I, Leah M Provo, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design in Design.

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The Little Black Dress: The Essence of Femininity

Student's name: Leah M Provo

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Phyllis Borcherding, M.S.

Committee member: Suszanne Hawthorne Clay, Ph.D.

Committee member: Margaret Voelker-Ferrier, M.A.
THE LITTLE BLACK DRESS
THE ESSENCE OF FEMININITY

A thesis submitted to the Division of Research and Advanced Studies of the University of Cincinnati in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design in the School of Design of the College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning (DAAP)

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By Leah Michelle Provo
Bachelor of Fine Arts,
Savannah College of Art and Design

THESIS COMMITTEE:
Phyllis Borcherding
Margret Voelker-Ferrier
Dr. Suszanne Hawthorne-Clay

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ABSTRACT

The fashion industry has long been criticized for its lack on consideration for sustainable product. When asked what garments have elevated as staples within your closet, what do you think of? White t-shirt? Jeans? A tailored suit jacket? For women, across the board, the number one garment necessary within their wardrobe will always and forever be The Little Black Dress, 8 out of 10 women claim it incomplete without it (Mcloughlin, 2012) spending on average anywhere from 20 to 2,000 dollars on it. Why is this? Vogue made it the “Number One Rule,” in the 20’s, but why exactly has this garment stood the test of time?

The Little Black Dress or LBD has been an essential garment in a woman’s wardrobe since the 1800s. This thesis will explore the psychological and socio-cultural reasons why this item of clothing has become the essence of femininity. To appreciate the enduring influence of the little black dress, we must first be aware of where it came from. To be thorough, it is necessary to begin with research on the history of the color black, the significance of a dress, and the history of the LBD. From this research we will gain a deeper understanding of why this color has become a provocative hue that has adorned women for many ages. Finally, I will apply Lamb and Kallal’s FEA consumer needs model and use expert opinions and research to create a linear chronology of the stylistic and symbolic progression of the Little Black Dress. Lastly, I will illustrate how and why this garment has stood the test of time.
A K N O W L E D G M E N T S

First and For Most,
I would like to thank my mother,
of whom my life ...and this paper,
would be in shambles with out.

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or how many times.

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whom as given me the power and strength,
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YOU CAN WEAR BLACK
YOU CAN WEAR IT
AT ANY AGE...
ON ALMOST ANY OCCASION,
A ‘LITTLE BLACK FROCK’ IS AN
ESSENTIAL TO A
WOMAN’S WARDROBE.

CHRISTIAN DIOR,
1945
BLACK: THE COLOR DEFINED

OPTICAL EXPLANATION
SYMBOLISM IN HISTORY
NEW WORLD NEW BLACK
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OPTICAL EXPLANATION

“The rejection of color,” “the absence of color,” these are descriptions often used to describe the color black. But what is black, really? Black can be more accurately defined as absorption and indirect contrast or the deficiency of color (Feisner, 2004). Contrary to what we were told when we were young, black was in fact not a color at all. White light is made up of many different wavelengths varying in proportion. When separated, each wavelength exhibits its own color perceivable to the human eye. A color is seen when reflected upon the surface of an object while other wavelengths are absorbed (Varley, 1980). So in the case that all wavelengths are completely absorbed upon the surface of an object and little light is reflected we call that color black. Black as the deficiency of colors, can be explained when we step into a room with no windows and close the door and we see no color at all (Varley, 1980). Whatever the case, the color black, be it visual or emotional, has always been a controversial color.

THE SYMBOLISM OF BLACK IN HISTORY

From its beginning in western civilization, Black has been revered as being a taboo color symbolizing: death, emptiness, mourning, oppression, ignorance and bad luck (Feisner, 2004). It wasn’t until the early 19th Century that black reestablished itself with positive connotations like: sophistication, power, luxury, sexuality and high fashion (Feisner, 2004). However, before we dive into what makes black so appealing to us today we must first explore its past representation in society.

Contrary to popular belief the color of black initially began as a symbol of strength, fertility and life (Pastoureau, 2009). Ancient eastern cultures such as Asia and Egypt portray black as being the beginning of all life, visually analogous to the way vast large bodies of water looks or soil, from which plants are given life and from which they spring from. It is difficult to believe that black was perceived with such negative connections in western civilization.

Michel Pastoureau, a respected French historian known for his specialization on the history of colors, believed that the negative connotations of black began in the early Christian period where the color was associated with hell, death and the devil. Within the bible, there are verses that reference darkness, and black and they are as follows: sin - Job 6:15-16, disease - Job 30:30, famine - Lamentations 4:8; 5:10, Revelation 6:5-6, death - Jude 1:12-1, sorrow - Jeremiah 8:21.
The darkness of black has primarily been associated with negative aspects of the human experience, including: death, disease, famine and sorrow. These negative aspects associated with the color black were often attributed to sin, with the only exception, the implication of health in Leviticus 13:37, Song of Solomon 1:5-6; 5:11 when used as a description of hair.

INTRODUCTION OF "BAD BLACK"

During the Middle Ages black suffered from a conflicting duality, “There was a good black and a bad black (Steele, 2007) – on one hand the color was associated with humility, temperance, authority, or dignity, on the other hand it evoked a world of darkness and the dead. (Pastoureau, 2009, p. 46) Eventually the bad outweighed the good and “bad black” prevailed in Western culture.

"Because of the overwhelming presence of Roman Catholicism in the Middle Ages, the portrayal of black was greatly contingent upon the religious views of the church on good and bad, or good and evil, thus the creation of the “devil’s color (Pastoureau, 2009).” As previously mentioned, the bible communicated its figurative stance on darkness leaning towards a more negative representation than positive, but not limited to the color black (Steele 2007). It was the church that assigned the color black to represent evil. As religion grew, so did the portrayal of its adversary, known simply as the “devil.” In the mid 11th century this great adversary developed a face in Romanesque Art. Catholicism and Christianity explained “the Devil” or “God’s Adversary” as a mischievous angel that dared to defy God and was cast out of heaven by God’s wrath and was condemned to wander the earth for eternity (Pastoureau, 2009). In no way are the devil and God equal. The devil is a fallen creature, created by God himself who makes his name by inspiring hatred, confusion and jealousy. He is a deceiver and a slanderer who torments and corrupts man. Towards the end of the 11th century images of the devil became almost as common as images of Christ and artists portrayed him in many different ways. However, the one commonality between these images was the color used to portray his dark, sinister corrupt nature and it was through a cloak of black.

“Before and after year 1,000 and for many centuries thereafter, black was constantly called upon to adorn the body or clothes of all those maintaining relationships of dependence and an affinity
Historically, there is an association with demonic cults such as Wicca and witchcraft and the color of black (Steele, 2007). In the early middle ages, witches were most commonly portrayed as women and were believed to be in a league with the devil and used their powers to wreak havoc on the land and cause harm. Here the concept of the dark arts or more commonly known as “black magic” is introduced. The churches reign and control across the kingdom had a strong influence on the ideas and the manifestation of concepts and color within society and from that black evolved under their discretion. In the 11th century, few religious dignitaries and representatives held a positive portrayal of black (Steele, 2007). “The Benedictine Monks remained faithful and continued to let their robes proclaim the ancient virtues of a color now scorned, rejected, and condemned. (Pastoureau, 2009, p. 46) In contrast, it was seen as a representation of power and monastic virtue, for Catholic priests, often found enveloped in black. These priests wore black as a sign of the mortification of their bodies. Mortification is the practice of Christian asceticism in order to overcome sin and master one’s sinful tendencies. Through penance and austerity they strengthened their will in the practice of virtue and grow in the likeness of Christ. Natural mortification is based on faith and seeks to grow in holiness through merit gained by cooperating with the grace of God.

