A week later, Libby was hired.

Libby Payne designed for Jonathan Logan for a total of 18 years. She first worked under the Betty Barclay label for four years and then began designing for the Bleeker Street division until she was fired. Bleeker Street profits were dropping and the employee turnover had increased just before Libby was fired for being unable to design “young” dresses. Being fired from Jonathan Logan was “business as usual” to Libby and she of course had a job with Kay Windsor almost immediately, thanks to her salesman friend, Mel Weiss.

Resilience. Libby Payne was resilient. As a moderate ready-to-wear designer, she had to be. Libby had thirty jobs in 49 years; the first 19 within two years, six of those within six months. When Libby first started designing, she was told that she was not ready. Although similar, her training was in stage costume, rather than fashion design. Some of her first jobs lasted only a couple days, others lasted a month or two. When Libby was fired from Gilbert Originals in 1938 (Job #7), she proclaimed, “I won’t be branded as a quitter.” Out of the ten different positions Libby held while in New York City, she was fired or let go from seven. And after each firing, she got right back out and became designer for another firm. Over forty-nine years, Libby Payne did not go without a job for longer than two months. After having each of her
three children, Libby was resilient and fortunate to have a nanny or her mother-in-law, Dora assist so she could return to work.

**Imagination.** If there is one trait Libby had in abundance, it was imagination. Libby Payne loved to design and make clothes. This interest started as a child and only grew stronger as she matured. At Virginia Intermont (1933-1935), she was required to dress formally for Friday dinners. In her memoir notebooks, she recounted a story that shows her imagination at work.

Another Friday night I robbed our curtains. My room-mate was away for the weekend. My diary says: “I took my long white evening slip and sewed lace around the top and bottom (old lace I brought to put around a dresser set). Then I took the tie-backs with rosettes which are made of different pastel shades of organdie and tacked them across the shoulders and around the waist.

I received many compliments on my new dress. Then at dinner Mary Reams, the sarcastic one, popped up with, “Elizabeth, what on earth are you doing to hold your curtains up tonight?” I just laughed and said, “Well, you see, the curtains are holding themselves up and the tie-backs are holding me!” Everyone began commenting on how original I was and that they thought it was a grand idea! And this was before *Gone With the Wind* was even written!

Not only does this story speak of her imagination, but also of resilience. When Mary tried to poke fun for making use of her curtains, Libby did not show any sign of defeat, but rather made the best of it and used the story later to show her ability to tune into what would come in the future. Her daughter Holly stated, Libby was “ahead of her time.”

As a young teenager during the Depression years from a family without much income, Libby had no other choice but to be innovative and thrifty in the clothes she made for herself.
an interview with Libby’s daughters, older daughter Holly described how Libby utilized the environment of the West Virginia family farm by placing muslin fabric over a galvanized fence to imprint a square design onto the fabric. Holly also described how Libby would find small pine cones or acorns to use as dress buttons or ask her dad to slice corks in half to use as toggle buttons.

According to daughter Penny Payne, Libby had an intrinsic creative interest from the beginning. She was inspired by anything and everything and was constantly sketching wherever she was on whatever she could find to sketch on, as evidenced by analyzing a sketch Libby drew on a piece of hotel stamped notepaper, or the paper bag folded into four with each side covered in sketches. “I found myself constantly inspired and I began sketching incessantly my own interpretations of things I had seen, imagined, or would like to make for myself.” In her notebook, Libby recalls, “When I wasn’t sewing, I was sketching.”
Figure 5. An example of Libby Payne’s sketches on a piece of paper from Hotel Algonquin in NYC.

Figure 6. Libby Payne’s sketches on a paper bag.

It was this innovative mindset of Libby’s that translated so well into the designs she created for numerous manufacturers throughout her career. For example, Libby was cost aware, especially during World War II when due to wartime restrictions, designs had to be regulated with particulars including hem width and length, collar and cuff size. For designers in the 1940’s, innovation was the name of the game.

When Libby designed for Tracy! she was in her sixties but her imagination never let her feel old or out of place. It was during this time that Libby designed a drop waist dress in grey, white, and pink and which sold out in one day in the stores that carried it. Buyers told her that the reason sales were so exceptional was because the style of the dress was new as was the color combination she used. They continued by saying, that at the time it was “rare to find ‘newness.’”
Describing the drop waist dress in her memoir notebooks, Libby stated that this dress “made” her reputation. She had been inspired by a book called *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh that took place in the late 1920’s. At that point in her career, Libby must have still possessed her design instincts because after the dress was released and became incredibly popular—so did the colors she used. The grey, white, and pink color combination was soon all over the place. As Libby noted, “I have always been very much pleased when I see someone wearing the fabrics or clothes which I designed.”

Figure 7. Grey, white, and pink drop waist dress designed for Tracy! by Libby Payne in a Lord and Taylor Advertisement, April 23, 1982.

**Career Aptitude**

Another theme to emerge through data analysis of Libby Payne’s story was Career Aptitude. Within this theme are the sub-themes of Work Experiences, Creative Strategies, Attention to Detail, Success Factors, and What Influenced or Inspired her. It was evident through stories in
her memoir notebooks that Libby was skilled in her fashion design career because of this combination.

*Work Experiences.* Libby Payne’s memoir notebooks contained several stories related to each of her jobs. It is these that shed light on typical experiences for a moderate fashion designer during the 1930’s through the 1980’s. Early in her career, Libby and her designer friend Mary Tettreault attended Fashion Group luncheons every month.

Each month we went to The Fashion Group, usually in the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria during my early years in New York. This is an organization for women in the fields of Fashion and Advertising, and their guests. It was always interesting to meet the other people at the table, as we introduced ourselves and identified our field of interest, actually the reason for being an invited member of the Fashion Group. There were always interesting speakers or a great fashion show. When I went to the first Fashion Group Luncheon, I sat at the same round table with two famous designers, Claire McCardell and Adele Simpson.

One of Libby’s friends, Billie Gordon, worked as a fabric designer and was always taking European trips for trend information. She would then let Libby know what trends she saw and inform her of what direction to take with her designs. After one of Billie Gordon’s European trips, she suggested Libby sample some of the leopard print fabric at her firm because she saw animal print as a major upcoming trend. Libby listened and designed a group of leopard print shirtwaist dresses for Parade Dress. As soon as it made it to the stockroom, the leopard print dress turned out to be a hit among all the women at the firm, with the buyers, and of course their moderate customers.
When the first 200 leopard shirtwaist dresses appeared in our stockroom in sizes 6-18, Chris brought size 8 into my design room and tried it on. “I’m buying this one,” she said, “I love it!” I dashed out and got a size 14 and put it on immediately—and kept it on. Estelle said, “I want one, too!” and she put on a size 10. Pretty soon all the women that worked at Parade had on a leopard shirtwaist dress. When we individually went out to the book-keeper to pay the “wholesale-price-less-8%” for our dresses, she said, “Oh, I have to have one of those,” and put on a size 10. Soon Arthur Rodbell’s sister who was an excellent saleswoman for us, had on a size 12 in the showroom. As assistant-buyers or buyers came in that afternoon, they asked, “What’s this? You girls are wearing a uniform?” Each of them acquired her size out of the stockroom and went into the model’s room to see if it fit. Some bright buyers placed orders right away for their stores.

By 6:00 that evening, all 200 dresses were on our backs. The salesmen called a meeting to decide how much yardage would be needed to fill contemplated orders. People flocked in the next day to see our “hot leopard dress.” When Loomskill ran out of leopard goods, we bought tiger or zebra. They sold also, but not as well as the leopard.

With each of the firms Libby Payne worked for, she and her colleagues frequented numerous fabric firms where Libby had interesting experiences. In her memoir notebooks, Libby described a trip to Heller Fabrics showroom while working for Bleeker Street.

Whenever we went to Heller’s showroom, we stopped in the entrance hall to look at the huge modern painting of which Mr. Heller was extremely proud. I’m afraid we didn’t really admire it as much as we ridiculed it. Everyone said when Mr. Heller wasn’t around
of course, that it looked like a house painter had dribbled a lot of black, white and bright blue paint on his canvas drop-cloth. The salesman told us that it had been painted by a neighbor of Mr. Heller’s near his home in East Hampton, Long Island. Mr. Heller found that the man needed money, so he had become his benefactor for a reasonable amount. The man’s name was Pollock—Jackson Pollock! Of course, soon after we saw that first painting we began to see similar ones by Jackson Pollock at the Whitney Museum, the Metropolitan, the Museum of Modern Art, etc.

Aside from the expansive industry experience Libby Payne had, she also gained a bit of academic experience. One of her bosses, Ed London from Dartford Deb and Toni Edwards often lectured in Fashion Marketing at New York University, but when he was out of town would ask Libby to cover his class and lecture about designing. Libby later participated in lecturing on her own at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), where daughter Penny attended school.

**Creative Strategies.** Over her long career, Libby Payne employed various creative strategies that contributed to the success of her designs. She always gravitated to “newness,” and for each line she designed would simplify or adapt the newest market trends to suit the firm for whom she was working.

When Ed Weiss and Danny Pressner, Libby’s bosses at Jonathan Logan, asked her if she’d like to continue designing for Betty Barclay or take over Bleeker Street, she told them “I always want to go with the ‘new’!” all while thinking “and where the emphasis and advertising money is.” Not only is this indicative of Libby’s interest in keeping lines fresh, it also provides evidence of her business knowledge.

While working in St. Louis, Libby figured out what would sell for moderate-price firms. Her first designing job in St. Louis was with Bernard’s, a Junior dress manufacturer where Libby
experienced some of her first design successes when buyers from one of the largest area
department stores bought the dresses she designed because they claimed they would be “big
sellers.” The first line of Junior dresses Libby designed for Johara in Chicago turned out to be
very successful, to which Libby said, “I knew they would sell, and they did!”

Libby identified new trends easily, especially in fabrics and trimmings because of her
stellar relationships with the industry’s salesmen. She often designed with the new and
innovative fabrics introduced during the decades she designed. Some of these fabrics included
Katya, a drip-dry fabric, Rachel knits, and the use of air tucking. Libby figured out how to
combine the right fabrics that would make the dresses she designed more interesting and
appealing to the customers. She paid great attention to detail in her designs. She knew that if she
made her designs have a particular point of interest, such as a trimming or button detail, it would
be enough to intrigue customers but in a way that would not cost the manufacturer too much to
produce.

Often times, Libby’s designs included simple lines with an emphasis on the details—like
trimmings. She knew that this creative strategy would keep costs low for the firm so that they
would make a profit on the garments. Not long after Libby started working for Bobbie Brooks
did Maury Saltzman realize that “Libby Payne” was also “Betty Miller.” He admitted to Libby
that for Bobbie Brooks, he had successfully knocked off her Johara designs as well as her
Dartford Deb designs. In Libby’s memoir notebooks, she includes pages from Frank’s own
personal biography from which he said about Libby working for Bobbie Brooks, “She should
remember that the company she had worked for had made a lot of money both because her
styling was so saleable and the fact that her dresses were simple to make.” This goes to show
how Libby’s design instincts for her simple, yet innovative designs were market-ready and saleable.

In an interview with Penny Payne, she said that customers who wore Libby’s designs told her “you make me feel so pretty.” And this was probably attributable to the fact that Libby designed the fronts and backs of her dresses to have a flat middle with gathers on both sides near the hips, which consequently was very flattering because as Penny said, it hid the “pooch” that most women are concerned about.

Another strategy of Libby’s was to pose as a buyer at fashion or trade shows. She even had her own faux business card with the business name “Kelly’s” based in Denver, Colorado. Posing as a buyer allowed Libby to save designs and write detailed notes about a garment in the notepads she always had with her. She would sketch about six designs to a page with notes and arrows that indicated what was what such as the fabric, color, trim or companies for specific trims and fabrics to use. Libby’s innovative nature helped her to record the inspiration she needed for her designs in unconventional ways. According to Penny and Holly Payne, often Libby would have them pose in front of a store window, or next to garments on a sales floor and take their picture in order to inconspicuously record the garments she was trying to remember for her own design inspiration.
Attention to detail. In her memoir notebooks regarding her jobs, Libby included a lengthy section about an instance at Winston Mills fabric firm. Libby and some of her colleagues, including her bosses from Bleeker Street visited Winston Mills to look at their new fabric line. After the salesmen finished showing the line, Libby glanced up to a shelf where a particular fabric caught her eye and asked why they did not show them that fabric. The salesmen said they were not too crazy about the print and therefore decided not to show it, but then pulled it out to show Libby and informed her it was called the “Thunderbird Pattern.” The fabric was grey, white, and turquoise with an unusual pattern. Libby, of course exclaimed “I love it! I think it would be a good pattern for us!” Libby decided they would sample only the 15 yards they had made in the print. “It turned out to be a winner,” Libby remembered, “An imaginative designer sees a fabric or item that the salesman isn’t pushing but which sparks an idea around which to make a successful group.”

As with the “Thunderbird Pattern,” Libby had another similar experience at one of Winston Mills’ divisions called “Merry-Go-Round” when fabric salesman, George Schurr told Libby he wanted to show her his new and different line of novelty knits. In addition to the fabrics she sampled from George, she also noticed standing rolls of fabric in a box sitting in a corner and asked to see them. George told Libby they were called “Rachel knits” which were made on a different type of knitting machine and that the Italian designer who designed them was there that day. Libby met the charming Italian man (who turned out to be a Count) and sampled several of his knits, which she planned on making into a line of light weight Spring and Summer dresses.

One of these groups was cream colored with alternating pastel colors in a scalloped pattern. The piece that earned a full colored page in the Sunday New York Times Magazine was
a jacket with scallop detail, a solid cream colored collar and matching solid cream colored dress. As with Style #862 for Bobbie Brooks, Bleeker Street sold and shipped 100,000 in two months of this scalloped patterned garment. Libby later learned that Merry-Go-Round shipped 3,000,000 yards of the same pattern that were used for copies of her jacket dress all over the world.

Figure 8. Scalloped patterned jacket with solid cream colored dress for Bleeker Street (March 16, 1975) that sold 100,000 in two months.

**Success Factors.** As Libby contemplated how to start a design career, Virginia spears told her that if “you have good taste, a good sense of color, know how to make your own clothes, sketch a little, bluff a lot, and have ‘half a brain’” she could make it as a designer. Libby possessed all of these traits which contributed to her eventual long-term success as a fashion designer in Chicago, St. Louis, and New York City.

Libby certainly had an eye for color which was noticeable from the sketches and fabric swatches she saved and were analyzed as a part of this study. In an interview with Penny Payne,
she said her mother would always tell her and sister, Holly that even if they did not have a lot, always “make meals colorful.” Both Penny and Holly remembered how much Libby loved color. In a tribute to Libby on January 11, 1998 Holly said “My mom had several phrases that I think of when I reflect on Mom’s perspective on life. One was ‘Oh, what a beautiful color!’ She believed in the power of color—in bright shades and tones…she would say, ‘colors change emotions. Life is too short to wear something drab.’”

Not only did Libby have a definite eye for color, she also had a knack for marketability and an understanding of the fashion business. Libby credits pattern-maker, Harry Alaynick from Johara as someone who taught her a lot of useful information about the fashion industry, saying “It would have taken me weeks or months to learn the things he taught me immediately.” In her memoir notebooks, Libby also included statements made by husband, Frank that pointed out her skill for designing garments that would sell. Frank Payne said, “She should remember that the company she had worked for had made a lot of money both because her styling was so saleable and the fact that her dresses were simple to make, i.e. didn’t require a lot of labor.”

As observed from Libby Payne’s sketches and designs, it was clear that she possessed a major sense of creativity. According to both of her daughters, Libby was constantly sketching. She sketched anything she found interesting, and sketched it on whatever she could find at the moment.

*What influenced or inspired her.* While Libby was growing up, she and her extended family often spent time on a family farm in West Virginia. With her cousins, she would make doll clothes on the attic steps using scraps of fabrics belonging to her Aunt. In her memoir notebooks, something Libby remembered was “one of the things I most enjoyed was going through the old fashion magazines especially “The Delineator” many had fashionable paper dolls
with exciting clothes…these magazines were usually either in the attic or the barn loft. This must have been another influence on me toward my designing career.” In addition to making doll clothes and reading fashion magazines, Libby was also inspired by working with her mother in selecting fabrics and patterns and playing with details in the clothes they made together.

The movies influenced Libby and her designs enormously, and even her own personal style. Libby was impressed with the glamour in the movies, especially after seeing the movie “Roberta” in 1935 while she was a student at Virginia Intermont. “Roberta” was a fashion story and according to Libby, was “perhaps the beginning of my interest in being a designer.” From that point on, she would study the clothes in many of the double features she saw. Libby paid attention to the way clothing moved on the actors and their appropriateness to the mood or period of the film.

In school, some of Libby’s favorite subjects included art and ancient history. Among actresses Katharine Hepburn and Joan Crawford, Libby identified with Queen Elizabeth I because of her palpable independence. Libby even made herself a “Queen Elizabeth dress” which included a large lacy ruff and that she wore for special occasions or when she needed to feel confident. Through content analysis, it became clear that Libby found inspiration from all around her. A natural archivist, she had saved all of the magazine cut-outs of images that influenced her designs.