A NEW WORLD: THE NEW BLACK

From the early Christian period we move to the Renaissance, where the growth and influence of the upper and middle class flourished. This group had vast amounts of disposable income that brought forth new and diverse ways of “conspicuous consumption.” (Hill, 2011, p. 332) The rich indulged themselves in any and everything at their pleasure lavish home furnishings, lush bejeweled robes, sumptuous behaviors and luxurious pilgrimages to neighboring countries. From these pilgrimages new trends and forms of dress developed in the middle ages. Also, in the Renaissance we see the trading of textiles such as wool, silks, lace and the new technologies. There was also an instruction to new and different food amongst northern countries with trading at a global level with modern and new economic ideas (Pastoureau, 2009). In Italy, black was still viewed as a cloak of seriousness and mourning and was elevated to a garment color of the wealthy. Black was a strong influence of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgandy after 1419 as a symbol to the French that he did not forget the death of his father. “His black is at once dangerous, retributive . . .”(Mendes, 1999, p. 6; Steele, 2007) Philip’s princely apparel selection employed costly processes
to produce black dye and created a “uniform of taste” that only the elite could afford. Even after his father’s death, Philip continued to adorn himself with obsidian garments that can only be reasoned to symbolize not only his power and virtue, but also his seriousness (Steele, 2007, p. 2).

Black made its way from Italy to Spain, where it had a great welcoming into society. Spanish rulers almost exclusively wore black and maybe responsible for this pivotal point in the history of black apparel (Steele, 2007). “With the wealth from its New World holdings and its military might, Spain became the preeminent power in the 1500s. Even much of Italy came under the authority of the Spanish. From the royal court in Madrid, economic, diplomatic, and cultural influences radiated throughout Europe (Hill, 2011, p. 364). “

From Spain, the color black used for apparel quickly gained popularity throughout Europe (Steele, 2007). By the 16th century, this elitist uniformity of color was an international norm. Initially, black garments were worn for the most formal occasions. While some might think that wearing black meant that the garments were simple, this was not the case at all, regional styles were still very distinct (Steele, 2007). The clothing was very intricate, elaborate and made with heavy fabrics such as velvet and raised silk, adorned with brightly colored jewelry such as rubies, diamonds and pearls to contrast the black backdrop of the clothing. In the 14th century, the status of black began to change. First, high quality black dyes began to be used in the market, allowing garments of a deep, rich black to be designed (Steele, 2007). Second, Magistrates and government officials began to wear black robes, as a sign of the importance and seriousness of their positions. A third reason was the passage of Sumptuary Laws in some parts of Europe (Edelman, 1997). These laws prohibited wearing of costly clothes and certain colors by anyone except members of nobility.

The difficulty of dying in black

Sumptuary Laws were applicable not only to the person wearing the clothing but also to the designer of the garment. A set of laws and rules were formed that forbade the use of certain dying colors and material for which one was not licensed (Pastoureau, 2009). Dyers were limited to a range of hues, for example warm hues and cool hues. In some German and Italian cities dyers were even restricted to a singular color (Pastoureau, 2009).
Producing a rich black shade in a color-fast format without future fading was an extremely difficult process in the 14th century. Before then, most tones in fabric were not truly black (Netherton & Owen, 2007). Prior to the 14th century to dye fabric black required roots, bark and or fruits. These dyes came from specific trees such as walnut, chestnut and certain oak trees. In the Middle Ages, walnut trees were believed to possess evil properties (Pastoureau, 2009). The roots were toxic to vegetation and livestock when grown closely around their quarters, sickening animals and in worse cases killing them. Thus dying was forbidden using colorant made from these base materials. However, despite the warning to stay away from dying fabrics this color, dyers continued to pursue and develop innovate ways to achieve the dark shadowy blacks without the use of the walnut attributes (Netherton & Owen, 2007).

Also during this time, a large number of dying techniques were created to improve black colorants. Moule, was the first technique that was a grinding method using iron fillings, copulated with strong vinegar to produce a fine semi permanent black, that faded with multiple washes and exposure to air (Pastoureau, 2009). Then there was blue the foot dying method, which was the repetitious submerging of cloth in a bath of woad. Woad is a common plant used in blue dye, giving the fabric a solid base and a more dark appearance. This same affect could be achieved with madder, a plant commonly used in red dye. However, such a process was strictly forbidden because dyers did not have the right to use black dye (Netherton & Owen, 2007).

Although the dyers struggled to create the perfect black, the only way known to achieve the most even tones of black in the Middle Ages, was through the process of using the oak apple (Pastoureau, 2009). This “oak apple” which is actually no apple at all, it’s the sap and larvae encased with various insects that laid their eggs on the oak leaf. Only if the sap is collected before summer and dried slowly will they produce rich, dramatic and potent color black (Pastoureau, 2009). This tedious process is what made dying black clothing in particular such an extremely expensive process. Not only did it take a large quantity of oak apples to produce a tiny amount of colorant, but the “apples” themselves had to be imported from Eastern Europe (Pastoureau, 2009).

It wasn’t until the dawn of the Early Modern Period 1500-1700 BC that a more cost effective way of dyeing black was introduced to Europe via the Spanish Exploration of the New World. Logwood, a dye specific to Northern and Central America, created an inexpensive blue colorant (Netherton & Owen, 2007). However, when perfected and paired with iron salts, such as copperas
or chrome mordant similar to the Moule process, it achieved a truly rich black. The emergence of Logwood introduced a less strenuous colorant process for dyers, allowing a single submergence of cloth into the dye bath rather than multiple submergences as in previous techniques (Netherton & Owen, 2007). As black dye became more readily available and the method slowly became more perfected it changed fashion and black became a color that was reserved for the most somber and saddest of occasions. Logwood continued to be the most widely used dye by the 19th century (Netherton & Owen, 2007).
THE INTOXICATION OBTAINED
FROM WEARING CERTAIN
ARTICLES OF CLOTHING CAN BE
AS POWERFUL AS THAT
INDUCED BY A DRUG

BERNARD RUDOFSKY,
THE UNFASHIONABLE HUMAN BODY
THE LITTLE BLACK DRESS: THE ESSENCE OF FEMININITY

THE DRESS

THE DEFINITION
THE PRINCIPLES
CLASSIFICATION OF DRESS

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THE DEFINITION

To define a dress, I believe it crucial to observe its identification from two assessments; the universal and the fashion perspective. A dress is defined, in a “universal” sense, as “apparel; clothing: an outer garment, usually consisting of a one-piece bodice and skirt.” For the fashion assessment of dress is defined as, “Generally a one piece garment. The dress was often made of copious amounts of fabric, which in turn implies a lot of folds and drape.” (Reigelman, 2000)

When these two definitions are cross-referenced, the defining attributes of a dress can be stripped down to one key phrase, “one-piece garment,” which allows the manifestation of a dress to be just about anything.

THE PRINCIPLES

A dress is interpreted as a garment of femininity and sensuality. When we envision a dress, usually on a woman, we picture her enveloped with lush fabric, draping next to the body for the entire length of her curvy goddess-like figure. Fabric and drape are large parts of what makes a dress a dress, but why? To be able to understand and dissect the dress, we must first understand the defining features of a garment, which are fabric, drape, fit, silhouette, and details. Nancy Reigelman, noted fashion illustrator and author of 9 Heads, a fundamental textbook in fashion education, has defined each of these attributes within the fashion industry.

Fabric is usually defined as but not limited to cloth typically produced by weaving or knitting textile fibers. This is the most essential element of fashion, be it ready to wear or haute couture the form and function of a garment is still limited to its fabric selection.

The drape and fit of a garment is simply the way fabric falls or hangs around the figure. Observing and understanding the drape of the garment is expressive where as the “fit” of a garment is directly related to its functionality and utility. Combined, these two features communicate the apparel’s intended manner of use.