**Network**

In a tribute to Libby Payne at the time of her death, daughter Holly Payne said:

[Libby] had an unsurpassed ability to get people to talk to her in any situation-a party, at church coffee hour, on a train touring across Europe, at McDonalds and IHOP, on an Italian Prince’s doorstep or in her oncologist’s waiting room. She would turn to someone
and say, ‘You look like you do something interesting!’ And whoever it was, they were hers. She could get anyone talking about themselves, making people feel instantly at home with her.

Libby’s uncanny ability to befriend almost anyone also benefitted her tremendously in her career. From the start of her career, she realized the importance of maintaining good relationships with the right people in the business. In her memoir notebooks, she details several of her “favorite” co-workers and fabrics and trimmings salesmen who seemed to adore her and want her to succeed as much as she did.

**Friends.** Libby also had valuable friendships with colleagues within the fashion industry such as Mary Tettreault and Billie Gordon. Mary was also one of Libby’s good designer friends who worked for Parade Dress and at one time worked for the legendary, Elizabeth Hawes. Together they would frequent the Fashion Group Luncheon’s every month that were often hosted by one of the more sophisticated hotels of New York City, like the Waldorf Astoria or The Plaza. Libby mentioned how these luncheons were always inspirational to her for ideas that she could adapt to her moderately-priced lines.

About the Fashion Group, Libby also said, “When I went to my first Fashion Group Luncheon, I sat at the same round table with two famous designers, Claire McCardell and Adele Simpson.” Though Libby was impressed by the designers themselves, she was not impressed with their personal styles however, stating that they were not quite as glamorous as she expected they would be. “I was disappointed to find Claire McCardell dressed very simply in sports clothes, although I always loved her clothes and was proud to own a few. Adele Simpson was very tiny, friendly little woman, but not glamorous as I expected her to be.”
Billie Gordon was another one of Libby’s good friends in the fabrics and trimmings business who worked as a designer for Loomskill Fabrics. Billie would regularly visit Europe to forecast fabric and color trends. Whenever Billie returned from Europe with garments and information on the trends, she would pass the information onto Libby and also let Libby borrow the garments to “knock off the body” for the lines. In her memoir notebooks, Libby referred to Billie as her mentor for finding this kind of valuable forecasting information.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>“Gene”</th>
<th>Ellen Lace Co.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Billie Gordon</td>
<td>Designer for Loomskill; Libby’s best friend in fabric business</td>
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<td>Marvin Greenberg</td>
<td>Embroidery manufacturer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dave Horowitz</td>
<td>Trimmings salesman (Johara)</td>
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<td>Mike Katz</td>
<td>Fabric salesman</td>
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<td>Nat Marcus</td>
<td>Fabric salesman for Winston Mills</td>
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<td>Mr. Messner</td>
<td>Loomskill Fabrics; Libby’s “mentor”</td>
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<td>Sol Roth</td>
<td>Trimmings salesman for Manhattan Embroidery Co.</td>
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<tr>
<td>George Schurr</td>
<td>Fabric salesman for Merry-Go-Round (div. of Winston Mills)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mel Weiss</td>
<td>Fabric salesman; founded Quorum Fabrics</td>
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<td>Morty Wishbow</td>
<td>Ribbon salesman</td>
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**Co-workers.** One of Libby Payne’s first bosses was Mr. Michel from Michel, Inc. (Job #4). Though she did not work for Mr. Michel for very long, she continued to sketch and model for him on the side, between her other jobs. To Libby, Mr. Michel became a good friend and mentor in the business, and probably one of the first relationships Libby formed that would aid
her in finding and getting future jobs. Mr. Michel recommended her to work for David Roth and Co., Libby’s eleventh job that lasted from March 26 to April 17, 1938.

In addition to Mr. Michel, Libby wrote about her other bosses and the relationship she had with them, such as Maruice Saltzman from Bobbie Brooks, Ed London from Dartford Deb and Toni Edwards, and Beau Baker from Tracy! and St. Barth’s. Libby described Maury Saltzman as a born leader and a kind man, and Ed London admired Libby for her design talent, regardless of firing her from Dartford Deb at the request of his partners, the Goldman brothers. When Libby worked for Tracy! and St. Barth’s, her boss was Beau Baker. In her memoir notebooks, she indicated that the two of them worked well together, especially when they were designing together for St. Barth’s and the Baker Payne label.

Libby worked for Reich Dress Co. from September 1 to 16, 1938 which was owned by Max Reich, the brother of Sam Reich from Franklin Dress Co. Franklin Dress Co. was the first design job that Libby “bluffed” her way into at the advice of friend Virginia Spears. Needless to say, Sam Reich was not happy when he found out that Libby was more inexperienced than she initially led on. Perhaps feeling a bit guilty, when Libby was working for his brother at Reich Dress Co., she visited Sam at Franklin Dress Co. to admit that she had bluffed to get the job with his company back in the fall of 1937. After Libby paid Sam that visit, he saw Mr. Schwartz, who was a well-known lace salesman and who advised Libby on jobs, and told him “In two years that little girl is going to be a darned good designer.”

At Johara, Inc. in Chicago, Illinois Libby worked for Mr. Harry Minsky and Mr. Burr. She worked with pattern-maker, Henry Alaynick who Libby was very grateful for because they understood and respected each other. Henry knew the needs of the Johara customer, pricing,
yardage and required timing. He had a lot of knowledge of the business and passed that onto Libby. “It would’ve taken me weeks or months to learn the things he taught me immediately.”

*Industry Affiliates.* When Libby began her career, it didn’t take her long to figure out that the people she formed relationships with in the business would greatly increase her chance of success as a designer. In her memoir notebooks, she admitted that “the fabric or trimming salesman with whom a designer works is extremely important to the designer’s success. They must become the designer’s friend and confidant.” According to Libby’s daughter Holly, it behooved suppliers to be friendly to designers because it was very much a “you scratch my back, I scratch yours” type of mentality in the fashion industry. The role that fabrics and trimmings suppliers and salesmen played was vital to the success of designers because they were truly the backbone of the industry.

In her memoir notebooks, Libby notes that her favorite salesmen had certain qualities: “trustworthy, fast to deliver stock or samples, quick communication with any issues, fairly priced, must deliver a high standard of quality, and efficiently return phone calls.”

In her memoir notebooks, Libby details the people with whom she worked at her numerous jobs in New York City. Of the network of people that she lists, those who stand out the most as having the most clout among designers and the fashion industry were the fabrics and trimmings salesmen. One in particular is Nat Marcus. Libby knew Nat Marcus from when she worked in Chicago at Johara and then continued to use his line from Winston Mills fabric firm when she worked for Bleeker Street in New York City. Nat Marcus was not only a fabric salesman, but was also known to run an informal “employment service” for designers. When a designer was fired, they went straight to Nat to find another job and on the flip side, when a design or manufacturing firm needed a new designer they would consult Nat for his input or
references for a good fashion designer. The reason was because Nat Marcus knew many people within the fashion industry. The fabric and trimmings salesmen had reputations as the middlemen of the industry. Nat knew designers’ backgrounds and he knew firms’ backgrounds and current standings, this in turn led to successful matches for both a designer and a manufacturing firm.

Another one of Libby’s favorite salesmen was Sol Roth who was with Manhattan Embroidery Co. Sol introduced Libby to “air-tucking”, then a new type of surface treatment in which designs were raised through cording on the wrong side and parallel stitches on the right side. In her memoir notebooks, Libby states: “Sol Roth was a real ‘find’ for me. His enthusiasm and excitement in working out new ideas, his wealth of imagination and understanding, his beautiful designs that ‘made’ the dress, his moderate prices, and the speed with which he worked and delivered the samples back to us made him a real resource for us.”

Mel Weiss was another one of Libby’s favorite fabrics salesmen who aided designers such as herself in finding new jobs. Libby worked with Mel when she was at Betty Barclay for Jonathan Logan and he was a salesman for Cohn, Hall, Marx. According to Libby, Mel fit all of her favorite salesman qualities. With three other partners, Mel Weiss formed Quorum Fabrics, a successful fabric firm that specialized in novelty knits with solid colors to match.

**Personal Influence**

Libby Payne was the kind of person who naturally inspired many people, both strangers and friends. Her personal style coupled with her charismatic personality was a motivator for emulation. In addition to her personal style, Libby created many designs over her long career that proved to be influential.
**Personal Style.** In her notebooks, Libby Payne remarked about how she never felt like she looked much like a “beauty queen” but tried to make herself look as attractive as she could and with limited means. “I needed lots of ego support” she said, and that she needed the compliments like most people do. She especially appreciated the compliments from people, and about the clothes she designed and made for herself.

Mrs. Persing, Dean of Women at Northwestern told Libby, “Elizabeth, when you walk in the room or I see you anywhere, you always make me feel that I want to do something with my hair or my clothes or my make-up for you always look so well-groomed.” And her favorite teacher, Mrs. Swift told her she always looked as though she had stepped out of “Vogue” with her “regal look.” Libby also hated her very curly hair, which is what made her become the hat person she was known to be. Frank once told Libby after they went to the theater, “When you came out of the ladies room, did you notice those two girls turn and notice your hat? In fact all evening, everyone seemed to be admiring your new hat. Were you aware of that?” “I don’t miss much”, Libby smugly replied.

In a letter written to her family while she was at Northwestern, Libby told them about how she ushered at the University Theater’s annual Shakespeare’s Birthday production “Henry IV”. Libby wrote:

At the last minute, I discovered that the ushers for this informal occasion were supposed to wear long dresses with sleeves. Since I had nothing I thought appropriate, I’d have to make one.

Since I figured that everyone else would be in white or spring pastels, I decided I would like to wear black net, but I would have to get done by 8:00 pm. Perhaps I could wear it over my red taffeta slip. So at noon, I ran down to Lord’s Dept. Store to look for the net.
It was Evanston’s “Dollar Day” and to my amazement, just inside the front door I saw a sign- “Pure Silk French Net- 72” wide- $1.00/yd.” There were flat bolts of about ten colors including black! I bought 5 yds and ran the 6 or 8 blocks home.

When I got home at 2:00 I discovered the black net over red didn’t look right, so I decided to chase back to town and buy some black material for a slip and some colored trimming to offset the black. At 3:30 pm I started sewing and at 8:00 I had on and wore a perfect dream of a dress, believe it or not!

Libby went on to describe the dress with a small sketch included in her letter and then said,

Well, believe it or not, and I hope I don’t sound too braggy, I was as much of a show as the play itself and received almost the same amount of attention. When I walked into the lobby of the theatre, where everyone was talking, a hush came over everything & people said in whispers to their neighbors, “Isn’t that a gorgeous dress! Who is that girl? Oohhoooh! Lovely! Devine! etc. etc.”

All the cast and crew members (& there were about 100 in it) raved and came up and asked if this was the dress people said I made, teachers commented in extremely complimentary terms. I was in my seventh heaven! You know how I thrive on things like that. And I did look striking and attractive! One girl is begging me to make her one. I may try to get an order for one like mine at some exclusive store-just for fun. People would evidently like it and I’ve certainly never seen anything like it. If I can make things people like, why can’t I sell them? I shall! I shall!

While Libby Payne attended Northwestern University, she worked at a local tea room where she met several people. In her memoir notebooks, she includes letters she wrote to her family while she was in school in which she describes her experiences at school, or at work.
March 28, 1936

Another unusual thing happened tonight at work. I went into the “powder room” to straighten up and a very attractive young woman followed me. She said, “Pardon me, but I have been noticing you all evening as you walked about (hostessing) and I have admired your dress so very much. Please don’t think me impertinent, but where ever did you find it?” I told her that I had designed and made it, which surprised her very much. She later introduced me to her father. They seem very genteel and aristocratic.

The dress she was admiring is the new one I made of very sheer “Kelly green” wool. It has a yoke with shirting on the bodice, very full sleeves, and a multi-gored very full flared skirt that swings as I walk. The most unusual thing is the belt, exceptionally wide, about 3 ½” with multi-rows of stitching and a very large buckle. After I made the belt, I couldn’t find a buckle to fit, so I had to make one. I took three or four layers of cardboard, cut out a buckle with a razor blade, used fine “piano wire to wrap the layers of cardboard to hold the buckle together, then cut long bias 1” strips of the green fabric and wrapped the buckle around and around till I got the look I wanted. The belt pulled through and snapped, since I had no prong. I get compliments every time I wear it. Many, including the young woman I met tonight, tell me I should go into designing clothes.

In 1963, Frank and Libby were invited to attend the Crystal Ball at the Philadelphia Museum of Art sponsored by The Fashion Group of Philadelphia. The Crystal Ball was a society benefit for the costume wing of the museum, and the guests of honor were the legendary Hollywood icon turned Princess, Grace Kelly and Prince Ranier of Monaco. Other notable
people who were honored were opera singer, Marian Anderson, designers Teal Traina and James Galanos. For the ball, Libby decided she did not want to wear pastel colors even though it was spring and pastels were the expected color palette. Instead Libby wanted to wear something she felt comfortable in, so she designed and made a simple, fitted sheath with long sleeves and a jewel neckline that was “blueberry,” quite the opposite of a pastel color choice. Over top, she wore a full length cape in bright red.

Apparently, Libby made the correct decision that evening because the guest of honor, Princess Grace also made her entrance down the grand staircase in a blueberry colored gown. Later that evening on the dance floor, Libby attracted the attention of a small group of onlookers, including Geraldine Stutz, the Henri Bendel’s president at the time, along with James Galanos and Teal Traina. They were all in awe of Libby’s blueberry gown and red cape ensemble. Libby noted in her memoir notebooks that in September of that same year, she passed Bendel’s and saw a long red wool double-knit cape in one window, and a blueberry colored knit sheath with a pearl choker in another window that read: “Galanos and Bendel’s say; smart women will wear wool knit for evening this fall! $995.00.”
Figures 10 & 11. Libby Payne’s invitation and personal notes about the Crystal Ball in 1963.

**Designs.** Throughout her memoir notebooks and the descriptions of each of her New York City Design jobs, Libby Payne described many of her workrooms that were mainly located on varying floors of either 1400 or 1407 Broadway. She indicated that Betty Barclay, the first division of Jonathan Logan she worked for, was where she had her favorite workroom. After completing a line, as the designer Libby would then present it to a range of department store buyers at the manufacturer’s showroom. She said, “I always knew when I was doing well by the reaction of the ‘nodders.’” Referring to people in the audience who nodded approval when liking something they had seen or heard.

Libby referenced many of her most successful designs throughout her memoir notebooks where she described in great detail each of her design jobs in New York City from 1945 until she
retired in 1987. Libby Payne had many design successes with several of the manufacturers she worked for. From 1951 to 1956, she designed dresses for the popular moderate label, Bobbie Brooks. Founded by Maurice (Maury) Saltzman, Bobbie Brooks was headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio. As Libby noted, Bobbie Brooks was also among the first dress firms to go public on the NYSE and one of the earliest to use IBM (International Business Machines) computers to analyze sales and customer preferences.

One of Libby’s most successful designs for Bobbie Brooks was “Style #862” which sold 100,000 in its first two months on the market. “Style #862” was a sleeveless shirtwaist dress in blue chambray that buttoned down the front and had six large red square appliqués and white cotton braiding on its full skirt. When Libby presented it to boss, Maury Saltzman, he said “That’s a hell of a dress” and the buyers agreed but that it would be “too expensive to make.” Maury then replied, “I think it’s a fabulous dress and we have to make it. We’ll make it for $8.75 wholesale and sell it for $17.95 in the stores.” After its first year on the market, Maury called Libby to tell her that they were going to sell “Style #862” for a dollar less wholesale to which Libby responded: “Maury, why reduce the price when you are already selling it so well at $8.75? We might as well make the extra dollar.” Maury and the Bobbie Brooks team listened to Libby and continued to sell the dress successfully for five years, showing again Libby’s knack for producing marketable designs.
Another successful Bobbie Brooks design was the “Katya” dress which was named for and made from the first drip-dry fabric which was introduced by J.P. Stevens Company. The fabric was 65% cotton and 35% DuPont polyester. According to Libby, the “Katya” dress “sold like hotcakes” for two years from 1956-1958.
Figure 13. “Katya” dress for Bobbie Brooks (1956-1958)

Results Overview

The results presented from the content analysis of Libby Payne’s personally written memoir notebooks about her life and experiences, one-on-one interviews with daughters, and review of advertisements and personal artifacts included details about the business behind accessible ready-to-wear clothing, the evolution of the fashion designer, and secrets to success in this role. This information proved that there were many reasons for Libby Payne’s achievements through five decades of 20th century American fashion, the 1930’s -1980’s. Libby’s story reveals a culmination of experiences, people, personal attributes, and creative strategies that made her successful as a designer in fashion’s moderate-price zone.
Discussion

This study shined light on the experiences of an American ready-to-wear fashion designer during the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century. From one woman’s story, insights were gained on the personal background and characteristics, job experiences, network of people, and personal influence that all played a part in the successful journey of this impactful individual from the 1930’s through the 1980’s. This individual was of course, Libby Payne whose life and career can add to knowledge by serving as an example of a moderate price-point ready-to-wear designer.