The silhouette can be defined as the contour or the outer edge of a garment, or simply, its shape. Silhouette is visually the single most significant feature of a garment providing pertinent information for the fabrication, drape and fit. (Reigelman, 2000; Sumathi, 2002, p. 32)
The final defining feature of a garment is its details. Details are smaller portions of clothing that are either vital parts of the construction or are added as decoration. Details can be zippers, seams, gathers, appliqués and pockets; and are often added to garments of a more expensive nature. Through observation of these four crucial characteristics and the understanding of what exactly a dress is in its most simplistic meaning, we can begin to breakdown the distinct qualities of apparel (Sumathi, 2002, p. 32).

CLASSIFICATION OF DRESS

As previously stated, the silhouette is visually the single most significant feature of a garment (Reigelman, 2000). Dresses are classified and categorized based on their silhouettes, which are predominately defined by the length of the dress.

For my thesis, I will define the key silhouettes that are revealed in my top choice, seven little black dress silhouettes. My selections are the: evening dress, ball gown, cocktail dress, shift dress, mini dress, and the shirtdress. The evening gown, or court dress, can be traced to the 15th century European royal courts where they were introduced by the fashion conscious Philip the Good (Mendes 1999).

Evening gowns are characterized by long flowing fabric that varies from tea length where the hemline falls below the knee and above the ankle. The hemline of the ballerina length evening gown falls just above the ankle. The full-length evening gown hemline extends to the floor. The evening gown is often made of lavish fabrics like chiffon, satin or silk organza. The evening gown is typically worn at semi-formal or formal affairs (Tortora & Eubank, 2010).

Similar to evening gowns, ball gowns are also to be worn at formal occasions, where they differ is in the shape of the skirt. Ball gowns will always have a long, full, flared skirt and a fitted bodice, where an evening gown can be designed in any silhouette.

A cocktail dress is commonly known, as a woman’s dress worn at cocktail parties, semi-formal, or “black tie” affairs (Tortora & Eubank, 2010). This garment is characterized by the lengths, which vary from above the knee to above the ankle depending on the occasion, and sumptuousness.

Christian Dior was the first to dub the early evening frock a “cocktail” dress in the late 1940s, and
in doing so allowed magazines, department stores, and rival Parisian and American designers to promote fashion with cocktail-specific terminology (Edelman 1997).

The shift dress, first worn in the 20s, is a short straightforward simple dress (Tortora & Eubank, 2010). Typically worn above the knee the shift dress has a fitted two-dart bust and a high scoop or Bateau (boat) neckline. Other variations to the dress can be most commonly adjusted at the waistline changing the straight silhouette to a line, where the base of the dress is the widest, resembling an A shape. The empire waistline then sits just below the bust, from which the rest of the dress flows down to the hem. Adjustments can also be made at the neck, adding a collar and sleeves.

The shirt dress, or shirt waist dress, as it was called when created in the 50s, is characterized a collar or button front that mimics a gentleman’s dress shirt(Hill 2011). Shirt dresses are traditionally made in crisp fabrics like cotton or silk and are typically cut with a seam at the waist. This simple pattern allows for variations of the dress like the T-shirt dress, which is merely the elongated version of a T-shirt.

Finally, the mini dress, popularized by Mary Quant in the early 60s, the mini skirt or dress defined a generation (Tortora & Eubank, 2010). The mini dress is described as a short, close fitting dress with the hemline resting at mid-thigh, roughly four inches below the buttocks.
IT WAS A WARM EVENING, NEARLY SUMMER, AND SHE WORE A SLIM COOL BLACK DRESS, BLACK SANDALS, AND A PEARL CHOKER.

TRUMAN CAPOTE,
BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY’S
THE LITTLE BLACK DRESS

THE HISTORY: MOURNING DRESS
THE STAPLE: CHANEL
THE DRESS: BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S
THE POPULARITY: THE 80S
**THE HISTORY: WOMEN IN BLACK AND MOURNING DRESS**

It wasn’t until the 16th century do we begin to see feminine symbolism with black attire develop, and in some respects to its demise, it arrived coupled with negativity. At this time, the fashion of the “mourning dress” became particularly popular, and with catastrophic events such as the black plague European countries were at the “peak of mourning observance,” (Edelman, 1997, p. 31) thus establishes the practice of the “mourning dress.” The mourning dress period lasted 2 1/2 years. The first period known as deep mourning was a duration of one year and one day (Mendes, 1999). Women wore matte black clothing with absolutely no ornamentation during this first period. The second period, known as half mourning was duration of nine months. During this second period, silk fabric was used for the dress. The third period was for duration of three months and it was known as ordinary mourning. Widows were allowed to embellish their dresses during this time. During the final six months of the mourning period additional colors where available. Dyers were permitted to use various tints and shades of black and violet (Edelman 1997).

In the 1500s, aside from nuns, not many women were seen enveloped in the inky hues of sorrow until Catherine de Medici (Steele, 2007). Medici also known as the “Black Queen” who almost always appears in black in historic art, was one of the first royal women documented for her somber attire, which she wore out of morning for her late husband King Henry II of France. (Steele, 2007) Later, Queen Victoria wore black for 40 years as homage to her dead husband Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. In the 19th century black was a prominent color that made its way into feminine dress, which was notably the beginning of feminine oppression in society through dress. Black began to define itself in two genres, rich black and poor black. The costumes of the wealthy were in rich black and those of governesses and shop girls were in poor black (Steele, 2007).

With the mourning attire came negative sociological and psychological perceptions of a woman’s character. In the 19th century “the observance of mourning was a confinement worse than a corset.” (Edelman, 1997) The wearing of black announced a woman’s unavailability and how her life ceased to exist without her husband. Similar to the letter “A,” it marked her sexual experience and how she was forbidden to enter into another carnal relationship. Although black was seen as a cloak of woman’s perceived character, it also inspired a seductive allure that sparked the evolution
of black in the 19th Century, as a public sign of social; and sexual unavailability (Edelman 1997, Steele 2007). Perhaps, it was made the forbidden fruit more attractive.

THE STAPLE: CHANEL

The little black dress was conceived around the beginning of the 20th century (Mendes, 1999). However, it wasn’t deemed as an essential to every woman’s wardrobe until Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel’s timeless silhouette was revealed in 1926. Coco’s Idea of the LBD was a knee length, long sleeve, wool jersey, day dress with a few asymmetrical lines, flowing across the body, simple, yet chic.

Why a little black dress? Black apparel was not only a symbol of mourning but also provided a sensible solution to the now working woman’s everyday attire; versatile, economic and chic in nature that allowed a women to achieve a casual yet sophisticated look. Chanel saw precisely these opportunities with the feminine wardrobe (Edelman 1997).

The little black dress was in some way a reflection of Chanel’s tragic childhood, adolescence and heartbreaking first (Rubenstien, 2011). It is rumored that these incidents can be accredited to the inception of the timeless vestment. At the age of 12, immediately following her mother’s death, young Gabrielle was tossed into a nearby orphanage where she first donned the somber black cloak (Edelman 1997). She continued to wear the LBD well into her early twenties as a perpetual reflection of the charitable courtesy provided by society (Edelman, 1997). Once beyond the convent, Chanel observed a greater division amongst society of those with money and those without and she decided she would be that of the latter. Through determination and God given talent, Chanel began her fashion career as a milliner for wealthy women and mistresses, her popularity and unique style of craft quickly elevated to her to couturier. This was when she met the love of her life Arthur “Boy” Capel, an English polo player whom with the young designer was smitten. Chanel and Capel’s affair lasted nine years and upon his tragic unexpected death in 1919, Capel had served as the patron for her first boutiques and ultimately the headquarters at 31 rue Cambon (Rubenstein, 2011). The death of Capel plunged Chanel into a deep depression for which the world would mourn. From that moment on, Chanel was seen wearing black, almost exclusively. Morn they did, on May 26 1926 when the dress debuted in American Vogue, with the headline “Chanel’s Ford” predicting the dress would “become the sort of uniform for women of all taste.
From a uniform of necessity to a uniform of taste, Chanel transformed the dress given to her into a “uniform of her choosing, which women of wealth and breeding would have to pay Chanel for the pleasure to wear (Edelman, 1997).”