It was these more “ordinary” fashion designers, such as Libby Payne, who made up the majority of creative talent in the American fashion industry, working behind labels of moderately priced manufacturing firms, presenting ideas that served a mass consumer market with a seemingly insatiable demand for new styles. As Libby’s story has demonstrated, behind every successful label or brand is a talented designer. Even the prevalent “celebrity designer” labels of today’s fashion industry have talented designers executing the brand.

While fashion designers like Libby Payne were, and continue to be numerous, the bulk of previous research on United States fashion designers has focused on those who worked in the couture and/or produced clothing with labels that bore their name (Epstein, 1945; Ley, 1978; Mackrell, 2014; Marketti & Parsons, 2007; Milbank, 1989; Tortora & Eubank, 2010; Walz & Morris, 1978). According to Stansbery Buckland (2005), “American designers knew how to cater to the American woman, but their anonymity made them the stepchildren of the fashion world.”

Although the name of most ready-to-wear designers was often absent, these publicly unknown fashion designers deserve recognition for the significant impact they made on the ready-to-wear industry and the “ordinary” people for whom they clothed. Like her counterparts, Libby Payne could also have been lost to history. But, she made sure that this was not the case.
Libby was “ahead of her time” as Holly Payne said. Not only did she constantly chase after the new and fresh in her work, Libby also anticipated the growing awareness among scholars that in order to truly understand American fashion history, it is important to uncover the stories of “hidden hands” in the ready-to-wear industry.

**Libby Payne in the Context of the American Fashion Industry**

   In 1992, Libby carefully documented her life and career, including remembrances, diary entries, advertisements, and photographs in a 456 page memoir notebook. The experiences and accomplishments of this one individual can inform our understanding of the American ready-to-wear fashion industry and those whose careers revolved around it. As stated in the literature, fashion is change; it “implies newness and freshness;” it is constant evolution (Frings, 2008). Beginning in the mid-19th century and fueled by the development of the department store, the American fashion industry offered mass-produced clothing that proved to be convenient and cost-effective by the early 20th century (Gamber, 1997; Welters & Cunningham, 2005). By the 1920s, a general consumer focus on acquisition of “new” over well-constructed clothing, spurred considerable growth in the American ready-to-wear industry (Keist, 2012). Market segmentation, viewing a market in smaller “segments” based on differences in preferences for certain goods was reflected in the development of the department store and price zones in fashion goods, primarily clothing (Leipzig, 2008; Smith, 1956).

   By the time Libby Payne made her entrance into the fashion industry in the mid-1930s, consumers were experiencing the influence of mass production of clothing and the beginning of “bargain shopping” (Richards, 1951). The industry developed price zones to better meet the needs of all market segments, making ready-to-wear available in every price point (Tortora & Eubank, 2005). Continual consumer demand and style turnover fueled America’s garment trade,
especially in the nation’s top industrial cities including Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and of course, New York. (Jarnell and Judelle, 1974). Libby was in the right place at the right time when she “bluffed” her way into a fashion design job in Chicago in 1937.

Ready-to-wear clothing manufacturers seek to meet consumer needs by producing what the consumer wants, when they want it, at prices they can afford, and are willing to pay. Through many positions in Chicago, St. Louis, and New York City, Libby Payne learned the business and proved her value at the retail level, where a fashion’s acceptance is measured by purchases. As witnessed by her continual ability to stay employed, Libby Payne’s story shows that designers skilled in developing ideas that appealed to consumers at an attractive price point were much in demand. Her memoir notebooks included many examples supporting Troxell and Judelle (1971), who said, designers able to interpret and satisfy changing consumer tastes and preferences succeed.

By the 1950s and 1960s, when Libby Payne was thriving in New York, the American ready-to-wear industry had grown significantly in size. Some firms, including those she worked for, Bobbie Brooks and Jonathan Logan, who produced “moderately priced separates and dresses developed multimillion-dollar businesses” (Ley, 1978, p. 113). There was a lot at stake with certain designers and manufacturers becoming well-known. Libby experienced what Ley noted in 1978, “…many manufacturers have trouble deciding between the various merits of promoting an individual or keeping the designers more or less anonymous and promoting the name of the manufacturer only” (p. 89). This tension between creative talent, business success, and recognition is an ever-present thread in the story of Libby Payne and other moderate-price zone fashion designers. It is through dissemination of this research that the recognition of her
accomplishment can be realized. The following sections discuss, interpret, and offer conclusions about the notable aspects of “unknown” fashion designer Libby Payne’s life and career.

**Background and Foundational Experiences**

In answering the first research question, “How did Libby Payne’s background and experience influence her fashion design ambitions?” the content of Libby’s memoir notebooks presented sub-themes of family, education, school experiences, and marriage and children.

Libby was born in Cuba in 1917. Being the child of missionaries who moved often, this made her unafraid to make friends. Libby was easily adaptable to new places and new cultures, including the culture of the fashion industry. Witnessing her father’s experience with a variable income dependent on parishioners, this experience gave her intrinsic motivation to do well at every position she held for herself and for her family. One example is when Libby found a job at Johara in Chicago in order to help her father pay for her younger brother’s college education. Libby’s daughters recalled witnessing their mother’s work ethic constantly. Libby would often be found sketching designs when away from the office, even while vacationing on their boat in the Hampton’s.

Libby Payne lived through some of the most important social events of 20th century American history such as the Great Depression and World War II. She saw the “Jazz Singer” in 1927, met friends of a famous war hero, and danced to the band led by Desi Arnez. She was a teenager during the Depression, which framed her ideas about affordable fashion and “the everybody.” Libby’s interest in fashion emerged when she would sew with her mother and cousin, which reinforced frugality. A prime example of her cost-awareness is when Libby felt guilt for overspending on stationary. Although Libby’s talents were great, perhaps these experiences led her to persist as a moderate-level fashion designer.
Libby’s immediate and extended family was highly educated, with many possessing college educations from Northwestern and Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Libby herself earned a degree from Virginia Intermont Women’s College in 1935 and Northwestern School of Speech where she extended her interest in sewing to specialize in stage costume in 1937. Libby worked on the costume crew during her time at Northwestern which improved her design and construction skills. In the summer before she went to Northwestern, she had two retail sales jobs, her first exposure to the fashion industry. This was furthered by auditing a class in Fashion Merchandising taught by Helen Sisson, the fashion director of Marshall Field’s.

The summer after graduation, she worked at both Marshall Field’s and Saks Fifth Avenue’s College Shops. She also was employed by Carson, Pirie, Scott before “bluffing” her way into designing. These retail experiences taught Libby an understanding of the fashion business along with an ability to interpret and satisfy consumer tastes and preferences as noted by Alyson (n.d.), Fitzgerald (2015), Granger (2014), Kokemuller (n.d.), Loretto (2014), and Troxell and Judelle (1971). This was especially important as she began her career in the 1930s when prices of ready-to-wear clothing became available to Americans at every price point (Tortora & Eubank, 2005).

Libby Payne wanted both a career and a family. Like many of her generation, she and Frank were a war-time couple, marrying only a week after Pearl Harbor and his enlistment into the Signal Corps. Shortly after their marriage, Frank was sent overseas for 32 months and Libby continued her career with Johara in Chicago. Through three pregnancies, Libby pursued her own ambitions in fashion design, and her memoir notebooks reveal strong relationships, in fact her youngest daughter followed in her footsteps by working in the fashion industry.
Personal Characteristics

In answering the second research question, “What personal characteristics did Libby Payne possess that contributed to her success over a fifty year fashion design career in mid-20th century America?” content of Libby’s memoir notebooks presented sub-themes of attitude, ambition, persistence, resilience, and imagination. Libby Payne’s personal characteristics informed her eventual career in fashion design; her passion to be a fashion designer was honest and intrinsic. From making doll clothes as a young girl to being inspired by almost anything she laid her eyes on, “fashion designer” was sure to be the title on her resume… and the one that carried her legacy.

Libby Payne had an optimistic attitude. She was a go-getter, a doer, even from elementary school. Not hesitating on advice given to her by Virginia Spears, a working designer friend, Libby utilized her acting skills to land an interview with Junior dress designer, Louise Mulligan, known as the inventor of the Junior dress market. Always positive, Libby gracefully carried on after each of her design jobs ended. A prime example is when she was fired from Dartford Deb by her boss, Ed London who came to her home to give her the news. He told Libby that he and his partners felt like she would be too busy since she just had her second child, and that business was not very good anyway. Libby responded tactfully by telling Mr. London that she understood perfectly but was not about to stay at home and would find another job to continue her designing career.