The iconic LBD silhouette reflected the times of the 20s flapper girl. (Edelman, 1997, Tortora & Eubank, 2010) and inspired the birth of another type of dress to Western society, “The Cocktail Dress.” Times were changing quickly in the 1920s after World War I, and a new norm was now being established for women, she was a working woman, a spirited and free woman and her attire should reflect so, thus the manifestation of the “cocktail dress.” Women for the first time in history were welcomed to join the workforce and the need for restraining crinolines (with which the steel was now used for weapons) and hobbling skirts (excess fabric used for soldiers) were no longer necessary. Dresses shrunk from 19 ¼ yards to 7, coining the phrases, “little, simple, small,” all adjectives used to describe the little black dress.

“Never before in the history of costume in the civilized West had women worn skirts that revealed their legs (Tortora & Eubank, 2010).” During the Prohibition Era, the term cocktail was widely used not only a type of beverage but also a way of life. The cocktail affair generally took place between six and eight p.m. and along with this new even, came new attire. No longer were women dressed in the frilly brightly colored tea gowns of the past. Now women were more likely to be seen in a sleek, sexy, black, sheath adorned with pearls and diamonds that shimmered through her black lacquered art deco inspired martini glass (Edelman 1997).

Art Deco, a visual design trend influenced by cubism, modernism, and futurism that debuted in France in 1926. It quickly permeated through industrial, interior, and graphic design, of which the color black was primarily utilized and elevated to modernity (Pastoureau 169). Black lacquered furniture, floors, glass, and appliances were a revolutionary development and “all the rave” in the roaring 20s, consequently it was expected the trend would carry over to apparel design. The birth of the cocktail dress was also the birth of :“new woman” who at this time was able to indulge in a world and a secret society she had not before. A world of adventure and play, becoming the vision of strength and independence we see today (Edelman 1997).
THE DRESS: BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY’S

It is dawn; a New York cab bustles hastily down a vacant peaceful Fifth Avenue, and comes to screeching halt outside of the polished granite exterior of Tiffany & Company. A slender, young, column-like woman appears from behind the taxi and slowly saunters to the shop window admiring the precious stones showcased before her eyes. She cooed softly over each piece as if she bore them herself, glowing like soft amber lights coming from sleepy cabs on their morning rounds. The young socialite is sophisticated and chic, swathed in a Italian satin pavement sweeping black sheath, which exposes a glimpse of her porcelain shoulders, and doused in pearls, with her opera gloves and large black glasses. It was in this illustrious minute that, the Little Black Dress became eternal. “She raised the little black dress to an art form. She taught us how to wear it once and for all, not with fussy fuchsia print scarves, but with simple pearls, a black hat, and –did we dare- a long black cigarette holder,” declared Ellen Melinkoff about Audrey Hepburn in Breakfast at Tiffany’s in her book, What We Wore (Edelman 1997). Givenchy, the creator of this iconic dress, selected the accessories all the way down to the cigarette holder. Each of these items were chosen explicitly for the character Holly Golightly performed by his beloved muse Audrey Hepburn (Givenchy Book- 86). The chemistry between Givenchy and Hepburn was undeniable, one of the most important fashion pairings ever (Wannamaker, 2006). She personified the Givenchy’s ideal feminine client, and became the representation of his fashion house (Givenchy Book- 85). Their professional relationship began when Hepburn approached the designer with a proposition to assist with the costumes for Sabrina, and ultimately blossomed into a lifelong friendship (Rubenstein 2011). “It was the perfect dress for her,” noted the designer, and Audrey herself declared, “His are the only clothes in which I feel myself.”It was an enormous help to know that I looked the part. Then the rest wasn’t so tough anymore.” Givenchy’s lovely simple clothes [gave me] the feeling of being whoever I played... (Wannamaker, 2006; Bailey 2006)” Hepburn is commonly characterized in the film as having poise, elegance confidence, power and urbane sensuality (Design Museum, 2010, p. 26), and she herself credits it all to Givenchy. From this moment on the little black dress designed by Hubert Givenchy, worn by Audrey Hepburn, would be cited as one of the most iconic of the 20th century and film history. (“Audrey Hepburn’s little black dress sells for a fortune,” 2006).

In 2006, that same little black dress was reintroduced to the press via actress Natalie Portman on the November, US Edition of Harper’s Bazaar magazine, labeling it “The Million Dollar Dress
(CITE – Magazine Article).” The dress of which only three were made; one a part of the Museum of Costume in Madrid, another within the Givenchy archives in Paris, and the third and final replica from Givenchy’s own private collection. These dresses were to be auctioned on behalf of Givenchy himself, in an effort to raise money for City of Joy Aid, a charity that supports the disadvantaged children in India. He further had the generous support of his dear friend and beloved muse. Givenchy’s dress was auctioned Christie’s, the world’s oldest fine art auctioneer in London and estimated to sell for £50,000 - £70,000 ($98,800 - $138,320). On December 5th, 2006 the dress was purchased by an anonymous telephone buyer for the final price of £467,200 ($923,187, almost six times the estimated price), the world was astounded. This price effortlessly surpassed that of Judy Garland’s blue and white gingham dress in The Wizard of Oz, noting it as the highest amount ever paid for a gown from a film (Wannamaker, 2006; “Audrey hepburn’s little black dress sells for a fortune,” 2006). “This is one of the most famous black dresses in the world, an iconic piece of cinematic history and we are glad it fetched a historic price (‘Audrey hepburn’s little black dress sells for a fortune,’ 2006),” declared Sarah Hodgson the film specialist of Christie’s. Four years later that very same dress topped the survey of LOVEFiLM, a DVD rental company, as the best dress ever worn by a woman in a film while also being noted in books like “100 Unforgettable Dresses,” and “50 Dresses That Changed the World.” “Audrey Hepburn has truly made that little black dress a fashion staple which has stood the test of time despite competition from some of the most stylish females around, “ professed Helen Cowley, publisher of LOVEFiLM, and the world undeniably agrees (P.A, 2010).

THE POPULARITY: THE 80S

The little black dress had a love hate relationship with the masses throughout the 60s and the 70s. British designer Mary Quant is credited with the brief glimpse of the symbolism of rebellious black in the youth revolution of the 60s. Suddenly black danced across the miniskirts of teenagers rejecting the mannered sophisticated black of their mothers in the 50s (Mendez 14). British street style and style tribes such as the punks and goths popularized black in the 70s, amongst the bright psychedelic hues of the disco-loving era (Steele, 2007). However it was the international economies that bloomed within the fashion industry in the 80s (Mendes & De La Haye, 1999, p. 233), that elevated black to the sophisticated fashionable hue that we see today, particularly by way of the Japan. Black flooded the fashion centers from 81’ to 82’, the Parisian debut of Japanese designers Miyake, Yamamoto and Kawakubo (of Commes des Garcon) revolutionized black, and over night Parisian runways were bathed in black; models strut down the runway in their
samurai black and critics were shocked and stunned referring to the monochromatic garments as “Hiroshima chic,” and “crow like.” This was the beginning of an alternative perspective within the fashion realm; achromatic spectrum and diversity of detail with in the apparel provided a separate identity, the eastern identity (Yamada article). This new outlook offered a pathway with in feminine apparel through innovative construction techniques, embellished cutwork, distressed fabrics and asymmetrical hems, which was artistic, intellectual and minimalism chic (Steele, 2007; Yamada).