Libby’s ambition for being a fashion designer was evident from her experiences at Northwestern through the end of her fifty-year career. At the end of her schooling, all Libby wanted was to land a job as a designer and wrote numerous diary entries indicating this goal. When Libby began working her first job out of school at the Marshall Field’s College Shop, she
was determined to work her way into the Fashion Department at Saks Fifth Avenue, which was led by Helen Sisson. She continued to ask Ms. Sisson about a position until Libby was again given a part-time position in the College Shop instead.

Libby Payne’s goal was to become the “Great American designer.” To do this, she knew that she needed to be persistent. While gaining experience in St. Louis, Libby took pattern making and draping classes to improve her designing knowledge. In getting her job with Johara in Chicago, she first wrote a letter of interest to the firm who told her they already had two designers with whom they were happy. A few months after this instance, Libby actually dropped by the Johara headquarters when she was in Chicago to meet the bosses and let them know that she “intended” to become their designer. Libby was hired a week later. Another instance of Libby’s persistence is when Bleeker Street let her go after 18 years for decreasing profits and being told that perhaps she could no longer design “young dresses.” Then in her 60’s, Libby Payne was not deterred, she went on to successfully design “young dresses” for Tracy! and St. Barth’s.

To be a moderate ready-to-wear designer in the mid 20th century, resilience was a necessary contributor to success. Libby Payne was surely resilient as witnessed by 30 jobs throughout her fifty-year career. The majority of Libby’s first design positions in Chicago lasted anywhere from two days to two weeks. This experience alone encouraged Libby, determined to be a “Great American Designer,” to be resilient. Quick turnover of jobs could have been partly due to Libby’s inexperience, but was more likely due to the way the fashion industry itself was structured. Early in her career after her job with Gilbert Originals fell through, she claimed that she would never be branded as a quitter, which Libby Payne certainly never was. Libby was fired
from seven of the ten design jobs she held in New York City and essentially worked almost non-stop from 1937 until her retirement in 1987.

Libby Payne was imaginative and passionate about designing. As a young girl spending summers on their family farm, Libby was innovative with utilizing what she had at her disposal to use on her own designs. For example, she used small pine cones and sliced corks to create buttons for dresses she made and took advantage of a rusty galvanized fence to create an embossed pattern on cotton fabric. Another instance was when she got creative by tearing up her dorm room curtains to furnish an existing dress while at Virginia Intermont.

**Career Aptitude**

In answering the third research question, “What creative strategies did Libby Payne enact that made an impact on the firms she worked for such as Bobbie Brooks and Jonathan Logan?” The content of Libby’s memoir notebooks presented sub-themes of work experiences, creative strategies, attention to detail, success factors, and what influenced or inspired her.

According to Leipzig (2008), “The American designer emerged from anonymity during a period when consumers and businesses had to accomplish more with less, and often do without. Practicality in design became a trademark characteristic of the American apparel industry, a reflection of an ongoing national ideal.” This is just what Libby Payne’s design philosophy: to design practical and simple garments that still had enough character to appeal to the consumer and make money for the manufacturing firm.

Libby Payne knew how to “play the game.” She bluffed her way into the fashion industry and was clever enough to figure out just what the manufacturer and consumer wanted. Her savvy business sense aided her in creating designs that were both appealing and marketable, which in turn made for happy customers and profitable employers.
Libby Payne detailed many notable work experiences in describing each of her jobs, especially in New York City. All of her stories expressed how she lived and worked during some major turning points in 20th century history. In the 1940’s, Libby had to create designs that fit WWII regulations. She even sat at the same round table with the mother of women’s sportswear herself, Claire McCardell for a Fashion Group meeting. Libby experienced first-hand what it was like for a working woman in the 1950’s, especially when she was fired from Dartford Deb after having her second child.

For Libby Payne, career aptitude included developing relationships with important stakeholders in the fashion industry and interactions with figures of the time. She described how she encountered a Jackson Pollock painting at the entrance of the Heller Fabrics showroom. The owner of the fabric firm, Mr. Heller had been buying paintings from Pollock to support his artistic endeavors. For a long while, Libby and her colleagues criticized the painting until of course, they began seeing more of his works at major museums. An awareness of new developments in art and popular culture reflected Libby’s continual quest for innovative ideas.

Over her long career, Libby Payne learned that creativity was necessary to be a successful designer as noted by Alyson (n.d.), Fitzgerald (2015), Granger (2014), Kokemuller (n.d.), and Loretto (2014). This was not only true with the designs themselves, but also how she executed them. Libby always wanted to create fresh and original ideas for the firms she worked for, and often mentioned how she had a tendency to gravitate to the newness in the industry. But, she also was pragmatic in her career choices.

For example, when Libby was designing for Jonathan Logan, she temporarily helped to design for Bleeker Street before her bosses asked her if she would like to stay with the line she was designing for, Betty Barclay, or if she would like to design permanently for Bleeker Street.
Libby responded that she always wanted to go with the new, but she also knew that Bleeker Street was where more of the firm’s advertising money was. This was most certainly a creative strategy employed by Libby Payne in order to continue her success as a fashion designer.

Libby found out early in her career which designs would sell, and her knowledge of marketability only gained momentum as she furthered her career. She was also very aware of her customer’s budget limitations, acknowledging that she could design saleable dresses that were simple yet interesting with a specific detail and would be cost-effective for the manufacturing firm. This strategy is one that made money for the firms for which she designed.

In addition to these creative business strategies that Libby incorporated, she also used creative strategies to find design ideas. Some of these included making her daughters stand in front of shop windows or garments in a store for a photograph as a way for Libby to record inspiration. Similar to the way Elizabeth Hawes described her clever strategies in her 1938 book, *Fashion is Spinach*, Libby also posed as a buyer at fashion shows. Since designers would often be removed if found sketching or copying designs, Libby pretended to be a buyer so she could see the garments and then quickly leave to sketch the garments or their details. For the duration of her career, Libby Payne designed for moderate price labels and often created designs inspired by higher priced fashions, which Frings (2008) explains as the Trickle Down Theory.

It was Libby Payne’s attention to detail that also brought her several of her successes, especially when it came to her eye for color, prints, and fabrics. Most of Libby’s designs had a simple foundation but included a significant or unique aspect that captured attention, like trimming, buttons, or even different fabric combinations. One instance of Libby’s attention to detail was when she noticed the “Thunderbird” print at Winston Mills fabric firm that was not
initially to be showed to her and her colleagues at Bleeker Street. Libby liked this print so much that she sampled what the firm had and made a successful dress line from it.

Another occurrence of Libby’s attention to detail was when she had a similar experience with Rachel knits which caught her attention at Merry-Go-Round fabrics. She again sampled yardage and made another successful group; one garment was featured in a full color page of the New York Times. In just two months, 100,000 of this particular garment highlighting the Rachel knits sold, similar to Libby’s Style #862 for Bobbie Brooks. In addition to an advertisement in a national newspaper and the sales success, the Rachel knit garment was copied all over the world and Merry-Go-Round sold 3,000,000 yards of fabric after the release of Libby’s design.

A fashion designer should have a discernible skill set in combination with personal characteristics that contribute to their accomplishments. Some of these are creativity, passion, artistic ability especially with sketching or drawing and the ability to work well with other people (Alyson (n.d.), Fitzgerald (2015), Granger (2014), Kokemuller (n.d.), and Loretto (2014)). Before Libby actually began working as a designer, a friend told her what factors were necessary for her to become a successful designer, like good taste and an eye for color. An eye for color is surely something Libby Payne had a knack for as evidenced by her sketches, fabric swatches, and designs. This was also verified by her daughters who remembered the vibrant home interiors and even colorful meals they had growing up. Libby also understood marketability. Many of her designs were successful because she knew what the customer was looking for. Libby created garments that suited both the customer and the manufacturer. Her designs matched the customer’s wants and needs with style and pricing while making a profit for the firm. Simply put, Libby Payne was business savvy.
Libby Payne drew inspiration from anything that caught her eye. When she was not sewing, she was sketching, and vice versa. Included in the numerous sketches she kept over the years were drawings of window sills, flowers on the side of the road, geometric patterns from road signs, or anything else she could see out the window of a car. *Delineator* magazine cut-outs, movies, and Broadway shows were also among the many things from which Libby drew inspiration for creative designs. In her memoir notebooks, Libby Payne speculated what things influenced her to become a fashion designer, like making doll clothes with her cousin on the attic steps of her aunt’s house and sewing garments with her mom that mimicked what they had seen in the movies. Being an adolescent when “talkies” began to populate the film industry, Libby found much of her early inspiration from the movies. She often saw 2-3 movies a week and learned about design by observing the movement of garments, and studying prominent details.