Aside from the avant-garde dark fashions of the Japanese designers, the 80s also brought on the materialization of a new clientele for fashion, the workingwoman. By 1980 51.2 % of women 18 and over were labor force participants (Solomon, 1986, p. 357), and there was a need for apparel that was appropriate for women with in this industry. These women requested that their wardrobe be suitable yet flexible, able to travel from the workplace to evening cocktails without forfeiting fashion in the process. Women wanted and needed a more diluted ‘realistic product’ from the runway that can be worn day to day, hence the inception of ready-to-wear. Ready-to-wear or ‘off the rack clothing’ is clothing made in standard sizes and available from merchandise in stock (Tortora & Eubank, 2010, p. 593), thus the high fashion began to take a back seat, designers began to see haute couture as a public way to drive their other businesses. In the 80s American designers were on the up and coming, taking particular interest to the career woman (Hill, 2011, p. 714). Designers such as Ralph Lauren and Donna Karan promoted the idea of mix and matching pieces dark gender-neutral hues evoking ‘big city sophistication,’ combined with practical features that promoted flexibility. Separates were introduced to be interchangeable, to achieve stylistic variations and diversity wit in apparel that allowed for a limitless wardrobe. US designers were proud of their ‘career chic’ producing garments in expensive high tech fabric innovations that echoed the Ivy League and folklore giving women in power authority through a sense of equality in style (Mendes & De La Haye, 1999, p. 248). Feminine power dressing consisted of two looks (both in commonly fabricated in black), the first characterized by their broad shouldered trim waist masculine silhouette; the second, ultra feminine silhouette introducing body conscious clothing through the renewed highlighting of the chemise (Tortora & Eubank, 2010). The flourishing economy of the 80s carried fresh perspectives within the fashion industry, the avant-garde Japanese influence, Feminine presence within the workforce and ultra tailoring of power dressing all contributed to the modern formula and the unrelenting admiration of the little black dress that we see today(Mendes & De La Haye, 1999).
ONE IS NEVER
OVER DRESSED
OR UNDER DRESSED,
IN A LITTLE BLACK DRESS.

KARL LAGERFELD,
CHANEL
PSYCHOLOGY AND THE LBD

HUMAN BEHAVIOR TOWARDS DRESS
WEARING BLACK: THE PSYCHOLOGY
WEARING THE LITTLE BLACK DRESS
HUMAN BEHAVIOR TOWARDS DRESS

The merger of self and social interaction impacts the idea of dress and the effects it may have on self and others (Johnson & Yoo & Kim & Lennon, 2008, p. 5). Dress can influence the behavior of an individual and others and play a role in the establishment of personal identity. Scientist Gregory Stone suggests that emotions can be inferred on another thru dress, identity, mood, attitudes and values (Johnson & Yoo & Kim & Lennon, 2008).

Scientists and researchers alike conclude that society has established dress to evoke certain social identity cues, since our primal beginnings. Through the ages, a woman’s physical appearance was said to be an accurate measurement of her social worth. In a society where thinness and youthfulness is promoted, one’s attire has a heavy weight on a woman’s social and self-assessment (Ogle & Tyner, 2007, p. 16).

To explore the physiological meanings behind women and dress it is helpful explore the theories of Foucault and Bourdieu. Their research was on the concept of a disciplined, “docile” or body, a body that is disciplined or controlled according to cultural norms. Things like diet, exercise, beauty and health regimens and one’s pursuit to change their body to conform to a given ideal. Additional research has been done that addresses the body and the ways women can achieve empowerment by accomplishing the cultural norms of beauty. Scientists suggest that when women embrace this ideal, it allows for access into the male dominated business professional sphere (Ogle & Tyner, 2007). Further suggesting that many high ranking women are savvy to cultural pressures and see opportunities for power through feminine beauty and wardrobe. Wietz conducted a study in 2002 and noted that women may manipulate their appearance in contrast or concert with social norms, for gaining power. In another research study, Davis in (Lamb & Kallal, 1992), studied of plastic surgery patients and discovered that women often undergo surgery to increase personal power. This suggests that women may gain power by resisting or accommodating socio cultural norms (Lamb & Kallal, 1992).

WEARING BLACK: THE PSYCHOLOGY

The theory of why humans wear black is partially skeptical, and completely emotional. When analyzing the emotional and the selective processes behind black one must first state that research and studies on this topic have been proven inconclusive- however the emotional influence of
color cannot be so easily overlooked (Varley 1980). There is evidence to suggest that the light of
different colors entering the eye can indirectly affect the center of emotions in the hypothalamus,
which in turn affects the pituitary gland. This gland controls the entire endocrine system including
the thyroid and the sex glands and so controls the hormone levels of this system and the moods
consequent upon them (Varley 1980), but to put simply colors do have an affect on our emotional
mindsets. As mentioned before in chapter Two, Dress plays a role in the behavior of the individual
in establishing ones personality—there for it could be assumed, through research and personal
experience that color plays an important role in the selection of a garment (Edeleman-1997).
Max Lüscher, Swiss psychotherapist known for inventing the color test, established that persons
color preferences reveal basic personality traits, which further imply that color has some type of
emotional value.

In Varley’s book entitled Colour he states that, Peoples ideal colors are based on personal point
of reference; on the intuitive understanding of the rules of color harmony and contrast as applied
to their hair, their eyes or their skin color, and on their ideas about their status, role, and age
or disposition (p. 33). The color black allows for limitless opportunities for self expression
because of its deep ubiquitous hue, it becomes a canvas upon which the host can express his
or her creativity while also a being self assured that their black cloak will have immediate peer
acceptance (Edelman, 1997). With my research, I have deduced that there are in fact two facets of
black, rebellious black and sophisticated black. Lüscher sides more with the idea of black being
defined as rebellious, empty, annihilating color—much like the black worn by the style tribes like
the greasers, rockers and Goths as a symbol of the rejection of conformity and their search for
self-expression (Tortora & Eubank, 2010, p. 590). Leattrice Eiseman, Director of the Pantone
Color Institute in her book The Color Answer Book, Believes the latter; that black communicates
empowerment, that the host is not easily manipulated loves elegance and appreciates classics.
Both perspectives of black are ideally accurate, yet in direct emotional contrast however, they
both have one over arching concept that unites them, and that is the concept of Power. Power
within the human perspective can mean a multitude of things. For black I believe this power can
be summarized into three categories: the power of authority, obscurity and the power of self-
confidence. These attributes are primary emotional cues that can be projected through black during
social interaction (Solomon, 1986, p. 321) either verbally or nonverbally and through the use of
clothing, one can shape the attributions made by others.
In 19th century Europe, black became the uniform of authority and austerity (Pastoureau, 2009, p. 174). Believed to be out of the necessity from the industrial revolution, black swept across countries covering the streets in thick coatings of soot and smoke, thus promoting dark colored apparel as a fashion requirement amongst the working population (Steele, 2007). Because black was already a color of uniformity amongst persons of influence such as judges, lawyers, doctors and clergy at this time; it is not surprising to see the manifestation of black as a practical uniform within professional business realm and thus associating it with authoritative power (Pastoureau, 2009). Nathan Kline, Professor of Psychiatry believes that Black’s consistency within the business world is because of its representation as a conservative outward sign of stability and security of which people are in search of within the unstable economy (Steele, 2007). Glenn O’ Brien, in the Color of Fashion, identifies black as a ‘power shade’ with the purpose of intimidation and dominance (Edelman, 1997). Stability, Security, Intimidation and Dominance are all well-known attributes to used to acquire influence and admiration with in the business realm, and black provides a unconscious way to infer those messages.

The obscure perception of black can no doubt be attributed to its taboo (Steele, 2007). Black has a long shadowy history, as mentioned in chapter one that commonly links it with witchcraft, dark arts and the unknown, however lying within the unknown is where black obtains its provocative appeal (Edelman-31). Vogue editor and former model, Grace Coddington, believes that the color black allows for limitless opportunities of self-expression, never overpowering, always allowing the ability for her to play a multiple of ‘characters (Edelman 1997)’. Associate professor at Cornell University likens black to a cloak of anonymity stating, “it forces men to define who you are based on your personality” (Steele, 2007). In harmony with providing uncertainty, the obscurity of black also projects sexuality (Feisner 2004). It is the obscurity of black that entices its audience, “of all the come-hither colors, black is the most chameleon in its sex appeal,” states fashion designer and provocateur Mary Quant. Edith Warton, in her book The Age of Innocence, states black as a ‘taboo Color,’ because of its history with mourning. Black separates women from girls symbolizing sexual experience and the loss of innocence and that it was makes the color appealing and author Ellen Melinkoff also agrees. Through obscurity, the color black can entice an audience evoking a sense of mystery and sensuality, giving its host the power to adapt within a multitude of environments (Edelman 1997).
High self-esteem is a critical psychological factor that is closely related to mental and social behaviors (Ogle & Tyner, 2007), and it’s those behaviors that define a positive self-assessment. One of the critical factors that impact self-assessment is physical attractiveness, which includes not only the way people assess themselves but also the emotional cues that stem from those assessments. Within the feminine perspective, Social media has a prominent effect on self-assessment, promoting that a woman’s appearance is an appropriate measure of herself worth (Ogle & Tyner, 2007); and black provides a vessel of confidence. Studies have shown, and time has proven that women feel thinner or more attractive wearing black (Edelman, 1997). Walk down the street, ask the first woman you see why she is wearing black you can be guaranteed that she will say because “its comfortable.” Director of the Pantone Color institute, Leatrice Eisman believes so, saying “Most American Women feel best when they feel slim and most think that black makes them look that way” and both designers Bill Blass and Donna Karan seconds that theory (Edelman, 1997; Steele, 2007). Or perhaps it is also the appropriateness of the color, Black is the only color in the color spectrum that can be successfully coordinated with every other color, for a perfect look (Varley, 1980). From the Wall Street look to glamorous chic, black has always been a very dominant and versatile, color the infinite chicness (Steele, 2007; Elegance, 1964), as Lagerfeld states, “Its not black in the sense of black my dear- its black in the sense of chic.” Black empowers her wearer by being appropriately outfitted in the workplace and in the same garment dressed for dinner hours later, the of comfort and flexibility, while also “keeping up with fashion (Edelman, 1997; p. 140),” The power to be able to slip into a garment knowing you will look appropriate for any occasion (Mendes, 1999) while also feeling her best, a power that only black can provide.

WEARING THE LITTLE BLACK DRESS

As for the LBD, it is the direct application of these attributes that has elevated this garment to an essential garment of every woman’s wardrobe. “You can wear black at any time. You can wear black at any age. You may wear it in almost any occasion. A little black frock is an essential to a woman’s wardrobe,” declared designer Christian Dior. (Mendes 1999; p. 9) “The utility of the little black dress can be defined with five rules: it is practical, nothing is so serviceable, nothing is so unrecognizable and nothing looks so well on every occasion,” Emily Post (Etiquette, 1992; Steele, 2007, p).
The little black dress is modern (Bill Cunningham, New York Times), it is always “in” thus always accepted, “Given fashions fecklessness… [Black] provides a uniform that protects them from the risks of dabbling in trends,” expresses Allure magazine editor and chief, Linda Wells (Edelman, 1997). The little black dress provides comfort and security. Donna Karan, influential designer for professional women and Richard Martin, Fashion Historian, likens the LBD to a “security blanket” providing its wearer with a sense of correctness and sophistication, (Mendes & De La Haye, 1999, p. 249; Feisner 2004) giving her self-confidence (Edelman, 1997). The little black dress is decisive and intimidating (Edelman, 1997). The LBD is mysterious, “Because the little black dress is not conspicuous and shape or fabric, it imparts a certain mystery inviting one to draw physically closer to see it’s details,” comments American Etiquette expert and PR executive Letitia Baldrige. Lastly, LBD is a classic expression of a woman’s sexual identity (Edelman, 1997) “symbolizing sexiness and adulthood” Ellen Melinkoff recollects in her 50s fashion and social history book (Steele, 2007). “…[The LBD] can be all things to all women, (Mary Quant- Color by Quant)” and it is this versatility that makes the LBD enticing and a common go to in a woman’s wardrobe (Steele, 2007), “It’s just something that you know is right, even if it’s wrong.”Andre Leon Talley, on The Little Black Dress, 2012.
METHODOLOGY

FEA MODEL
DESIGN PRINCIPLES
RESEARCH METHOD
THE SINFUL SEVEN
FEA MODEL
The method that I will use to approach the evaluation of the seven nominated Little Black Dresses is referred to as the FEA Model (functional, expressive and aesthetic) Consumer Needs Model. This model observes and identifies the process that consumers use when selecting apparel. This process not only satisfies practical needs but also personal needs of the consumer. Identifying consumer needs and wants provides a basis for forming design standards by which to measure the success of the design process. Although concerns will vary by customer, they can be filtered into three individual categories: functional expressive and aesthetic.

Fit, mobility, protection and comfort are all examples of functional needs that consumers may seek when selecting apparel. Situational use and cultural influence may also play a role when selecting apparel use, form and utility (Rosenblad & Wallin, 1985). Therefore it is pertinent that we explore these attributes while within the functional context of the design process.

The expressive category communicates the symbolic interaction of the consumer. Apparel infers a variety of information about its host. Therefore, consumers select apparel that echo cues, such as personality, values and social status, that reflect explicit messages that they want to convey to society.

Aesthetic needs refer to the consumer’s inherit to attraction to a particular garment. Color, texture, pattern, and symmetry, commonly referred to in design books as design principles, are all examples of aesthetic qualities that are used to evaluate apparel. Aesthetic apparel standards are directly connected to cultural standards of beauty, therefore they transform over time, similar to trends and fads. While observing these three filters it is impossible to disregard the overlap, which is why the model is illustrated in a circular continuum. Apparel needs to be functional while also being expressive, and expressive while also being aesthetically pleasing, and aesthetically pleasing while also being functional; and so on and so forth.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES
In coordination with using the FEA Model, applicable principles of design will also be used to evaluate the aesthetics of each dress. A design principle can be defined as a comprehensive and fundamental law within the working process of design (Faimon & Weigand, 2004, p. 24). The principles of design include rhythm described as the imposition of order and unity using various
forms of repetition. Balance, defined as the appearance of work that imparts unity of which there are three types: formal or symmetrical, informal or asymmetrical and radial (Sumathi, 2002, p. 36). Proportion defined as the relationship formed between two parts of design in relation to the whole. Scale defined as the concept of size relationships within a design. Emphasis, defined as the creation of areas of visual importance for an audience to focus upon. Finally, harmony defined as the visual agreement of all the parts of a work, which results in the unity of the work (Feisner, 2004, p. 154-157; Faimon & Weigand 2004). Good design is not purely subjective and design principles provide designers with a direction to interpret functional and aesthetic parameters in a successful manner (Faimon & Weigand, 2004, p. 25).

RESEARCH METHOD
The FEA model and principles of design enhances the designer process by expanding the considerations made in the concept and the design process, and forces the designer to think outside of the needs commonly accepted for an apparel consumer or any product consumer for that matter. Forcing them to extend the life of product beyond the 6mos trend window (Tortora & Ebank, 2010).