**Network**

In answering the fourth research question, “What factors contributed to Libby Payne’s success as a moderate RTW designer in New York in the 1930’s through the 1980’s?” The content of Libby’s memoir notebooks presented sub-themes of co-workers, friends, and industry affiliates.

“It’s who you know” is one of the truest statements pertaining to Libby Payne’s career and being the child of missionaries who moved often, she was unafraid to make friends. Libby figured out very early on that relationships with the right people would consistently keep her working as a designer. Her first job at Franklin Dress Co. in Chicago was the only design job Libby found through a newspaper advertisement. Each subsequent job was secured through her network of people in the industry, either co-workers or industry affiliates, like fabrics or
trimmings salesmen. Knowing and making durable relationships with these people that were the “backbone” of the industry was absolutely essential.

Libby made many designer friends in the fashion industry over her lengthy career. Two frequently mentioned were Mary Tettreault and Billie Gordon. Mary was a designer for Parade Dress who started in the fashion industry working for the legendary Elizabeth Hawes. Billie Gordon was a fabric designer for Loomskill. Libby and Mary would go to Fashion Group luncheons together on a monthly basis to network and learn about what was happening in the industry. Billie mentored Libby in color scouting and trend forecasting, and also how to look at Europe for design inspiration.

Libby worked with many people in 30 jobs over fifty years. Throughout her memoir notebooks, she named every boss she ever had including one of the first, Mr. Michel in Chicago with whom she formed a valuable relationship and who aided her in finding other design jobs, including her 11th with David Roth and Co. Libby had fairly strong relationships with most of her managers while working in New York City especially Ed London, from Dartford Deb and Toni Edwards, and Beau Baker from Tracy! and St. Barth’s with whom she shared her name on a St. Barth’s label. Much of the fashion industry in which Libby Payne worked was dominated by European immigrants, specifically Jewish immigrants. It became an industry of family businesses (Rantisi 2002; Yeshiva University Museum, A Perfect Fit, 2005). The garment industry allowed immigrants to work their way up in the world (Cline, 2012). Libby easily assimilated into this “family,” as she had assimilated into different cultures through her childhood, from Cuba to many locations in the U.S.

Libby worked for Sam Reich at Franklin Dress Co., the first of her actual design jobs, and the one that she “bluffed” into at the advice of her designer friend, Virginia Spears. Several
jobs after Franklin Dress Co., Libby worked for Sam Reich’s brother, Max at Reich Dress Co. Her first New York design job at Dartford Deb was operated by the Goldman Brothers. Beau Baker, Libby’s boss at Tracy! and St. Barth’s was the son of Jack Baker, who owned another firm in New York called Sue Brett. In addition to her bosses, Libby formed beneficial relationships with several of her co-workers as well, always learning something from them. For example, while working at Johara, Libby worked closely with the pattern-maker, Harry Alaynick who taught her so much about the fashion business that she admitted would have taken her considerably longer to learn on her own.

Libby Payne was loyal to the services of her favorite fabrics and trimmings salesmen over the half-century she worked in the fashion industry. In her memoir notebooks, Libby identified a few salesmen who were absolute favorites and with whom she had lasting relationships. Nat Marcus was the salesman that Libby and many other designers would go to if they got fired because of his informal employment service. Libby found Sol Roth to be enthusiastic and efficient, imaginative, and knowledgeable of the industry, exactly what she sought after in her fabrics and trimmings salesmen. Like Nat Marcus, Mel Weiss was also a salesman who aided designers in finding new jobs. And like Sol Roth, he possessed all of the desirable qualities.

**Personal Influence**

Through content analysis of Libby Payne’s personal memoirs, her personality absolutely radiated through her words. This personality in combination with innate talent and personal style made her the kind of person who was immediately admirable and respected. It also made her very successful as a fashion designer.
Over her career, Libby Payne designed numerous successful dresses for the manufacturing firms for whom she worked. One of the most remarkable designs was Style #862 for Bobbie Brooks that sold 100,000 in its first two months on the market and sold continuously for five years. Another for Bobbie Brooks was the “Katya” dress made from the first drip dry fabric, and “sold like hotcakes” for two years. While Libby was in her 60’s and working for Tracy! she designed another outstanding dress that sold out in department stores within a day. This drop-waist dress consisted of a color palette of gray, white and pink which Libby originated and then spread throughout the junior dress market.

Libby Payne’s innovative nature influenced those around her, including her friends, teachers, and strangers. She told a story about ripping up her dorm room curtains just so she could add some much needed detail to one of her existing dresses, and about meeting a young lady at work who approached her about the dress Libby was wearing, which she designed herself.

Another instance of Libby’s influence was when she and Frank attended the Crystal Ball at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1963, and Libby happened to be wearing the same color as the guest of honor, Princess Grace of Monaco. Not only was Libby wearing the same “blueberry” color as the Princess, but the renowned designers James Galanos and Teal Traina were both in attendance and gave notice to Libby’s gown that she combined with a bright red cape. So much so that several months after the ball, Libby saw a similar blue dress and red cape designed by Galanos displayed in the Henri Bendel’s window.

Libby Payne’s memoir notebooks, conversations with her daughters, and examination of her personal artifacts provided information to investigate the life and work of a 20th century American moderate-price zone fashion designer. Her story offered insights to the business
behind accessible ready-to-wear clothing, the evolution of the fashion designer, and secrets to success in this role.

**Limitations**

Firstly, this study concentrated on the life and career experiences of one individual, Elizabeth “Libby” Miller Payne, so, while important to addressing “unknown” American fashion designers, conclusions cannot be generalized to a larger population. For this study, four volumes of memoir notebooks including extensive and detailed information were reviewed. These notebooks were written and compiled by Libby Payne, and thus, can be assumed to be somewhat individually biased. Information written is based on Libby’s interpretation of her personal experiences. Largely, this study did not employ additional or objective sources to verify or present the viewpoints of events and occurrences documented in Libby’s memoir notebooks.

Given that the notebooks totaled over 450 pages of written pages, diary entries, advertisements, and images, deciphering and processing its totality posed a considerable challenge. This study focused on her life, and specifically those experiences related to her career. Therefore, purely personal remembrances, of which there were many, were not included in the data collection and analysis. Material included in the notebooks was read and reread multiple times with the researcher making decisions as to what was relevant to address the research questions. To better handle this amount of information, a more efficient or organized system would be beneficial. For this study, coding was performed first by categorization and secondly by color assignment. The process of coding helped to interpret the data, but coding of images would have helped interpretation further.

Because Libby Payne’s daughter, Penny Payne was located in Long Island, New York and had six or more bankers boxes containing information and archived materials that her mother
kept over the years, this presented a challenge and would be considered a limitation. The researcher’s personal location in Kent, Ohio was not conducive to traveling to New York for separate visits to view the items more extensively. It was also not a possibility to ship any of the delicate materials between New York and Ohio. Another limitation would be the amount of information covered in a short amount of time, and therefore a longer timeline for investigation of this topic would be suggested.

Recommendations for Future Research

In researching an individual’s life and career, there will undoubtedly be a vast amount of information which includes copious options for future research. Not only could the individual life of Elizabeth “Libby” Miller Payne be more extensively researched, but so could her career including the history of the companies and labels for which she worked and the time period in which her career took place. A more concentrated evaluation and analysis of the full gamut of materials pertaining to Libby Payne’s life and career would yield a greater understanding of the scope of her work, impact, and influence. Furthermore, this study was narrowed by a limit to the additional information regarding the context surrounding the career of Libby Payne. As more scholars uncover details of the American ready-to-wear industry in which she worked, additional insights could be gained on Libby Payne’s role in history.

Prior to this study, there was not any former scholarly research on Libby Payne herself, and likewise, there is a gap in information about the designers who designed for manufacturers, especially for those targeted at the moderate-price point consumer, better known as “Mrs. Main Street America.” Libby Payne designed for the moderate consumer, or the consumer who was known as “the everybody,” from the 1930’s- 1980’s, an important period in the development of moderately priced manufacturers and labels. More research could surely be done on the variety
of moderately priced garment labels that existed during this time period in the 20th century American ready-to-wear industry. For example, Libby Payne designed for some well-known manufacturers at the time, such as Jonathan Logan and Bobbie Brooks. A history of these manufacturers and the extent of their impact on the moderately priced market of the ready-to-wear industry would be a valuable option to research.