Rather than assuming the client wants one filter more than the other, the designer must consider all three aspects of the consumers needs and wants. Being able to identify and define the most iconic sustainable garment in fashion history through scientific and methodological research would be a pivotal point within the fashion industry. This process creates a thorough assessment of not only how well apparel aligns with consumer wants but targets the potential to identify and ultimately create more sustainable, beautiful apparel appropriate for consumers. Through developing this methodology (using the FEA model in harmony with design principles) evaluation in apparel can be applicable to assessing not only future little black dresses but also future apparel.
FEA CONSUMER NEEDS MODEL
The following seven little black dresses were specifically chosen for their presence within fashion history. Each garment has had a significant moment that is not only responsible for shaping how women looked, but also how they felt. These selections range from silhouettes illustrated within priceless artwork to cinematic marvels that created once in a lifetime moments within feminine history. Each dress was a turning point in the way women and men have dressed over centuries. Be it a wedding, a job interview or a social event, these seven dresses observed the previous limitations set by society and broke them with divine elegance and controversy.
The first controversial Little Black Dress was illustrated in a portrait, the Portrait of Madame X, a historically provocative oil painting by Sargent of the American native Virginie Amelie Avegno Gautreau. The painting presents a ghostly pale Gautreau, her elegant frame facing the artist as her head twists gracefully in profile as if gazing nostalgically into space. She is wearing a plunging black sweetheart neckline shaped like the top half of a heart, fitted bodice, floor sweeping satin, evening gown with decorative jeweled straps. The portrait was not well received, contrary to the thoughts of the artist and its sitter. Critics raved of immorality and scandal; and although unnamed, acknowledged and publically humiliated Gautreau (Edelman, 1997). Prior to the 20s it was considered indecent for a woman of Gautreaus standing to be portrayed wearing black outside of morning situations, and the painting itself was considered sensual with erotic undertones. Initially unveiled with the jeweled strap of the dress tumbling down her right shoulder in correlation with the plunging neckline of the dress, demonstrated pretentiousness at the time (Davis, 2003). Later Sargent would paint the strap resting on the shoulders of Gautreau as if to “hold up” the gown to appease his audience (Edelman, 1997). Years later, Sargent sold the painting to the Metropolitan Museum of Art noting the piece as “the best “thing” he has ever done”, where it remains today (Davis, 2003).
This High Bateau (follows the curve of the collarbone to the very tip of shoulders) Neckline with a Straight fitted bodice, a Floor length Traditional Sheath. Originally created with a split revealing a substantial amount of Hepburn’s Limbs, Edith Head and director Blake Edwards decided that the dress be redesigned as the column-seque frock that was revealed to us in the famed opening sequence of Breakfast at Tiffany’s (Wannamaker, 2006). Only three replicas of the dress remain, two of which are modified without the split in Givenchy Archive in Paris and in the private collection of an anonymous collector, and the final reproduction with the thigh high split at the Museum of Costume in Madrid.
The dress worn by Rita Hayworth in Gilda, was more of a work of technical beauty rather than simply a gorgeous gown. Jean Louis, Columbia Pictures costume designer and dear friend of Hayworth, went to great lengths to create the legendary dress that became the signature scene of Hayworth’s career as she swayed across the nightclub one glove in hand singing, “Put the Blame on Mame.” When Gilda began production it was noted to Louis that the gown had to be a gown exemplifying “extreme sexuality” within a woman (Fields, 2007). With that cue, Jean Louis was inspired but the extreme sexuality of Madame Gautreau in Portrait of Madame X. Modeled his gown after the Italian satin plunging floor sweeping, little black dress (Grey, 2011). During the shooting of Gilda, Hayworth was pregnant, and starting to show. In efforts to keep the actress’s circumstance unnoticed on screen, Jean Louis took particular precautions to conceal her growing belly while still allowing Hayworth to perform the scandalous striptease (Rubenstein, 2011). To the eye, the strapless sleek satin gown was stunning, but beneath the gown it was far more impressive. The fitted bodice was created as a harness much like a corset, which was made up of three stays positioned under the breasts, in the center and on the side. To create comfort, the harness was molded for Hayworth as she “stripped” about the club (Grey, 2011). The final precaution was the strategic positioning of a large bow on Hayworth’s waist. While giving the dress balance, it also masked her ever-growing belly (Rubenstein, 2011). Nevertheless, the tabooed strapless gown grew in popularity after consumers upon watched this film. Hayworth was able to show women, although naive of its complexity, the availability of flexibility and movement with the strapless gown while still preserving her reputation (Rubenstein, 2011). In 2009 the Gilda dress was put up for auction at Forrest J. Ackerman Estate, valued at $30,000 to $50,000, however the dress was removed before it reached the auction (Levy, 2011). Little is known of the whereabouts of the legendary Gilda dress, but we do know that no one wore the strapless dress quite like Hayworth (Rubenstein, 2011, p. 160).
THE BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY’S DRESS

GIVENCHY,
AUDREY HEPBURN
1961

Dress Description: High Bateau (follows the curve of the collarbone to the very tip of shoulders) Neckline with a Straight fitted bodice, a Floor length Traditional Sheath. Originally created with a split revealing a substantial amount of Hepburn’s Limbs, Edith Head and director Blake Edwards decided that the dressed be redesigned as the column-seque frock that was revealed to us in the famed opening sequence of Breakfast at Tiffany’s (Wannamaker, 2006). Only three replicas of the dress remain, two of which are modified without the split in Givenchy Archive in Paris and in the private collection of an anonymous collector, and the final reproduction with the thigh high split at the Museum of Costume in Madrid.
Dress Description: The dress by little known Greek designer Christina Stambolian by royal British icon Princess Diana was a case of power dressing the impact of the right LBD worn at the precisely right time. At a Vanity Fair dinner in London and on the eve of her husband’s, Prince Charles, acknowledgement of his very public affair, Lady Di pranced down the pavement in a very sexy buoyant body conscious little black dress (Design Museum, 2010). Diana’s silk jacquard low neckline bare shoulder ruched cocktail dress stunned the press. The image portrayed a sexier more confident Diana than they were used to and she was sensational! The gown was affectionately labeled “the revenge dress,” as it headlined the papers and tabloids the following morning, as Charles confession fell to the wayside (Rubenstein, 2011, p. 130). The Princess played the press and was victorious, she was a vision of strength and independence in the face of adversity (Design Museum, 2010)- and this moment and this dress would be the second most photographed dress she ever wore (Rubenstein, 2011, p. 130).
The LBD that donned Elizabeth Hurley at the Premier of Four Weddings and a Funeral was arguably one of Versace’s best known creations and predominantly responsible for launching young Hurley’s Career (Design Museum, 2010, p. 86). This “neo-punk” inspired silk crepe and lycra body hugging plunging neckline with thigh high slit, double fastened strapped and open rib cage evening gown that was secured by a half dozen medusa headed safety pins, made headlines and fashion history (Rubenstein, 2011, p. 15). The infamous gown was just one of his iconic pieces from Versace’s 1994 spring collection, that shocked critics with their distance resemblance to catholic school uniforms only begin held together by Versace inspired safety pins. Gianni Versace emphasized the power of sexual black, and was known as the creator of the “Antibourgeois little black dress,” turning the risqué fashion fetish style (characterized by its black leather, vinyl, rubber and tightly laced corsets- Tortora & Eubank, 2010, p. 591) and made it chic (Steele, 2007). Versace proclaimed that he knew that the dress would look beautiful and simply perfect on the 29-year-old actress. “Liz has this intelligent face attached to that very naughty body. So seeing a woman like her in this gown was a guarantee that everyone would go nuts!” and they did in fact go nuts. Since 94, the Versace-Hurley dress debuted as a part of a 2007 Timeless Luxury promotion at a Harrods exhibition dedicated to the little black dress, for £10,690 and recently donned Lady Gaga, whom has been an adamant Versace promoter.
Marc Jacobs is by no means a conventional designer, in fact his eccentric personal style has made him a fixture for the glamour paparazzi but on the evening of the 2012 Met Gala he would shock not only those fashionably inclined but the entire world. That evening Marc stepped on the red carpet to what he would refer to as “just a lace dress,” but what former editor of Vogue magazine, Andre Leon Talley, defined as an iconic piece of clothing history (Hoevel, 2012). The designer’s sheer lace calf length button down cocktail shirt dress accompanied with white boxers and pilgrim inspired footwear was a statement, and an unconventional one at that. No longer was the little black dress painted as the “uniform frock of the 50s” it could now be interpreted in any way to anyone as they deem fit be they male or female (Bourne, 2012). “I think, in today’s America, there is a great leverage and a great sense of liberation… And I chose this dress with great care. I was there when Marc wore it; it was a very shock value moment… but it was also a statement of elegance and confidence by a provocative designer” declares Talley. The statement dress completely sold out, nearly overnight at Barney’s (Mau, 2012) and since then made an appearance in Talley’s “Little Black Dress” exhibit at Savannah College of Art and Design’s Museum of Art (Hoevel, 2012). Although selected instead of a “boring tuxedo” the designer nonchalantly revealed, this daring look opened the doors to the unlimited potential of men’s fashion (Hoevel, 2012).
DRESS REFERENCE CHART