In addition to recommended research on moderately priced labels, research on the American ready-to-wear industry during the period of 1930 through 1980 would be recommended. These five decades were some of the most impactful decades the American ready-to-wear industry has experienced, especially in regards to innovation, price-conscious consumers, and domestic/off-shore manufacturing. The way moderately priced designs reflected societal history would be recommended for future research as well as the many advances in fabrics, garment styles, and production during the 1930’s - 1980’s.

Libby Payne was a working woman for fifty years, and during decades when it was not as common for a woman to be a “professional.” Not only was Libby Payne a working woman, she was a working mother for nearly 40 years. Libby experienced the effects of being a working mother in the 1950’s when she was fired because management did not think she could handle the responsibility of having two children and a full-time job as a fashion designer. Although fashion was considered a female oriented industry, it was still an industry led by men. Libby Payne did not have one female boss over her entire career. With that being said, another area of research stemming from Libby Payne’s story could be the evolution of working women’s roles in mid-20th century America.
Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to collect and analyze historical information on the professional life of Libby Payne within the fashion industry, to determine how her creative talent impacted the brands for which she worked, and the way in which her background and other factors played a role in her success as a fashion designer. This study examined her “life story” which included foundational development including her personal characteristics, the direct experiences she had during her 50-year career, and most importantly, how she became a successful ready-to-wear fashion designer.

Libby considered her story worth noting, worth archiving, and worth telling. To date there has been minimal investigation of moderate price-point designers and labels, nor the suppliers, manufacturers, retailers, and consumers in this segment. Libby Payne’s story presents an opportunity to fill the gap on a valuable part of American fashion industry history. Conclusions made as a result of this study can include 1) the value of research on the lives of individuals to learn about the past and use it to inform our future, 2) an individual’s success is a culmination of personal attributes, experiences, and being “at the right place at the right time” and 3) specific components are necessary in order to become a successful fashion designer regardless of the time period or market.

The fact that years after she retired, Libby Payne remembered the amount of information pertaining to her life and took the effort to record it speaks as a loud justification for this study. Libby wanted someone to tell her story and for her legacy to be remembered. She played a vital role in the American ready-to-wear industry for five of the most influential decades in American fashion industry history. There is no doubt that some attribution for this phenomenon can be
given to Libby Payne and the many other unrecognized designers who contributed their creative
talent to ready-to-wear manufacturers.

As learned from Libby Payne, personal success is the sum of all parts. The reason she
was successful was due to a culmination of factors, some being her personal characteristics and
experiences, the relationships she had, and of course the time in which she designed. Libby
Payne shows us that to become a successful designer, specific components are necessary
regardless of the time period or market, such as originality, business sense, and of course
passion.

The lives and careers of designers who have been fortunate enough to reach fame have
been researched extensively and come to be regarded as the industry revolutionaries. While the
stories of “famous” designers are valuable to the fashion world, they are but a small percentage
of the creative talent in the American industry as a whole. Hundreds of “hidden hands”
employed by manufacturers may not have gotten a lot of attention but, nonetheless, made an
impact not only on the industry, but also on the consumers for whom they designed. The
anonymous influencers of the ready-to-wear industry are an often-neglected area of fashion
industry research. Sharing Libby Payne’s story is one step towards bringing light to the
important individuals who worked, “behind the labels.”
References


# APPENDIX A

## CODEBOOK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Owners and Managers</th>
<th>How Hired</th>
<th>Co-Workers Mentioned</th>
<th>How Left Company</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945-1950</td>
<td>Dartford Deb</td>
<td>Mr. Ed London and the Goldman Brothers</td>
<td>Recommended by Virginia Spears</td>
<td>Lena, fore-lady</td>
<td>Fired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Peggy Caswell</td>
<td>Carl Spitz and Mr. Singer</td>
<td>Fabrics and trimmings salesmen</td>
<td>None mentioned</td>
<td>No acknowledgement for her work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1956</td>
<td>Bobbie Brooks</td>
<td>Maurice Saltzman</td>
<td>Salesman from B. Blumenthal Button Co.</td>
<td>Bill Smith, head of NY showroom; Milton Zweig, head of fabric office; Sydney Lynn, salesman; Jackie Ranen, salesman; Mickey Bornstein, Sportswear designer</td>
<td>Fired- was replaced by male Fashion director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956-1958</td>
<td>Toni Edwards</td>
<td>Ed London and Paul Schneiderman</td>
<td>Ed London wanted her back</td>
<td>Maria Teresa, model</td>
<td>Head-hunted by Parade Dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958-1960</td>
<td>Parade Dress</td>
<td>Arthur Rodbell and Ranny Ranzer</td>
<td>Was head-hunted</td>
<td>Paul Guardi, pattern maker; Estelle Gordon, fit model and friend</td>
<td>Left because they were “scoundrels”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1979</td>
<td>Jonathan Logan/Betty Barclay/Bleeker Street</td>
<td>David Schwartz; Joe Linsk; Abe Linsk; Lester Saks; Ed Weiss</td>
<td>Recommended by friend, Maxine Bentley who</td>
<td>Mary Bega, assistant/pattern maker; Ben Marano, pattern maker; Julie</td>
<td>Fired-too old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Salesman 1</td>
<td>Salesman 2</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td>-------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979-1980</td>
<td>Kay Windsor</td>
<td>Bernie Wolfsman</td>
<td>Mike Katz, fabric salesman</td>
<td>Beverly Levine, Fashion Director; Bob Given, designer of half-size division; “Astrid”, model</td>
<td>Fired-perhaps too efficient?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1984</td>
<td>Tracy! St.Barth’s</td>
<td>Beau Baker</td>
<td>Nat Marcus, fabric salesman</td>
<td>Roberta Wagner, Fashion Director of Bloomingdale’s Junior department; Bernie Ozer, Fashion Director of AMC; Naomi Dellacasa, Libby’s assistant; “Marty”, top showroom salesman</td>
<td>Let-go due to company financials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Freelance</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1986</td>
<td>John Henry</td>
<td>Skip Wasserman</td>
<td>Recommended by Lennie Marshall, former sales</td>
<td>George Gottesman, sales manager of the “road force” also friend, Estelle</td>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gordon’s husband</td>
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<tr>
<td>manager of NY showroom at Bleeker Street</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Some of the interview questions asked of Penny Payne were as follows:

*When and where was your mother born?*

*Where did she grow up/go to school?*

*What were some of her hobbies?*

*What did her parents do?*

*Did she have any siblings?*

*She seemed to have gone by a few names…why was this? Did she favor one more than the other or despise any? Was it confusing in her career?*

*What had been her career aspirations before starting a career in design? What influenced her career in fashion? Had she any previous design experience?*

*Did any of her siblings or parents attend college?*

*What made her decide to go to Northwestern?*

*What is your favorite memory of your mom? What about your mom and dad together?*

*Did your mom’s career influence your personal career path?*

*Why do you think no one knows much about Libby Payne?*

*I think the history of ready-to-wear is a subject in which there isn’t much information or research, yet it’s one of the most influential industries of our society, even still, it seems like the focus is always on runway and couture…why do you think everyday RTW and its past and present designers don’t get the attention that they deserve?*

*Where did your mom grow up?*

*How long was she designing in Chicago before moving to NYC with Frank?*

*When did your parents get married?*

*Did your mom ever tell you which of her design jobs was her favorite?*

*Did she ever disclose why she thought her job turnover was so high?*
She talks about having to work with new and innovative fabrics through-out her career, what other kinds of things were evidence to her as indication of evolution of the industry?

It sounds like working and having a career as a working woman was just as important to your mom as having a family/living a fulfilling life was—did she ever talk about the role changes she (and probably other women she worked with or knew) experienced? Especially in the 50’s and 60’s?

Why is it she never climbed the ladder even higher in the design world? Do you think having family priorities related to this?

Did she ever indicate what her highest goals in her career were? I would say designing successful things repeatedly is a pretty awesome accomplishment—100000 dresses in 2 months?!

What were some characteristics or qualities your mom had that you think contributed to her success in design?

Did she have a favorite of her designs?

Did she ever indicate why designers such as herself were never as well recognized among some of the others of her time, like Claire McCardell?

Blueberry gown and red cape: were other designers knocking off her designs often? That is an indicator—I think—of success but maybe she was never fully recognized for her ideas, do you think this is valid?

I noticed that Libby was fired from many of her design jobs in NYC because the company “wanted to go in another direction” (or were “scoundrels” who backed out on their word!) do you think she was just getting too close to success than some of these men leaders (in a female dominated industry) were comfortable with?

Why do you think, or did she ever mention why she thought so many men were leaders of companies, and so forth, within the fashion industry—which is a female dominated industry

When did your mom retire? Why?

Where/what were her first 20 jobs?