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SURVEY OF HISTORIC COSTUME</th>
<th>WORLD COSTUME AND FASHION</th>
<th>20TH CENTURY FASHION</th>
<th>100 UNFORGETTABLE DRESSES</th>
<th>50 DRESSES CHANGE THE WORLD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GLAMOUR.COM. UNITED KINGDOM</td>
<td>ANDRE LEON TALLEY LBD EXHIBIT</td>
<td>10 BEST DRESSES IN FILM: LOVEFILM</td>
<td>25 ICONIC LBD IN ART: COMPLEX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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# Dress Analysis Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dress Assement</th>
<th>Rhythm</th>
<th>Balance</th>
<th>Scale/Proportion</th>
<th>Emphasis</th>
<th>Harmony</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madame X Sargent • 1884</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Egerir Ioris, Nost L. Vivera Rebefret, Ve, ACIAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Black Dress Chanel • 1926</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Egerir Ioris, Nost L. Vivera Rebefret, Ve, ACIAM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strapless Gilda Gown Louis • 1946</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Egerir Ioris, Nost L. Vivera Rebefret, Ve, ACIAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast at Tiffany’s Givenchy • 1961</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Egerir Ioris, Nost L. Vivera Rebefret, Ve, ACIAM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diana Revenge Dress Stambolian • 1991</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Egerir Ioris, Nost L. Vivera Rebefret, Ve, ACIAM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety Pin Gown Versace • 1994</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Egerir Ioris, Nost L. Vivera Rebefret, Ve, ACIAM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Met Gala Man Dress Comme Des Garcons • 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Egerir Ioris, Nost L. Vivera Rebefret, Ve, ACIAM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 10**

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DRESS PRICE GRAPH

FIGURE 11

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FEA DRESS ANALYSIS

1 MADAME X
SARGENT • 1884

2 LITTLE BLACK DRESS
CHANEL • 1926

3 STRAPLESS GILDA GOWN
LOUIS • 1946

4 BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY’S
GIVENCHY • 1961

5 DIANA REVENGE DRESS
STAMBOLIAN • 1991

6 SAFETY PIN GOWN
VERSACE • 1994

7 THE MAN DRESS
COMME DES GARCONS • 2012

©2013 LEAH MICHELLE PROVO, MASTER OF DESIGN CANDIDATE, UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI
LITTLE BLACK DRESSES HAVE TAKEN US TO PARTIES, JOB INTERVIEWS, WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS. WE EXPERIENCE ALL OF LIFE'S BIG EVENTS IN THE LITTLE BLACK DRESS, IT CAN BE RESPECTFUL OR EMPOWERING DEPENDING UPON THE DESIGN.

NORMA KAMALI, 2012
CLOSING

MAJOR FINDINGS
REVIEW
RECOMMENDATIONS
MAJOR FINDINGS
Within the initial research of my thesis, I hypothesized that the dress worn by Audrey Hepburn in Breakfast at Tiffany’s would be “The Most Iconic Little Black Dress,” while this can be perceived as being true through my historical and social research methods. “The Perfect Little Black Dress,” was in fact that of Coco Chanel’s 1926 debut little black dress.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE RESULTS
Through the design principle model, each dress was broken down in the very essence of its design. Particular attention was paid to the scale, proportion and harmony columns. Although the evaluation of the dresses can be defined as subjective if the garment is analyzed precisely based on the definition of each column the principles can be selected. The Chanel little black dress qualified in each column, while the other six dresses varied here and there. Second and Third place included the Liz Hurley, Versace Dress and the Stambolian Dress worn by Princess Diana.

FEA MODEL RESULTS
For the FEA Model, each category was broken down into three segments within the functional, expressive and aesthetic qualities of the little black dress based on a three-point degree of intensity from strong to moderate. Using this model once again, Chanel’s 1926 LBD displayed a strong sense of design in each category. Second place for this model was Rita Hayworth’s Gilda dress, which is specifically credited to costume designer Jean Louis’ particular attention to the functionality and construction of the garment.

HISTORICAL + SOCIAL RESULTS
Within my historical and social research, the Givenchy Breakfast at Tiffany’s dress prevailed. This specific dress had irrefutable presence in a high percentage of the historical resources and fashion collectives used for references for thesis. Further, it received accreditation and admiration from many influential fashion designers, editors, historians, and educators. Close seconds within this category were the Sargent’s Portrait of Madame X, Chanel’s 1926 LBD, and Versace’s neo-punk safety pin dress having a presence within roughly eighty percent of the research material reviewed for this thesis.

Although historical and social research is an effective determination of a garment’s validity within a culture, specific attention should also be paid regarding the monetary value of each dress. For
about 10 years, specific iconic dresses have been auctioned off in various societies. For a variety of reasons, be they for a personal collection or on behalf of a charity, and amongst them are iconic little black dresses. In 2006, the Givenchy- Hepburn Breakfast at Tiffany’s dress sold for a whopping $923,187 earning it the achievement of the highest amount ever paid for a gown from a film, and giving it the title of “The A Million Dollar Dress.” The second and third place for this category are Rita Hayworth’s Gilda gown with an estimated price of $30,000 and the Neo-Punk inspired Versace dress worn by Liz Hurley, estimated price $16,280 but also could potentially be the Stambolian gown of Princess Diana priced at between $30,464- $456,968.

REVIEW
“Little black dresses have taken us to parties, job interviews, weddings and funerals. We experience all of life’s big events in the Little Black Dress. It can be respectful or empowering depending upon the design”

Norma Kamali

The little black dress has been a pivotal garment within the fashion industry long before Vogue and Chanel made it popular in the 20s. The little black dress can be perceived more as a statement rather than simply a garment. The “statement” began as an outward proclamation of sexual experience and possession and years later has emerged as an emblem of self-empowerment and sophistication. “The story of the little black dress is the story of our society and of our changing politics,” Didier Ludot, thus elevating it to its current status of a cultural icon.

I believe the mystery of the sustainability of the Little Black Dress truly lies within feminine subconscious. Adaptability, versatility, comfortability, chicness and sexuality are qualities that lend themselves to the little black dress, which is why women continue to reach for it first. It is the answer when you don’t know what to wear, because it is always appropriate and always accepted, always in and always chic. The LBD has adapted to current fashion and still remains a classic. It is this type of classic apparel that women want in their wardrobe.

I have grown up with the phenomena, donning the garment for almost 25 years to memorable events in my life. For me, it was vital that I explore the Little Black Dress as not only a garment but also a social statement, which would help me to gain a deeper understanding of the feminine
subconscious towards dress and socio-cultural meaning of the hue black. Surprisingly and unfortunately, although my findings have been found inconclusive I did gain pivotal knowledge specific to the little black dress that could not only impact the design process of current dresses, but future dresses and apparel which was my ultimate goal.

**Recommendations: Issues for Further Research**

Given more time, I would love to dive deeper into the physical and psychological cues and responses of black to men and women. To gain a deeper understanding of the effect that black has on a subconscious level across a non-gender specific spectrum. Within my research I was very much drawn to the sensual nature and history of black. I would’ve liked to see what type of effects that has on the human psyche.

The development of apparel is a creative problem solving process, through this thesis; I have been able to creatively solve the question of the most iconic garment of all time. Creating this thesis stretched me in ways that I could not imagine and I have learned more than I expected about the little black dress and myself. Perhaps Chanel said it best “Fashion Changes- Style endures,” and the little black dress will always be in style.”
BIBLIOGRAPHY


PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS


