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Modest Dress As Literacy Practice In English-Speaking Conservative Mennonite Groups

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MODEST DRESS AS LITERACY PRACTICE IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING CONSERVATIVE MENNONITE GROUPS

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

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2018
This thesis, submitted by Megan Lois Mong in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Linguistics from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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Grant McGimpsey
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

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Date
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Department Linguistics

Degree Master of Arts

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Megan Lois Mong
July 20, 2018
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ABSTRACT

English-speaking conservative Mennonites exercise a distinct set of dress practices that are not often understood by people outside the community. Advances in New Literacy Studies pave the way to understand their dress practices as a type of literacy. Multiple literacies work together to inform conservative Mennonite dress practices. One of these literacies is the reading and writing of religious texts. A second literacy is a form of heritage literacy where clothing functions as a multimodal text. Conservative Mennonites use their clothing to codify their Christian identity, gender roles and church affiliation. They intend their clothing to represent who they are to the people around them. A conservative Mennonite woman's head covering is a subversive, embodied text that corrects power imbalances they perceive between masculine and feminine. The results of viewing Mennonite dress practices through the lens of literacy show them to be a coherent sign system that passes between generations.
CHAPTER 1
Introduction

Conservative Mennonites exercise a distinct set of dress practices. A visitor to Lancaster County, a place with a large population of conservative Mennonites, will see Mennonite women in long skirts and dresses with cloth prayer veils on their heads. This clothing differentiates them from members of mainstream society and is an important part of their heritage, handed down from generation to generation. Dress practice is integral to what it means to be a conservative Mennonite.

Mennonites are part of the Anabaptist family of the Christian faith. Other Anabaptist groups include Hutterites, Brethren and, most famously, the Amish. Anabaptists distinguish themselves within the Christian tradition by beliefs and practices such as the exercise of free will, adult baptism, the Christian woman’s veiling, non-resistance and the refusal to participate in war (Anderson 2013).

Conservative Mennonites are one of three divisions in the Mennonite tradition: Old Order, conservative and mainline (Anderson 2013). Mainline Mennonite churches do not dress distinctly Mennonite and present themselves similarly to mainstream Evangelicals. Old Order churches are most similar to the stereotype of Amish, a label frequently misapplied to all Anabaptist people who differentiate themselves from mainstream dress practices by dressing “plain.” Like the Amish, some Old Order groups still use horse and buggy transportation and primarily speak Pennsylvania Dutch\(^1\) at home and among the community. Conservative Mennonites fill the cultural space between the mainline and Old Order traditions.

\(^1\) Pennsylvania Dutch is a term local speakers use to refer to Pennsylvania German. I have chosen to use the term Pennsylvania Dutch in this thesis to maintain consistency with the narrators as they refer to the language in their interviews. Pennsylvania Dutch is not a form of Dutch, but is instead a member of the High Franconian family of Germanic, closely related to German (Green 1990). The ISO 639-3 code is [pdc].
Like Old Order Mennonites, conservative Mennonites are “distinctly plain Anabaptist in their adherence to a consortium of concrete, highly visible symbols” such as the Christian woman’s prayer veil, the non-wearing of jewelry and other clothing practices (Anderson 2013), the topic of this thesis. Other markers of a conservative Mennonite church and its members can include the following:

...non-ownership of television and non-attendance at movie theaters, refusal to hold public office or to serve in combatant military positions, separation from consolidated K-12 public schools, gender-based family and church roles, a cappella congregational singing (non-instrumental) in church services, rejection of religious icons and paraphernalia, endogenous marriage, unsalaried ministers chosen from amongst the laity, and the necessity of religious community in the individual’s life. (Anderson 2013)

These practices are “a generalized cultural embodiment of Biblical literalism” shared by conservative and Old Order Mennonite churches alike (Anderson 2013).

Conservative Mennonites are closer to mainstream society, especially Evangelical Christianity, than Old Order groups. Like Evangelical Christians, conservative Mennonite groups emphasize elements such as foreign mission programs, Bible schools, born again experiences and individual religious devotion. They primarily speak English at home and in the community.

Conservative Mennonites are a cultural group that are often misidentified or misunderstood. They are separate from mainstream society, and yet not so separate as the Amish or Old Order Mennonite groups. They are a plain people and yet they may also “build half million dollar houses, patronize coffee shops, operate combines and forklifts, guzzle down Mountain Dew, and wear name-brand clothes” (Anderson 2013). They are also largely invisible in the media, who prefer to introduce all plain groups as a quaint, primitive people with pristine values or in terms of “hicksploitation” as a poor, white rural group who are exploited for entertainment. Each of these depictions misses the rich complexity of conservative Mennonite life.

I was a practicing conservative Mennonite for fourteen years, from the time I was fifteen until twenty-nine. During this time I learned the deep consideration conservative
Mennonites put into their clothing practices. These practices are an organized, regular system meant to communicate certain messages about the wearer. They speak to the conservative Mennonite’s deep Christian faith and desire to be pleasing to God.

In the years since I have left the conservative Mennonite practice, I have continued to notice knowledge gaps in the outside world’s awareness and understanding of conservative Mennonites. This gap exists both in pop culture stereotypes and in academia. Who are these people who wear Aeropostale hoodies over home sewn cape dresses? Or a prayer veil with combat boots? Or, as I was asked by strangers countless times during my time as a conservative Mennonite, “Why do you wear that thing on your head?”

This thesis exists to help fill this gap. My aim is to describe dress practice among the conservative Mennonites by analyzing it as a literacy practice. Suzanne Rumsey (2009) brought the lens of heritage literacy practice to Anabaptist studies in her evaluation of Amish quilts. I look at conservative Mennonite dress practices through the same lens to present it as a coherent sign system passed between generations. In doing so, I hope to add to the understanding of conservative Mennonites and to spark further research into their traditions and practices.

I base my analysis on a series of eight interviews I recorded with members of the conservative Mennonite community. I used the methodology of oral history to conduct the interviews, assuring that the voice of each interviewee (referred to as “narrator” in this thesis) voice was documented and heard. I present the conservative Mennonite dress practice through the community’s own words.

In Chapter 2, I describe the methodology I used to document the data behind this thesis. I introduce each of the eight narrators who participated in my research. I also present an overview of the interview process from beginning to end. I provide information about where to access the recordings I created, which are available in a public archive.

In Chapter 3, I begin to explain dress practice as a form of literacy by discussing literacy in the context of New Literacy Studies. I introduce multimodal texts as relevant to literacy studies and present multiple modalities in conservative dress practice.

I show how conservative Mennonite dress practice relates to literacy practice in Chapter 4. First I look at traditional, alphabetic literacy by showing how their dress practices
are inseparable from the reading and writing of their religious texts. Secondly I discuss clothing as a multimodal text in literacy practice.

In Chapter 5, I present Rumsey’s definition of heritage literacy and examine conservative Mennonite dress practices through its lens. I discuss the decision-making process as clothing choices pass between generations.

I present parallels between traditional orthography and clothing as a non-alphabetic sign system in Chapter 6. In this chapter, I specifically look at the codification of group identity by conservative Mennonites.

In Chapter 7, I examine dress practice through the lens of critical literacy and embodied texts. I use Johnson’s and Vasudevan’s work to show how embodied texts are performed and positioned. I then share examples of performance and positioning in Mennonite dress practices.

Finally, in Chapter 8 I summarize the results of my analysis and suggest areas for further research.
CHAPTER 2
Methodology

My research involved a series of interviews with English-speaking conservative Mennonites. The methodology that I followed is the methodology of the field of oral history. This methodology allowed me to collect useful material for this thesis, documenting the dress practices of conservative Mennonites through their narrative voice.

There are two side benefits to my research that are equally important, although not crucial for this thesis. The first is that the corpus I collected is rich with information that can be used for other research, both linguistic and anthropological. The second by-product is a meaningful documentation experience for the narrators and their communities.

In Section 2.1 I describe the oral history method and discuss its merits for my research. I also discuss its benefits for future research by other scholars. In Section 2.2, I introduce the eight narrators I interviewed. Lastly, in Section 2.3, I discuss the interview process.

2.1 Oral History Method

Oral history records history through the voice of the common person. Oral history is a term that refers both to the method of recording that voice and the result of that process. As a method, oral history is a way of conducting and recording interviews with everyday people. An oral history is also the recorded material produced by the interview. It is a historical document that captures the speech of the narrator.

Oral history’s emphasis on the common person differentiates it from traditional history. Traditional history documents the actions and thoughts of salient figures, such as kings, generals and celebrities. The actions and thoughts of common people were largely ignored. As a result, much of human history has passed forever from memory. Oral history aims to correct this by creating a permanent document of history through the lens of
the common person. While an oral historian cannot reach back and fill the gaps in history as we know it, she or he can create a richer corpus of documents today for the people of the future.

The modern method of oral history developed as a distinct “category of historical practice” (Abrams 2016) in the later half of the twentieth century. This development was fueled in part by the invention of the portable tape recorder and a populist shift in cultural values after World War II (Perks & Thomson 2015). Society became more interested in everyday people and the oral history method arose as a way of recording their experiences. The portable tape recorder removed barriers to documentation by making recording technology more affordable and convenient. Everyday researchers could document everyday people.

Oral history’s emphasis on the accounts of everyday people made it a seamless fit for my research. Conservative Mennonite dress practices involve everyday items worn by everyday people. Conservative Mennonite voices, especially the voices of conservative Mennonite women, are infrequently recorded for research. They are type of voices oral history aims to preserve before they are unheard and forgotten.

I was particularly committed to using the oral history method in this research because of its emphasis on personal stories and personal voice. Conservative Mennonites are often lumped together with Amish as “plain people” whose cultural particularities are mistaken as an obsession with avoiding electricity and modern technologies. What is more, Mennonite women are further marginalized in media, often depicted as silent and simple, if depicted at all. This is not the case with any of my narrators. Their desire to dress modestly has nothing to do with avoiding perceived evils in technological advancement. My female narrators are intelligent, coherent and perceive themselves with ultimate agency in their choices. The oral history method lets them speak for themselves.

The narrators told their personal stories, from the time they were children until the present day, about how they dressed and how they felt about it. They also shared how their parents’ generation dressed, reflected on changing dress patterns from generation to generation, and even reflected on dress in the distant past, citing the beginning of Anabaptism in the Protestant Reformation.
Each of my narrators was motivated to share her or his beliefs and way of life for the historic record. They desired to be part of the “history” in oral history. Not only did they value recording their recollections of the of the past, they also valued the opportunity to archive their contemporary perspectives as the history of the future. They described the outfits they wore to the interview. They spoke about their current church and family experiences. They talked about their convictions and beliefs about appropriate dress practices. Our narrators described contemporary events with the intention of preserving them as a piece of history for future generations.

The broad scope of data collected makes oral history an appropriate method for academic research. Not much study has been done with English-speaking Mennonites. I sought to capture data not only for this thesis, but also for further study by future researchers. In doing so, I documented information on a wide breadth of subjects, including gender roles, family structure, Mennonite subgroups, and names and descriptions of the particular clothing they wear. My intent is that the narrators’ experiences will invite researchers to conduct further study into the English-speaking Mennonite’s way of living in the world.

2.2 The Narrators

I chose to interview eight narrators from the English-speaking conservative Mennonites (see Section 1 for a working definition). I selected a range of ages (18 - 83 at the time of the interview) and individuals from a variety of conservative Mennonite subgroups. I sought to interview both female and male members of the community, but was only able to find one male member who met the qualifications and was willing to be interviewed. All the narrators are connected to me through friends or family. In this section, I introduce each narrator and situate her or him within the Mennonite community. I will identify each narrator by first and last name, but will refer to them by first name only throughout

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1 Due to the personal nature of the oral history method, I only selected participants who were able to meet with me in person. A second male member of the conservative Mennonite community volunteered to be interviewed, but he lived at a distance that would have required recording a video conference.

2 Each narrator gave permission to be identified by name.
this thesis for readability. Here and throughout the thesis, I include faces in photographs where I have permission to do so.

I interviewed Amy Gingerich on November 24th, 2014. The following are photographs of what Amy wore at the time of her interview:

Figure 1. Amy’s Outfit at her Interview

I met Amy through my family. My mother, brother and sister at one time attended Life Mennonite Fellowship (a Biblical Mennonite Alliance church), the same church that Amy attends. Amy regularly cleans my mother’s house and occasionally cleans for my sister-in-law as well. We knew each other by face and name at the time of the interview. She was
18 when we sat down to record her experiences. She lives in Lancaster County and has spoken English all of her life. Her father grew up speaking Pennsylvania Dutch, but her mother never learned it. She lives at home and cleans houses to help put herself through college. She hopes to major in social work.

I interviewed Alicia Esh on December 1st, 2014. The following is a photograph of what Alicia wore at the time of her interview:

Figure 2. Alicia’s Outfit at her Interview
I found Alicia through Amy’s recommendation. She attends the same church as Amy (Life Mennonite Fellowship, a Biblical Mennonite Alliance church) and also knows my family. At the time of the interview, she is a secretary working for one of my sister’s and brother-in-law’s closest friends. She is 21 at the interview and lives in Willow Street, Pennsylvania. She is unmarried and lives with her parents. She has spoken English all of her life. She says her parents do not know any Pennsylvania Dutch except for “the bad phrases, one or two of them.” Her family has also lived in Canada and South Carolina. She attended public school for a time before finishing high school at a private conservative Mennonite school.

I interviewed Claudia Beiler on December 11th, 2014. The following is a photograph of what Claudia wore at the time of her interview:
Claudia is 23 at the time of our interview. She is married and lives with her husband in Honey Brook, Pennsylvania. They are expecting their first child and she does not work outside the home. She attended an Amish Mennonite church with her family when she was a small child, before they started attending New Covenant Mennonite, an unaffiliated Mennonite church. Now she and her husband attend what Claudia calls a “community church,” an unaffiliated church that desires to include non-Mennonite background people interested in following Jesus. She says that her parents spoke fluent Pennsylvania Dutch,
but did not pass it on to her. She says that in “Beachy churches” and other “Mennonite
churches there would be none of that spoken.”

I interviewed Charlene Stoltzfoos and her father Roman on the same evening, December
15th, 2014. The following is a photograph of what Charlene wore at the time of her
interview:

Figure 4. Charlene’s Outfit at her Interview

I interviewed Charlene privately in her bedroom. She is 26 when we sat down to record,
unmarried and living at home. Charlene works as a midwife. She and her father attend
Mine Road Amish-Mennonite, part of a Mennonite subgroup also referred to as “Beachy Mennonite” or “Beachy Amish” or simply “Beachy”. Charlene and her father are related to me through my sister’s marriage. Roman is my brother-in-law’s father and Charlene is his sister. Charlene has spoken English throughout her life, has studied Spanish as another language and knows, in her words, “very little Dutch.”

I also interviewed Roman Stoltzfus on December 15th, 2014. The following is a photograph of the two outfits he wore at the time of his interview:

Figure 5. Roman’s Outfits at his Interview
As already stated, Roman is my brother-in-law’s father and attends Mine Road Amish-Mennonite church. He is 47 at the interview and lives with his wife and unmarried children in Kinzers, Pennsylvania. He speaks both English and Pennsylvania Dutch, but says that he spoke English with his parents as he grew up at home. He speaks Pennsylvania Dutch, in his words, “whenever I talk to Amish. I’ll do a couple of sentences [in Pennsylvania Dutch], but if I really want to explain something I’ll switch to English.” Roman operates a fourth-generation, 200 acre farm that is pioneering organic and grass-based dairy technology.

I interviewed Martha Nissley on December 18th, 2014. The following is a photograph of what Martha wore at the time of her interview:
Martha and I had not met before the interview. A mutual friend referred her to me as a person who would be both interested and interesting in the documentation project. Martha is the oldest person I interviewed, 83 at the time we sat down together. Neither she nor her parents spoke Pennsylvania Dutch. She says that she thinks her grandparents may have known “some” Pennsylvania Dutch. Other than English, Martha speaks a “little bit” of German that she learned during four years she lived in Germany as an adult. She attends Linden Mennonite Church, a Lancaster Conference church on the southern edge
of Lancaster City, Pennsylvania. She is a retired teacher and she and her husband live in a retirement community in Lancaster County.

I interviewed Elaine Yoder on January 5th, 2015. The following is a photograph of what Elaine wore at the time of her interview:

![Elaine's Outfit at her Interview](image)

Elaine is 60 at the time of the interview. She only speaks English, and relates that her parents spoke both Pennsylvania Dutch and English when she was an infant. After infancy her family switched exclusively to English. She understands limited Pennsylvania
Dutch and can speak “some words.” She is unmarried and lives by herself in Conestoga, Pennsylvania. She works as a full-time counselor and, at the time of the interview, was completing her Doctorate in Ministry. Her dissertation is on femininity and the image of God. She attends Life Mennonite Fellowship with Amy and Alicia, a part of the Biblical Mennonite Alliance. She is a friend of my mother’s, and my mother connected us.

I interviewed Joyce Long on January 9th, 2015. The following is a photograph of what Joyce wore at the time of her interview:

Figure 8. Joyce’s Outfit at her Interview
Joyce and I first met during my time as a conservative Mennonite when I shopped for veilings at her coverings and veils store. Joyce runs a storefront connected to her home where she manufactures and sells various head coverings and accessories to Mennonites across the country. She has over 7,500 households in her customer database. When Joyce wanted to sell her head coverings online, she worked with my mother’s web design company. Joyce was her client until my mother retired from web design. My mother reconnected me with Joyce when she learned of my research. Joyce is 46 at the time of the interview. She is married and lives with her husband in East Earl, Pennsylvania. They attend Bowmansville Mennonite Church, a part of the Keystone Fellowship. She only speaks English, as did her parents. When asked if her grandparents spoke Pennsylvania Dutch she answered, “Probably not. Not that I’m aware. Not fluently, anyway.”

2.3 The Interviews

The interviews I conducted followed the heart of the oral history interview method from beginning to end. The heart of this interview process is that it “involves communicating with living, breathing human beings,” and these human beings are a “researcher who is asking the questions and the respondent doing his or her best to answer them” (Abrams 2016). I aimed to keep the person-to-person heart of the method and follow best practices of the Oral History Association (OHA 2009) for conducting interviews.

As seen in Section 2.2, I selected my respondents (or “narators” as referred to in this thesis) through personal connections I maintained since my time as a conservative Mennonite. I invited each narrator to participate through a personal phone call. I explained who I was to the few who did not know me personally and explained how I was socially connected to them.3

During the phone call, I explained the nature of my research. I explained my desire to document Mennonite dress practices both for my master’s thesis and also to be archived as historical documents for future generations. My narrators were eager to participate and each of them agreed to do so during the phone call.

3. My use of a phone call was a departure of the Oral History Association’s best practice of inviting participants through introductory letters or emails (See Pre-Interview #5, OHA 2009) My personal association with the conservative Mennonite community made written invitations a socially uncomfortable choice.
I met each female narrator one-on-one in a “quiet room with minimal background noises and possible distractions” (OHA 2009). I interviewed Martha and Elaine in their living rooms. I interviewed Joyce in a small room off of the side of her store. I interviewed Charlene in her bedroom. Lastly, Amy, Alicia and Claudia each met me in my mother’s living room. Amy cleans my mother’s house once a week, making it a natural place for us to meet. Alicia and Claudia both know my mother as well. My mother’s living room was a quiet, comfortable place to record in when narrator’s homes were not available.

I met with Roman, my sole male narrator, in the presence of his wife and children. Because I am female, it would have been inappropriate to meet with Roman privately. When I sat down with Roman, I sat down in his living room. Most of the time his wife sat with us, although at times she puttered in the kitchen. Due to their home’s open floor plan, she was always present and listening. The children milled in and out, sometimes listening, sometimes reading or engaging in living room activities. Roman spoke to his wife and children during the interview, asking their opinions or relying on them to help him define a term. His interview was a family event.

At the beginning of each interview, before the recording started, I went over an eleven point consent form with the narrator. This form was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of North Dakota and guaranteed the narrator rights to refuse questions or withdraw from the interview. This met the (OHA 2009) best practice that oral historians “insure that narrators voluntarily give their consent to be interviewed and understand that they can withdraw from the interview or refuse to answer a question at any time.”

I came to each interview prepared to move the conversation in two directions: the narrator’s outer experiences (clothing styles, etc) and their inner experiences (feelings/beliefs/etc.) in her or his dress practices. Most of the questions arose during the interview. I encouraged the narrators to share their stories with reflective listening questions, such as “Can you expand on that?” or “Tell me more?” My goal was to record what they felt was most important to tell me about their dress practices.

Oral historians are obligated to avoid “stereotypes, misrepresentations, or manipulations of the narrators’ words” (OHA 2009). My time as a member of the conservative
Mennonite community gives me particular insight and sensitivity to stereotypes and misrepresentations. My personal experience helped me avoid stereotyping the culture as Luddite or the women as uneducated, weak or downtrodden.

One way I have chosen to avoid these stereotypes is how I have handled the transcriptions. Spoken English differs from written English. When speaking unscripted in an interview, even the most educated person uses filler words such as “like” and “um”, repeats herself, makes false starts and fumbles for words. When written verbatim, these particularities of written speech create the impression that the speaker is less than educated or articulate. I have chosen to delete these particularities for the most part from my transcriptions because Mennonites and other “plain people” are often portrayed in media as not just simple, but simpletons. My narrators are neither simple nor simpletons. I have done my best to balance my desire to faithfully present my narrators as the thoughtful, intelligent people that they are with the integrity of the transcriptions and each narrator’s unique voice. When an error is to be made, I err on the side of presenting my narrators with dignity.

Interviews ranged from an hour and a half to over two hours long, as is standard according to the Oral History Association’s guidelines (OHA 2009). The interviews did not have a set time limit, and they lasted until the narrator was tired or had spoken all she or he had wished to speak. Each interview was conducted in one session. I have not conducted follow-up interviews or other data collection.

I used a Zoom ZH1 Portable Digital Recorder for the interviews. The narrators wore an MM-PSM Pro Series Earset Microphone attached to the recorder. This result in an audio document that preserved the narrator’s voice, both in its physicality (tone, pronunciation, volume, etc.) and in its social space.

Each narrator intended for her or his interview to be made public and available for research. I have transcribed each interview, entered the audio file into ELAN (an audio annotation software4), following the structure developed in the OHMS project (Boyd 2013). Transcripts, audio files and photographs will be archived at both the Louie B. Nunn

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4 For more information about ELAN, see https://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/ and the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, The Language Archive, Nijmegen, The Netherlands. (Brugman & Russel 2004)
Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky and the Earl H. and Anita F. Hess Archives and Special Collections at Elizabethtown College. I have included portions of the transcriptions in Appendix A and ELAN annotations in Appendix B.
CHAPTER 3
Multimodalities: Clothing and Codified Sign Systems

In this chapter, I present Mennonite dress practice as a multimodal, codified sign system following the innovations New Literacies Studies brought to academic literacy discourse. New Literacy Studies introduced the study of multiple literacies and a wide variety of multimodal sign systems. Our understanding of literacy is no longer confined to traditional alphabetic texts and the cognitive process of reading and writing them. This opens the door to consider Mennonite dress as a multimodal codification of meaning, and as such, an example of literacy.

Because of the fact that most of my readers already understand alphabetic, or print literacy, I will spend most of this chapter discussing multimodal literacy. Keep in mind that multiple literacies work together to inform conservative Mennonite dress practice. I develop the concept of alphabetic literacy further in Chapter 4.

In Section 3.1, I discuss multimodalities and present an example of commonly accepted modalities in the digital age. In Section 3.2, I articulate the argument that modalities such as pattern, cloth and texture can create non-alphabetic texts relevant to literacy study. I offer several constraints on the definition of mode and introduce Mennonite dress practices as a visual or gestural text.

In Section 3.3 I center the discussion of nonverbal signs within the discipline of semiotics.

Lastly, in Section 3.4 I present examples of multimodality in Mennonite dress practice that I collected during my oral history interview process. I share photographs and descriptions of outfits several narrators wore to their interviews. I discuss multimodalities present in these outfits, meanings they codify and how they relate to the constraints on mode presented in Section 3.2.
3.1 Multimodalities in the Digital Age

Multimodality is “the concept that all modes of communication are important to meaning making” (Mills 2015). Before the 1990s when multimodal studies took root, most literacy studies were monomodal, focused on the singular mode of alphabetic text. Since the explosion of the digital age, literacy studies have expanded to address other modes such as moving image, still image, audio and gesture. Digital platforms pushed the envelope in ways that forced literacy studies to redefine its purview. Literacy became “new literacies” tasked with the challenge of integrating non-alphabetic modes into its definitions.

Modes are “organized, regular, socially specific means of representation” (Suhor 1984). The New London Group divides modes into seven “major categories of representation: written language, oral language, visual, audio, tactile, gestural and spatial” (Cope & Kalantzis 2009). These definitions are best understood by examining a real life example of multimodality in use in the digital age. The following screen shot from Zappos.com, a popular online shopping platform, illustrates multiple modes:

Figure 9. Screen Shot of Zappos.com

In Figure 9 above, multiple modes come together to enrich the page’s meaning in cooperation with the alphabetic text. We have visual modes such as the still images of the
shoes for sale. We also see visual shapes such as the five stars and the Twitter bird on the social media icons. Figure 9 flattens the modalities into a single image. Online, the page features video with moving image and audio. The woman uses in the video uses gesture, body language and happy facial expressions to explain the features of the shoe for sale. She speaks about the shoe through a recorded audio track. Across the page, the web designers use multiple font styles, sizes and colors. All of these elements come together to convey meaning to the person experiencing the web site. Digital modalities, such as the modalities in Figure 9, are commonly accepted in New Literacy Studies today.

3.2 Rumsey’s Alternate Understanding of Multimodality in Literacy

Rumsey (2009) argues for an expanded, or alternate understanding of multimodality from that discussed in Section 3.1. She calls for an unpinning of multimodality from digital media and broadening its definition to include other technologies:

...the current trends toward lauding computer-mediated literacy should be put in check. A broader understanding of technological literacy is needed in which there is balance between the new and the old, between modernity and heritage, and between digital and cultural.

For Rumsey, New Literacy studies must not myopically focus on new digital technologies, but widen its gaze to include older technologies as well. Multiple modalities are not new, but in fact very old. People have used technologies such as bead making and hieroglyph to make meaning for millennia (Rumsey 2009).

Rumsey illustrates her argument with a discussion of quilts as a literacy technology among the Amish. In doing so, she moves the discussion of multimodality away from the “bright and shiny objects” of the digital age to the simple fabric of homemade blankets. The Amish eschew many of the new, digital technologies New Literacy has hitherto considered. They exhibit, as she puts it “multimodality where one would least expect to find it” (Rumsey 2009).
Rumsey (2009) discusses why she considers quilts to be literacy artifacts:

I use quilts as literacy artifacts because I believe that they exemplify multiple modes, which according to Carey Jewitt and Gunther Kress, include “image, gaze, gesture, movement, speech and sound-effect” [Jewitt & Kress 2003] as well as pattern, texture and color.

She adds “pattern, texture and color” to Jewitt and Kress’ list of possible modalities. Pattern, texture and color are visual modalities. Texture is also tactile, regarding how fabric feels (or in the case of clothing, clings to the body). Pattern can also be spatial. Quilts come in different sizes and cover different spaces. Rumsey argues that Amish quilt-makers use these modalities to “write” their Amish identity into their quilts.

A major criticism of New Literacy is that it offers “fuzzy borders” to the boundaries of what can or cannot be considered literacy. Once codified sign systems such as bead making, quilts or clothing are considered fair game for literacy studies, where does it stop? This is a fair question, and Mills (2015) states that the proponents of New Literacy concede literacies boundaries as unresolved.

Importantly, Rumsey is not the only author who considers clothing a potential sign system for literacy studies. In Cope & Kalantzis (2009) clothing is mentioned in a list of gestural modalities:

Gestural Representation: movements of the hands and arms, expressions of the face, eye movements and gaze, demeanours of the body, gait, clothing and fashion, hair style, dance, action sequences (Scollon, 2001), timing, frequency, ceremony and ritual. Here gesture is understood broadly and metaphorically as a physical act of signing (as in ‘a gesture to ...’), rather than the narrower literal meaning of hand and arm movement. Representation to oneself may take the form of feelings and emotions or rehearsing action sequences in one’s mind’s eye.

In Johnson & Vasudevan (2012) the body, and by extension the clothing on it, is referred to as a text:
The body is a text produced by socially circulating norms for gender, race, sexuality, class age and ability (Kamler 1997). Through daily, bodily repetitions, (i.e., speech, gesture, and dress), we reproduce and reinscribe these meanings (Bettie, 2003; Butler 1999; Youdell, 2006). For instance, people frequently position (i.e., assign seemingly fixed roles) babies dressed in blue as boys....

In this thesis, I follow Suhor (1984) by constraining modalities as organized, regular, socially situated and representational. I offer the following points as an explanation of each constraint:

1. Modalities are organized. They operate according to a certain system or method. They are not chaotic but patterned.
2. Modalities are regular. They are normal and customary. They have community adoption.
3. Modalities are socially situated. They appear in empirical literacy events which operate inside a social literacy practice.
4. Modalities are representative. They involve the encoding/decoding of meaning.

I discuss Mennonite dress practice in light of these constraints in Section 3.4.

3.3 Centering Within Semiotics

Before discussing multimodalities in Mennonite dress, I pause in this section to center my discussion within the discipline of semiotics. Semiotics, in its most rudimentary definition, is the study of signs. This includes both verbal and nonverbal signs.

Semiotics, as the study of verbal signs, is intrinsically related to language, and in turn linguistics and literacy. Rauch (1999) views semiotics as a sort of umbrella term:
The intimacy of the relationship between semiotics and linguistics is accountable on the one hand to the role assigned to language within semiotics, and on the other hand to the role assigned to linguistics within language. Specifically, the arrangement of the arguments of these “within” relations prefigures the controversial hierarchical entanglements between and among semiotics, language, and linguistics.

Traditional literacy clearly falls within this umbrella as a subset of linguistics.

Semiotics, as the study of nonverbal signs, includes the multimodalities I examine as part of conservative Mennonite dress. Semiotics considers all sorts of nonverbal, sign-making modalities. In fact, Sebeok (1985) concedes that nonverbal signs may coincide with the entire range of human culture:

... it would hardly be an exaggeration to claim that the range of the ‘nonverbal’ ... becomes coincidental with the entire range of culture exclusive of language yet further encompassing much that belongs to ethology. But this way of looking at ‘nonverbal’ seems to me about as helpful as the Kugelmass theories reported by Woody Allen...

Just as the concept of literacy helps us understand traditional, linguistic texts, the concept of literacy may also help us understand multimodal texts. Multimodal literacies fall under the purview of semiotics the same way that traditional literacies do. The latter organizes our understanding of verbal signs, while the former may organize our understanding of nonverbal signs.

Room exists to increase our understanding of nonverbal signs; the concept is not fully understood even within semiotics:

Analogous to the successful use of incompletely understood concepts in the natural sciences, e.g., the atom, the use of the concept of nonverbal sign in semiotics is productive without explicit definition. But more importantly, analogous to the atom, the nonverbal sign is fundamental to life, in this instance to communicative experience. (Rauch 1999)

I offer a discussion of multimodal, nonverbal signs as literacy as a possible illumination of a difficult, semiotic concept.
3.4 Multimodalities in Mennonite Dress

In this section I show examples of multiple modalities present in Mennonite dress practice. I will discuss how Mennonites use modalities such as pattern, size, color, and looseness to form a picture of who they are and what they represent. These modalities are organized, regular, socially situated and encode/decode meaning.

The following image is the dress Charlene wore during her interview:

![Charlene's Cape Dress](image)

Figure 10. Front, Side and Back View of Charlene’s Cape Dress

Charlene is wearing a nearly floor length white dress. She says, “I would wear [this dress] to go to maybe a party with a youth group or maybe even to a program like a Christmas program or a church service or something very similar to this.” She considers it “dressy” which she defines as “to me a dressy dress is something long and flowing and usually solid, and that’s just a preference.” She says that the definition of dressy largely “depends on the material to me.” For this series of photos, Charlene took off her blue sweater (as she is shown wearing in Section 2.2 where she is introduced) so that we could see the details of her cape.

Claudia wore the following outfit during her interview (also pictured in Figure 3):
Claudia is wearing, in her words, “combat style shoes because of the winter weather. I also chose just to layer a lot today, and I am wearing, boot warmers, leggings, knee length skirt, quarter length sleeved yellow top and a vest over the top of that as well.” She says that this is “my daily attire, I try to layer a lot, you kind of have to if you're going to make things work.” She says of the layer she is wearing at her neckline beneath her main shirt, “something that is pretty much my staple outfit is something that comes to like my bones right here,” she points to her clavical bones, “that’s kind of the cutoff where I make sure every day I am wearing a t-shirt or a tank top that comes to a moderate length.”

Claudia and Charlene are both wearing a prayer veil or covering:
We can see several modalities at work in Charlene’s and Claudia’s dress choices, such as pattern and style. Charlene and Claudia are part of Mennonite subgroups on opposite ends of the dress spectrum between conservative and liberal. (See 6.3 for discussion on Mennonite subgroups.) Charlene presents herself as more separate from mainstream culture, and Claudia more closely identifies with it. Because of their distance on the spectrum, it is illuminating to compare their use of modalities.

For example, Charlene’s clothing is a traditional Mennonite pattern, a one-piece dress style known as a cape dress. The Mennonite community sews cape dresses for themselves. Furthermore, Charlene’s cape dress is solid colored. She does not wear two-toned clothing.

Claudia, on the other hand, wears clothing she has purchased at stores, designed by the mainstream culture. Claudia is wearing what is called a two-piece outfit or “skirts and blouses.” She wears patterned and multi-toned clothing. We see a flower patterned...
layer around her waist. Also, in Figure 12 Claudia is wearing a bandanna in front of her Mennonite lace veil.

Charlene’s clothing style (Figure 10) is closer than Claudia’s (Figure 11) to Old Order Mennonite traditions. Old Order Mennonites also generally wear homemade dresses in the cape dress pattern, although they style the sleeves and skirts differently and wear a different size and style of head covering. Because of the proximity of Charlene’s style to Old Order, people outside the conservative Mennonite community may more readily identify her as conservative Mennonite than they would identify Claudia as such. A person fluent in “reading” conservative Mennonite clothing, however, would be able to easily identify Charlene as conservative Mennonite rather than Old Order. The differences in style between the two groups, such as sleeve and covering patterns, are unmistakable to the trained eye.

Although Claudia (Figure 11) dresses more closely to mainstream fashion, she adapts that fashion to fit conservative Mennonite values (I discuss the adaption process in more detail in Chapter 5). She wears a black lace prayer veil (Figure 12) behind a mainstream bandanna. She is careful to dress with sexual reserve. Her clothing is layered so that it is impossible for an observer to see down her shirt when she bends over. She also wears an extra layer at her waist so that it is impossible to see any skin at her mid-section. She presents herself as feminine by wearing skirts instead of pants. When she wears make up, she is careful that it only highlights the natural look of her face instead of introducing artificial colors. She does not wear jewelry or a wedding ring, even though she is married.

Both Claudia and Charlene identify themselves as women with high sexual standards. Although they wear clothing more or less proximate to Old Order or mainstream fashions, they both use looseness as a modality to convey their sexual reserve. They are careful that their clothes are not too tight. Charlene wears a cape dress “which means that I have an extra piece of material around the bodice part of it.” Figure 10 shows a second layer of fabric, or cape, sewn into the shoulders and attached at the waist. She attaches her cape so that it is not “pulled tight and shows stuff like my underwear line, or even the bottom curve.” The bottom curve is the curve on the underside of her breasts. She explains, “That’s one standard that I have for my dresses or clothing that I wear. When I
am wearing it, would someone be able to see the whole curve of my breast or whatever? Or are they just seeing the gentle slope of the top?” Claudia is expecting a child at the time of the interview and wonders, “So am I just going to keep wearing my same clothes as long as I can or am I going to go out and buy looser things?” She wonders whether or not a pregnant belly has the same modesty concerns as a non-pregnant one.

Taken as a whole picture, the colors, patterns, looseness, size and fabrics of Claudia’s and Charlene’s outfits codify their identity. While they dress differently from one another, they both wear the clothing they do to show that they are Christians. Not only are they Christians, they are Christian women who deserve the social privileges of conforming to gender norms and having high sexual morals. They also identify themselves as members of the particular Mennonite subgroup they belong to, Amish-Mennonite for Charlene and an unaffiliated church for Claudia. Both women are conservative Mennonite.

Roman modeled two outfits during his interview:
In the left panel of the image, Roman is wearing the outfit he wore for interview in the evening. He describes it as, “I am wearing a short sleeve, button-down-the-front shirt with collar and regular white or beige [...] pants [...] and brown shoes.” He says he wears an outfit like this “most anywhere where I would want to be dressed up more than I would for work, but not for church generally. For church I would wear darker colors, and usually I would wear a suit.”
In the right panel, Roman is modeling the suit he wears for church. He defines a plain suit as “a straight cut, no lapel, no collar laid down. It’s more when it’s closed, it closes straight down the front.” His suit is a hook and eye suit, a clasp technology he shows us in Figure 14:

![Figure 14. Roman Showing the Hook and Eye Clasps on His Plain Suit](image)

Roman says that “the hook and eye was an Amish thing that was brought over from the Amish.” Ten to fifteen years ago, when he bought the suit, his church required the hook and eye design for church services. In the years since then, the rules changed to allow
button suit closures to church. Roman says that he has not updated his suit since the rule change, but when he does, his next suit will have buttons.

Roman’s fashion choices show the dual influence of Amish and Mennonite fashions and mainstream fashions. Conservative Mennonites draw from both cultural heritages. Roman’s hook and eye fasteners are an Amish design. The buttons on his shirt are mainstream. He wears them together in Figure 14. Different Mennonite groups see themselves as more or less separate from the world or mainstream culture. I remember debates about what cultural separation means. How much is too much? Or how much is enough? Mennonite fashion choices are socially situated between two heritages. The identity tension between in influence of the dual cultures is discussed more in Chapter 6.2.

Women’s prayer veils or coverings take a variety of forms among Mennonite groups. Joyce manufactures and sells many veil and covering styles through her veiling store.\footnote{Joyce gave permission to use stock photos from her online, retail web site as examples of the variety of prayer veils worn by Mennonite women today.} Four of these styles are illustrated in the image below:

![Veiling and Coverings Styles](image15)

Figure 15. Veiling and Coverings Styles

The above photo shows four of styles, clockwise starting in the top left: a net covering, a doily or lace veil, a hanging veil, and a Charity veil or square hanging veil.

Style, size, fabric and color come together to form Mennonite prayer veils. A main pattern division exists between “coverings” and “veils.” A covering is a cap design, most often made with semi-transparent, firm, net fabric. A veil is a piece of fabric, solid or lace, that does not hold its shape like a cap, but drapes with the curves of the head. The example on the top right and the two on the bottom are veils.
Veils are further divided into doily style veils and hanging veils. The veil in the upper right corner is a doily style veil. This style sits entirely on the head and stays within the hairline. A hanging veil “hangs” down the neck. A hanging veil is also referred to as a flowing veil. Doily veils range in size from the large example here to very small ones. Amy describes the smallest ones as “little, round like the size of putting your fingers in a circle.”

Conservative Mennonite churches often have written rules about the type of veil a woman may wear as a member of the congregation. They can be quite detailed. If the rules call for cap style coverings, they often dictate size, pleats and whether or not the covering has covering strings. Covering string are not pictured on the covering in Figure 15. They are generally a white ribbon attached behind the ear on both sides of the head that hangs down onto the neck. If the rules call for veils, they may cover particulars such as color, fabric type, use of lace, whether it must be a doily or hanging veil, size and other pattern variations. Guidelines about veil styles are so organized and regular that it is often easy to identify which particular subgroup a Mennonite woman belongs to by her veil or covering alone.

In conclusion, I will briefly compare the modalities presented in this section against the constraints presented in Section 3.2. Each of the constraints is discussed in greater detail in later chapters.

First, Mennonite clothing is representational. The individual modalities in Mennonite clothing come together to codify identity in three ways: identity as a Christian, identity as a member of a Mennonite subgroup, and identification with gender and gender roles. Charlene and Claudia are both concerned about appearing as virtuous women and wear loose clothing accordingly.

Mennonite clothing is regular. The same modalities appear in the consideration of each conservative Mennonite subgroup. Discussion about color, pattern and style are universal. Claudia and Charlene can both articulate why they’ve chosen the styles and patterns they’ve chosen to wear. They’ve chosen different patterns, but for the same reasons.
Mennonite clothing is organized. Many Mennonite groups have written rules about what may or may not be worn by their members. The modalities are approached methodologically. Roman’s church changed its rules about hook and eye fasteners after intentional discussion. Mennonite clothing is so regular and organized that it is often possible to identify which subgroup a woman belongs to by appearance alone.

Mennonite clothing is socially situated. What a Mennonite chooses to wear or not wear greatly impacts his or her opportunities, relationships and position in Mennonite community. Amy describes how her male peers socially situate a woman because of her clothing:

(1) Amy: I feel like [my brothers] have a higher level of respect for girls who dress modestly, with the combination of the spirit and the dress. In my talking with them, I would definitely think that clothing impacts how they view a girl. I have good relationships with my cousins too, and I’ve heard them say before, “Oh, I like that girl but then I was at Bible school with her, she wore some stuff that I was surprised that she would wear. I was kind of disappointed.” They notice that stuff and sometimes I was very surprised that that would actually be a turn off for them.

In this case, the young men respect a woman less because of immodest clothing choices. They would not date or marry a woman that did not carry their respect. On the other hand, I know a man who turned down a potential spouse because her clothing was “too plain.” Plain or not plain, clothing choices open and close social opportunities.
 CHAPTER 4  
Modest Dress in Literacy Practice: Alphabetic and Multimodal Literacies

In this chapter, I present two literacies essential to understanding dress practices in conservative Mennonite culture: the reading and writing of alphabetic texts and the use of clothing as a multimodal sign system. I assume the existence of multiple literacies as established by New Literacy Studies. I define literacy by first presenting an example of literacy as a social practice among the Panjabi community in West London. I follow this example with a definition of literacy as an inter-working of literacy events and literacy practice. Then I explore how this definition informs traditional literacy as Mennonites read their religious (alphabetic) texts in Section 4.1, and how it informs the “reading and writing” of clothing, a multimodal text, in Section 4.2.

Saxena (1994) gives an example of literacy as a set of social practices. The Panjabi community in Southall, West London, encounters a multiplicity of literacies with social meaning in their everyday life, particularly with regards to Panjabi and Hindi. Both Panjabi and Hindi may be written in either the Gurmukhi or Devangari script. The Gurmukhi script is associated with Panjabi tradition and the Sikh religion. The Devangari script is associated with the Hindu religion. A person chooses which script she or he will use depending on the social context. For example, Saxena (1994) tells us about a grandfather who writes a poem in Panjabi about Panjabi rivers. He intends to publish this poem in a Panjabi nationalist newspaper, and so he uses the Gurmukhi script. On the other hand, a Panjabi Hindu may choose to write Panjabi in the Devangari script when writing a personal letter to another Panjabi Hindu. In this case the choice to use Devangari rather than Gurmukhi could symbolize Hindu unity.
Saxena (1994) shows a single group of people using multiple print literacies in the context of social practice. They know which scripts to use in which context and understand the social implications of their use. Their practice of literacy is more than the ability to read and write either Gurmukhi or Devangari scripts. Literacy is inseparable from the social world in which they read and write.

Along with Saxena (1994) and other proponents of New Literacy, Barton and Hamilton (2000) assert that literacy is best understood as a social practice. They provide the following six propositions about the nature of literacy as a practice:

(2) a. Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices: these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
   b. There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
   c. Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential.
   d. Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
   e. Literacy is historically situated.
   f. Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making.

Literacy’s technical, cognitive skills are part of a larger literacy practice that includes how we think and feel about literacy and how it influences us. “In the simplest sense, literacy practices are what people do with literacy” (Barton and Hamilton 2000). We “do” literacy not just when we are reading or writing, but also when we use literacy to shape our beliefs, behavior and social structure. We understand this “doing” best as an inter-working of literacy events and literacy practice.

A literacy event is an empirical episode, situated in time and place, where literacy plays a role (Barton and Hamilton 2000). Heath (1982) first used the term “literacy events” and defined them as an occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the participants’ interactions and interpretative processes. She provides a list of literacy events a middle-class preschooler would engage in, including reading cereal boxes, following written directions for games or listening to nightly bedtime stories.

A literacy practice is what people “do with” their literacy events. The term evolved when Street (1995) took Heath’s literacy events and added a greater level of abstraction:
‘Literacy events’ for Heath refer to ‘any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants’ interactions and their interpretative processes’ (Heath, 1982). The concept of ‘Literacy practices’ is pitched at a higher level of abstraction and refers to both behaviour and the social and cultural conceptualizations that give meaning to the uses of reading and/or writing. Literacy practices incorporate not only ‘literacy events’, as empirical occasions to which literacy is integral, but also folk models of those events and the ideological preconceptions that underpin them.

Modest dress practices are one example of what conservative Mennonites do with literacy. I present this “doing” in the following two sections. First, in Section 4.1, I discuss conservative Mennonite dress choices as inseparable from reading and writing their religious texts. Secondly, in 4.2 I examine the claim that dress practices themselves are a literacy practice in light of the six propositions about the nature of a literacy practice in Barton and Hamilton (2000). Throughout both of these sections I will present examples of literacy practice and literacy events in the conservative Mennonites.

4.1 Modest Dress in Literacy Practice: Alphabetic Texts

Mennonite dress practices are inseparable from the literacy practice of reading and writing their religious texts. These texts are English, alphabetic texts: the Bible and church standards. In this section, I give examples of various literacy events where religious texts are central. I will explore how dressing modestly is inseparable from “doing” literacy.

The Bible is the central religious text of the conservative Mennonite community. Reading the Bible is a core responsibility of the individual. It is the most important activity to do with one’s ability to read and write. They do their best to “do” what they read in the Bible, thus “doing” literacy by working it out in their behaviors, relationships and daily practices (Barton and Hamilton 2000). This includes their dress practices. Charlene tells us that conservative Mennonites take the Bible literally:
Charlene: If you are really earnest about following the Bible exactly how it says, I think you are going to be pretty different [in your dress from other groups] sometimes. [...] And taking it literally is one thing that I appreciate about the Mennonites. It’s not like we take everything literally; I think we have some pretty huge weak points. But at the same time I feel like it’s probably—and I don’t know, this is my perspective—probably one of the cultures that takes the Bible most literally as in, “Oh, it says that, so we are going to do that.”

Conservative Mennonites intend to take a “literal” approach to the Bible. In other words, if the Bible says to do something, they follow that command as closely as possible. They believe this sets them apart from other Christian groups, especially regarding the Christian woman’s prayer covering commanded in 1 Corinthians, chapter 11.

Joyce talks about other Christian groups experiencing “piecemeals of compromise” when it comes to obeying the scripture. Joyce relates that Christians from other groups seek her out for direction when they start reading the Bible literally for themselves:

Joyce: There are many who are seeking the truth of scripture and understanding in simple, practical terms—taking at face value what the scripture actually says. Realizing that even though they may not have grown up in a fellowship where they practiced it all their life, they find the truth and are like, “Where is somebody that practices this? Who can I find to help me?” […]

In (4) above, Joyce is specifically talking about people who read about the Christian woman’s veiling in the Bible and are looking for help practicing it. Many people who join conservative Mennonite churches are first drawn to them because of their application of a prayer veil. What is important for the analysis developed in this thesis is that the ultimate motive for the way conservative Mennonites dress is to be people who obey God by obeying the Bible. Many like Joyce believe that their way of dress will come naturally to any Christian who reads the Bible this way for themselves.

The conservative Mennonites use the Bible in various literacy events. Literacy events include reading and discussing the Bible out loud at church, memorizing Bible passages together in Sunday school or as a family, singing Bible verses put to music and quoting the Bible from memory as evidence for a belief or behavior. When I asked the narrators “why” questions during our interviews, such as “Why do you wear this?” or “Why do you dress modestly?” the narrators often cited or quoted Biblical passages from memory. They
answered with a reference to 1 Corinthians 11 every occasion I asked the reason for the Christian woman’s veiling, without exception.

Literacy events also happen as a matter of private devotion. Alicia regularly reads the Bible personally in private. She says, “I have been reading Revelation recently and the different examples or images that God gives of a prostitute—when you think of a prostitute, you don’t think of someone dressed modestly.” In the course of regular private reading she understands that appearing like a prostitute displeases God. She takes the cautionary example and purposefully dresses differently in her daily dress practice. Modest dress choices are something she “does” with reading the Bible.

A second major text for many conservative Mennonites is written church standards. These standards cover a variety of behavioral commitments, often including detailed rules about clothing. When a conservative Mennonite joins a particular church, he or she signs a written document, committing to follow the guidelines it prescribes. Not every conservative Mennonite church writes down standards about dress. But for congregations that do, the writing, reading and signing of this document is important in shaping behaviour, power structure and other social dynamics.

Charlene discusses her church’s written standards in the following passage:

a. Charlene: There’s quite a few different dress standards and things that we have agreed to do, so they get pretty specific in some ways. Even down to what style of veiling we wear on our heads.
b. Interviewer: Can you tell me everything you remember down to the specifics?
c. Charlene: I can maybe pull the paper out. That’s all I can remember.
d. Interviewer: Do you have it here?
e. Charlene: I think I might, but I’m not sure where. We moved recently, and I can’t remember where it is.
f. Interviewer: Just whatever you remember.
g. Charlene: Yes, it would talk about having dresses that are loose and modest which is very general. Then it explains that a little bit, and I can’t remember the wording exactly. It would talk about having sleeve length that comes close to the elbow and necklines that aren’t too big. Which is, I think it describes it in some way. It would talk about combing your hair modestly and not in showy ways. Which, of course, each one can interpret that in different ways. And it would talk about the size of the headship veiling as well. And it would talk about what color of footwear for church.
h. Interviewer: What is that?
i. Charlene: Black.
j. Interviewer: Only black?
k. Charlene: Yes. For church services or for dressy occasions. I forget how it states it, but “for more formal occasions” I think is what it says, actually—“formal occasions”—And for the men, they would not wear sleeveless shirts or shorts, and have haircuts that are neatly kept and not long hair. Yes, that’s only a slim picture of it. I’m not sure [what else].
l. Interviewer: So it is long?
m. Charlene: Yes.

Charlene goes to a conservative church that has detailed written standards. Individuals sign a document of behavioral guidelines when they come of age and join the church. Some churches require each member to resign the document every year to maintain membership. Both men and women sign the document. Persistent deviations from the standards in the document can be cause for termination of church membership.

The wording in the church standards is purposefully chosen and discussed at length. Some standards are left to general categories, such as showy hair. Others are more specific, like sleeve length that comes to one’s elbow in (5g). When a church wants to make a soft standard, they will use the word “encourage” in their writing:

(6) Joyce: It’s not mandatory for the cape dress or that it would need to be a one piece dress. They would encourage. It’s all written as “encourage.” Yes, that’s the word. There are some church groups who would make it mandatory. “You may not. That’s what you do. And you will do it if you want to be a member of this church.” A lot of it in our group is left to personal choice.

Joyce’s church does not make the cape dress style mandatory for women. Charlene’s church does. I discuss dress variety among Mennonite subgroups in Section 6.3. Both Charlene and Joyce can quote their church’s standards from memory. They are aware of the wording and how it influences their personal clothing choices. Charlene had a personal copy of the standards as referred to in (5c). Each family usually has at least one copy kept at home.

While both texts, the Bible and the written church standards, are important in shaping behavior, the conservative Mennonites approach them differently. They consider the Bible’s directives unchanging with time and culture. Church standards are continuously
rewritten and updated as culture changes. They view this change and as normal and necessary:

(7)  

a. Interviewer: How is your church[’s standard on dress] changing. Is it changing? Has it changed since your parents’ generation? Your grandparents?

b. Charlene: The dress standards have, yes. [...] I don’t know always if the changes are good, and yet I think that as culture changes over time, you have to be making changes. I mean obviously, like having a standard now about not being allowed to have—let’s think of an example—VCRs. That’s obsolete because who uses VCRs anymore? We use DVDs. [...] Yes, so that changed; that’s an example. As far as dress, yes, it changes with time.

Literacy practice is historically situated and the conservative Mennonite community embraces this principle. As innovations and styles come and go, conservative Mennonites sit down and decide as a group whether they will allow it into their church or leave it to personal choice. Some churches allow just the male members to vote on and discuss the wording. Other churches include female members in the decision process. But once the decision is made, every person must agree to what the group writes down as its guidelines in order to remain or become part of the group.

When a conservative Mennonite evaluates what she or he will wear, she consults written, alphabetic texts. All of my narrators cited the Bible as a fundamental reason for why they dress the way that they do. They also cite written church dress standards as commitments they have agreed to uphold in their clothing choices. While they treat these two texts differently—the Bible as unchanging moral directive and church standards as culturally situated best practices—both religious texts guide their dress practices.

4.2 Modest Dress in Literacy Practice: Clothing as Multimodal Text

In this section I examine modest dress practices as a type of literacy practice through the lens of the six propositions of the nature of a literacy practice in Barton and Hamilton (2000). In section 4.1 I considered modest dress practices as part of the wider “doing” of the traditional reading and writing of religious texts. In this section I consider dress a codified system of its own. If modest dress practices are literacy practices, then we can expect them to correspond to definitions of literacy beyond the more narrow definition of
heritage literacy presented by Rumsey (2009). We will look at each of the six propositions in sequence, discussing their relation to modest dress as a codified sign system in literacy practice.

As indicated above and reprinted here, the six propositions of the nature of a literacy practice in Barton and Hamilton (2000) are as follows:

(8) a. Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices: these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
b. There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
c. Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential.
d. Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
e. Literacy is historically situated.
f. Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making.

The first proposition (8a) has three components: social practice, empirical literacy events, and a coding modality (or modalities).

First, literacy is a set of social practices. This includes behaviors and the “ideological underpinning” of those behaviors (Street 1995). Mennonite dress practices are also a set of social practices. They include behaviors, such as what to wear and when to wear it, as well as the ideological underpinnings, such as feminine power and responsibility. For example, Claudia considers it her responsibility to be careful about how her clothing affects other people:

(9) Claudia: And so, am I going to take the time to look at myself in the mirror? Am I going to take the time to value myself as a woman and not to just throw something on? But to say, “Is what I’m wearing affecting other people? And how can I glorify the Lord through what I am wearing?”

While she may consider the example she is setting to younger women or to controversies she may be stirring in her church, Claudia is mostly concerned with how her choices are affecting men around her. Is she bringing attention to her sexual power or is she leaving “the glory to God?” I look at modesty and feminine power in Chapter 7.2.
Secondly, literacy practices include a coding modality (or modalities). Mennonite clothing is a multimodal codified sign system, including modalities such as looseness, color and style (as presented in Chapter 3.4). Clothing functions as the multimodal text in their literacy practice.

Lastly, literacy practices include empirical literacy events. In traditional, alphabetic literacy this includes signing one’s name on a contract or reading the Bible before bed at night. Such events are situational events, occurring in time and place. Literacy events in the context of clothing as a codified sign system include mothers and daughters sewing dresses together, a father sending his daughter upstairs to change into a more modest outfit or Joyce putting her veil on in the morning as she recounts below:

(10) Joyce: My son asked me, “Okay Mom, every time you put [your covering] on in the morning, do you think about being submissive?” Uh, good question! I think about it now that he pointed that out to me.

Joyce, like other conservative Mennonite women, covers her head with a cloth covering to show that she acknowledges her place in God’s order of authority: God, Christ, man and then woman. She puts it on every morning, a situational “literacy event” grounded in time and space. The veil is the multimodal, codified sign system that encodes her identity as a woman who embraces her feminine role.

A woman can be “read” as a godly woman, under God’s protection, not just by other people, but also by supernatural beings:

(11) Charlene: There’s a verse about [a woman’s covering] being a sign to the angels of protection. So I feel like it’s also a protection from evil forces. I think there is power, and I feel like there’s been lots of stories of people who took it off and were able to do evil things that they weren’t able to before. Like there is one testimony of a girl—I think it was in Lancaster city—she wanted to use a Ouija board and she could not use it—it did not work for her—until she took off her covering.

In Charlene’s account, the girl’s veiling was a “sign” that was read by the angels. Her veiling functioned like a “handle with Divine care” stamp on her person. The angels read it and blocked evil forces from communicating with her. Amy also says that she wears her veil “to show the spirit world that I am under the protection of God.”
The second proposition concerns different literacies associated with different domains (8b). Barton and Hamilton (2000) illustrates this with the example of cooking. The literacies used at a cooking class differ from the literacies used while cooking at home. Home cooking may involve shorthand, notes in the margins of a cookbook or calling one’s mother and having her recite a recipe from memory. A cooking school, on the other hand, could involve textbooks or a written grading system.

Mennonite dress practices also differ with domains. Examples of domains are church, home, the workplace, athletics and swimming. Each domain is associated with a different way of dressing. These associations often make it into written church standards. I remember attending a Biblical Mennonite Alliance church with a written guideline that men could wear shorts only in the “back forty.” In other words, men could wear shorts in private settings like the “back forty” acres in the woods behind the farm. They could not wear them in public settings.

The third proposition concerns social institutions and power structures (8c). The church institution mandates dress styles through written rules (see Section 4.1). Clothing worn in the church domain, such as Sunday morning services, is most separate from the surrounding culture and more distinctly Mennonite. The closer conservative Mennonites are to the authority of the church institution, the more Mennonite their dress becomes. Mennonite dress practices are also deeply embedded in power relationships between genders, especially the headship hierarchy of “God, Jesus, Man, Woman.” I discuss this in depth in Chapter 7.2.

The fourth proposition states that “literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices” (8d). Heritage literacy practices are fundamentally purposeful. Rumsey (2009) defines them as “lifelong decision making” about how communities “adapt, adopt or alienate” innovation into the accumulated literacy passed between generations (see Chapter 5). Mennonite dress practices are well thought out and discussed openly and at length. They are embedded in the broader social goal of the Mennonite people to be a Christian people. They consider themselves a “light to the world” and desire to be an example of what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus.
The fifth proposition situates literacy within history (8e). Modest dress practices are historically situated as clothing patterns pass from generation to generation. Mennonite dress practices sit in the context of two cultures’ histories: traditional Mennonite culture (such as the cape dress and plain coat) and mainstream culture around them (see Chapters 5 and 6). Dress practices change as technologies change. Martha recalls when nylons were invented:

(12) Martha: There was a time when I was quite young when nylons came out. Then when they wore these thin nylons, it was the church—somebody—got the idea that women ought to wear black stockings. [...] The preachers used to talk about the silk or nylon stockings that didn’t look like there was anything there. It was supposed to be a no-no.

The invention of nylons changed Mennonite dress practices. At first the leaders were suspicious of the new technology. Thinking the thinner fabric was too revealing they adapted nylons into their practice by requiring the transparency to be offset by only wearing black, an opaque color. Nowadays only the most conservative Mennonite churches require black nylons. Moderately conservative churches require women to wear nylons of any color in public, even nude colored nylons, as long as her legs are not bare. The least conservative churches have no guidelines concerning nylons. I remember agreeing to wear nylons on all occasions outside of the ladies’ dorm when I signed the dress standards of the moderately conservative Mennonite Bible college I attended. This practice is historically situated after the invention of nylon technology.

The sixth and final proposition is is that “literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making” (8f). Dress practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through informal learning. Several narrators mention that magazine racks at grocery stores can influence conservative Mennonite styles. Conservative Mennonites see the way the cover models are dressed and may find ways to work these styles into their dress practice. (See Chapter 5 for discussion about adapting mainstream styles into conservative practice.)

Sense making happens both on collective and individual levels. Amy tells us how she is in the process of making sense of which veil style is best for her to wear:
a. Amy: When I started wearing a veil I had a bigger one because my mom wears a bigger one. I would ask my brothers what they think about it—and it was quite a bit bigger—and I remember my brother didn't say that he didn't like it, but I could tell he didn't really like it. So I think that affected me, the fact that I knew he didn't really like it. If he would have been, “Oh, I really like it” I might have stayed with a bigger veil. I don't know that I've really thought about that before, but yes, I am sure. Within a few weeks I got a smaller veil, and since then [...] I've fluctuated a little bit, bigger and then smaller veil. But it is basically the same—except when I was talking with my cousin in Greenland. We were talking about it—the veiling—and I had a smaller one. Then I was like, “This is it for me.” I just wanted to wear a bigger veil. So I came home and I bought a bigger veil. Just a little bit—but yes.

b. Interviewer: Because?

c. Amy: Simply because I didn't want my veiling to be a fashion thing, and I didn't want to just be trying to fit in with my group. I didn't want to be trying to be cool. I wanted it to actually be for the right reasons.

Amy is a late teenager at the time of her interview. She is in the process of making sense of what the veiling means to her and how to best express it in her selection of veiling style. She is influenced by fitting in with her brother and her peers and also by what she calls the “right reasons.” These reasons are pleasing God and obeying the Bible. She fluctuates in the size she wears, larger and smaller, as she sense makes for herself. Amy engages in informal learning by talking to her older brother and her cousin. She picks up their attitudes through conversation and changes her behavior accordingly. As I present in Chapter 5.1, individual sense making and personal responsibility is important in modest dress literacy power structure. Accounts about style changes coming in from mainstream society and their adaption by the group as a whole are covered in Chapter 5.2.
CHAPTER 5
Modest Dress Practices as Heritage Literacy

Modest dress practices among conservative Mennonites are a clear example of heritage literacy. As discussed in Chapter 4.2, dress practices can fit the definition of a literacy practice. In this chapter I present dress practices as a particular type of literacy practice, a heritage literacy practice. The concept of heritage literacy is developed and defined by Rumsey (2009):

“...heritage literacy, a decision-making process by which people adopt, adapt, or alienate themselves from tools and literacies passed on between generations of people.”

First, heritage literacy is a “decision-making process.” Each generation of Mennonites decides which dress practices to preserve, modify or discard. These decisions concern “tools” and “literacies” or “practices, tools, and concepts” (Rumsey 2009). We see an active decision-making process among the Mennonites as they engage in the “reinterpretation, questioning and critiquing” typical to heritage literacy (Rumsey 2009).

Three concepts are key to understanding this decision-making process: adoption, adaptation and alienation. A generation adopts a practice by incorporating it into accepted behavior without significant modification. Conversely, a practice is alienated when a generation rejects it in its entirety. Adaptation functions between these two concepts. A generation adapts a practice by neither accepting nor rejecting it, but modifying it to fit into accepted behavioral norms.

Secondly, heritage literacy is “multimodal” and incorporates “a broad set of sign technologies and systems” (Rumsey 2009). I presented several modalities present in Mennonite clothing, such as looseness and pattern, in Section 3.4. Mennonite clothing functions
as a sign technology in their dress practice, falling under Rumsey’s broad definition of multimodal sign systems.

Lastly, heritage literacy passes between generations. It is not one-directional, but passes in both directions. Younger generations learn from older generations. But because heritage literacy is a “life-long learning process,” older generations continue to learn “recursively” from the young (Rumsey 2009). We see the expectation that modest dress concepts and practices will continue to be passed to new generations and the recursive influence of younger generations on the older ones.

In the following two sections, I explore Mennonite dress practice as an example of heritage literacy. I discuss the decision-making process and the passing between generations as they adopt, adapt or alienate tools and practices. In Section 5.1, I highlight these concepts in our narrators’ personal experiences. In Section 5.2, I present examples of specific dress practices as they change through time.

5.1 Heritage Literacy Themes: Personal Stories

In this section I show how the defining tenets of heritage literacy are present in the personal experience of three narrators. Two of our narrators went through a period of questioning or rebelling against modest dress practice, while the third narrator did not. Each narrator discusses her decision-making process and how she decided to adopt, adapt or alienate modest dress practices, tools and concepts. They articulate the multi-generational influence of their parents and the influence of the world’s innovations as they decide how to dress.

Joyce tells us about the interaction “between generations of people” in her story about sorting through her convictions on modest dress. Here she describes the process of questioning, critiquing and eventual adaptation:

(14) a. Interviewer: You mentioned back in your teenage years, sorting through what your convictions were. Do you mind sharing whatever you feel comfortable with that sorting through process and how you came to you convictions?
b. Joyce: [...] For myself, coming to the church at ten-years-old, not really knowing if this is what I wanted to do. I didn’t understand it. When you reach about fifteen, sixteen—up to eighteen, “Is it really who I am? Do I want this for my life?” [...] I know for myself, at that point of just adopting conservatism, I guess is the best way to say it is that it seems like (and part of it again was probably my personality) the plainer the look, the plainer the face, the more sober the face. And do we have to be like that? Do you have to look sad to be conservative? You know, “If that’s the way you’ve got to look—if that’s the way that the two go together, I don’t want any part of that.”

c. Joyce continued: But it’s just seemed like God spoke and brought friends and influences into my life saying, “You know what? You can be simple in life, but joyful.” So that was probably what I struggled through the most. Saying, “You know what? I don’t need to alter my personality. I can be joyful, I can be radiant and still be simply conservative—you know if you want to term it that.” That was probably the hardest hurdle. Not that I ever wanted to leave what I was taught because I did embrace it, and later in life, I have a greater understanding obviously. Hopefully I can pass that same passion on to my children, to my next generation. You know, “We can live radiantly.”

Joyce is a clear example of a person receiving instruction from an older generation, going through her personal decision-making process and desiring to pass her heritage on to the next generation.

Joyce experienced a period of questioning and critiquing modest dress practices. As young as ten years old, she was already unsure how she felt about the subject. Through her teenage years she wrestled with whether or not “adopting conservatism” was for her. She questioned why “do we have to be like that?” and critiqued the styles as too “sad” for her.

Joyce made the decision to adapt conservatism to make it joyful. She rejects “plainer the look, the plainer the face” dress practices while at the same time fully adopting the identity of her heritage. She tells us that she never wanted to “leave what she was taught.” She embraces Christianity and her Mennonite affiliation without modification. Because alienating herself from her heritage was not an option for her, she adapts modest dress to make it “radiant and still be simply conservative.” In doing so she reinterprets modest dress as joyful instead of sad.

Joyce desires to pass her “passion” for modest dress practices to her children. When she speaks about what she wants to pass on to the next generation, she specifically men-
Claudia embraced modest dress practices after a period of questioning and rebelling:

a. So growing up, modesty was something that was an outward thing, and it was something that was never really taught about my heart necessarily. It was something that you do on the outside, but no reflection on the inside of the heart. So I really rebelled against that. I really hated it because, "What’s the reason? What’s the purpose?" If there is no purpose why would I even do this? Why would I live this way—fight so hard—for something if it only makes me look stupid?"

b. In studying, it’s been a great challenge for me to realize that there’s such a beauty in modesty and that it’s obtainable even though it’s difficult. A little slogan I’ve had is that, “modesty is hot or modesty is not.” Modesty is hottest in the literal way. I was giving some speeches on modesty in my life. I tell them literally there will be times when it’s not easy. In the summer, you will have to wear different clothes. You can’t just wear your strappy things if you’re wanting to have the title of modest. But yet so much more than just teaching the outward—like I think even for my own children—in our culture I have a burden to teach that is not just the things you put on, but it’s such a reflection of the heart.

c. [...] Until I found my security in Christ, I really wanted the affirmation of man and I thought the only way to be fashionable was to dress immodestly. “How can I do this behind my parents back? How can I change in the car as I am driving to the party so that my parents never find out, so that I look cool at the party?” And never realizing that immodesty doesn’t make you fashionable and you can be fashionable and modest. What I really wanted was the approval of man, and I wanted to be fashionable. I wanted to make a statement, and I think once I found my approval in God alone, that erased a lot of problems. Then also realizing that it’s exciting—the challenge of being fashionable and being modest in a culture where fashion means taking off more.

Claudia’s rebellion against modest dress practices happened when she was growing up at home. She questioned them and “hated” them because she didn’t understand the reason or purpose behind them. She critiqued them as something that “makes me look stupid.” She alienated herself from modest dress practices by figuring out how to change her dress “in the car” on the way to parties behind her parents’ back.

Claudia attributes her struggles with adopting her dress heritage to being taught tools and practices without being taught concepts to an equal degree. She says, “modesty was something that was an outward thing, and it was something that was never really taught about my heart.” The result for Claudia? In her words, “I really rebelled.” She alienated
herself from modest dress practices until she acquired the conceptual framework that made sense of modest dress. She says that when she embraced her faith and found her “approval in God alone” that it “erased a lot of my problems.” She shifted from alienating dress practices to adapting them to fit her style and personality.

Claudia’s adaptation of heritage literacy practices is an interesting example of reinterpretation. Claudia acknowledges that modest dress practices can be difficult. The difficulty is both in social pressure and in the physical inconveniences of wearing more clothing. She reinterprets the difficulties as a fun challenge, meaningful because it bears the approval of God.

Claudia is already teaching dress practices as heritage literacy to people in her community. She has given speeches on modesty. She teaches the slogan, “Modesty is hot or modesty is not” and talks about specific dress styles and patterns. She is careful to teach concepts as well as practices. She wants people to know that it is “not just the things you put on, but it’s such a reflection of the heart” in (15b).

Like Joyce, we see the passing between generations in Claudia’s story. Claudia learns from her parents. She makes her own decisions, and she brings up teaching modest dress practices to her own children. She desires that her reinterpretation of modest dress as an exciting challenge become part of the accumulated literacy of her community.

The decision-making process is also present in the stories of narrators who never experienced a period of intense questioning or rebellion. As Charlene tells us in her story below, “I don’t feel like I had a lot of questions or problems myself.” Although she never engaged in a period of alienation from her heritage literacy structure, the concepts of adoption, adaptation and alienation from one generation to another are present in her experience:

(16) a. Charlene: I would have worn dresses ever since I can remember. Definitely the style has changed over the years. Sometimes of course, as a child or as a teen, Mom would want us to wear stuff that we weren't always that excited about, because we maybe thought it looked old or out of date.

b. Interviewer: Like what?
c. Charlene: Well I don’t know if I can remember exactly, but maybe a dress. Okay—so the style had changed in our circles—the style had changed from elastic to pleats or gathers in the waist instead. I wore elastic for some time when I was younger, and it was okay. Eventually I just did not, I couldn’t stand it anymore and I thought it looked terrible. I thought it wasn’t comfortable either and stuff, and so I didn’t want to wear. And she didn’t force it on me.

d. Charlene continued: So yes, sometimes she’ll pull a dress out of the attic and be like, “Hey one of you girls could wear this” and we’re like, “We don’t want to.” I feel like my dad taught us very clearly and strongly about conviction for dressing modestly and why we dress modestly. And so, I don’t feel like I had a lot of questions or problems myself. And its partially personality with me like, “Why do we have to do this?” Things like that.

Charlene adapts clothing as heritage literacy from her parents’ generation. Her father “taught us very clearly and strongly about conviction for dressing modestly and why we dress modestly” in (16d). She wholeheartedly adopts the concepts that guide the dress choices passed down to her. Her adaptation of heritage literacy occurs in stylistic changes. Charlene’s questioning, critiquing and reinterpreting center on personality preferences and stylistic concerns. She says that her “Why do we have to do this?” questions are “personality” in (16d). I understand her to mean that the things she questions are details of personal preference, not questioning the modest dress system as a whole. Her decision-making process is more stylistic than foundational.

Charlene gives us a specific example of how she interacts with a stylistic concern regarding her mother’s elastic waist dresses in (18d). Elastic waist dresses are a one-piece dress that have a band of elastic sewn in around the waist to pull the fabric in to the body at the waistline. This pattern was common in her mother’s generation.

Charlene refuses to wear elastic waist dresses. She’s alienated elastic waists as a tool or technology from her wardrobe because of stylistic and comfort reasons. She critiques them as “looking terrible” or “out of date” and that they were not “comfortable either.” Her generation has switched to pleats or gathers in the waist. These style taper the fabric in at the waist instead of pulling against the body. Charlene has kept the basic cape dress technology, but adapted it to better fit her preferences and the preferences of her generation.
5.2 Heritage Literacy Themes: Changes in Clothing Styles

In this section I discuss heritage literacy in relation to dress styles as they have changed in the last few generations. In Section 5.1, I discussed heritage literacy in the context of personal journeys. Here I look at generations moving as a whole. We will look at two practical clothing examples: stylistic changes in women’s dress patterns and shifts in the clothing men wear to church services.

Martha, eighty-three at the time of the recording in 2015, speaks about her generation’s transition away from wearing exclusively cape dresses:

(17) a. Interviewer: When you made the transition away from cape dresses, was it your parents’ generation, your grandparents’ generation changing with you? Or was it your generation?
   b. Martha: My generation first, but eventually even my mother was not always wearing capes as I recall. Many of my parents’ generation are not wearing capes anymore.

Heritage literacy does not pass linearly in one direction, but flows both ways between generations. Martha’s memories are an example of the recursive nature of heritage literacy. Her generation stopped wearing the cape dress pattern first, and her parents’ generation followed them. As Martha says, “eventually even my mother was not always wearing capes.”

Martha’s age makes her account of generational change particularly interesting. Martha’s mother would have been born approximately one hundred years ago. Between Martha’s discussion of her mother down to our youngest narrators, we see the “passing between generations” for a century.

Elaine, sixty years old at the time her stories were recorded, tells us the changes she’s seen in women’s dress practices in her lifetime, starting from the time she entered her youth group around 1960:
(18)  a. Interviewer: What patterns have you seen as fashion styles come and go?
   b. Elaine: [...] Well, for example when I was just starting with the youth group, way back before the cape dresses were all one [piece]—the cape was also a separate thing that was put on top of the dress and hooked with a belt—somewhere right about the time I started with youth group they started sewing the cape into the waistline. So that it was attached instead of detached, and that was kind of a big—everything that changes is—a big deal because it is viewed with suspicion. So when I was in the youth group our skirts had pleats in them—yes, mostly pleats or maybe gathers. Then the tradition started (it was the rage for ten years) to put elastic in your waistline. Then you didn’t have to wear a belt. Just little stuff like that.
   c. Interviewer: Yes.
   d. Elaine: So now elastic is out and belts are out. I think most of the girls that wear cape dresses now make them way more long than we ever wore them. Like basically down to the ankles all the way. Yes, so there is seasons of everything.

At the time Elaine entered the youth group, her mother’s generation were already changing their style from a separate cape to a one-piece cape dress. She watched the shift from pleated waistlines, to elastic waists and back to pleats again. Charlene mentioned the same shift in practice with elastic waist dresses as already stated in example (16) in Section 5.1. Clothing literacy is not fixed, but fluid as generations adapt and accumulate innovations and technologies.

Elaine mentions that every change was “a big deal because it is viewed with suspicion” in (18b). Whatever hesitation Martha’s mother’s generation may have had to changing dress styles as seen in (17b), it was eventually discarded as they adapted the innovation.

We see the pattern of resistance and eventual adoption again in Roman’s discussion of t-shirt style undershirts. Roman is fifty-seven at the time of the recording. He describes how the younger generation has changed the practice of what men wear to church. In this account, when Roman mentions “t-shirts” he is referring to undershirts with sleeves rather than outerwear t-shirts.

(19)  a. Interviewer: Do all the men wear suits to church?
   b. Roman: No, but most of the men my age or older would. I would say that even most of the men over 40 had suits on. Very few younger than that.
   c. Interviewer: Why is that?
   d. Roman: I don’t know.
   e. Interviewer: What do the young guys wear?
Men’s church clothing changed practice as it passed between generations. Men in Roman’s generation learned to wear plain suits from their fathers. A plain suit has no collar and is cut in a particularly simple, straight fashion. The younger men stopped wearing the plain suit. They do not wear a suit jacket at all, just a shirt.

When the younger generation alienated the plain suit from use, they added t-shirt style undershirts underneath their shirts. The younger generation adapted their practice of dress to fit with their concept of modesty. They added an extra layer underneath to make sure people could not see through their clothes.

Roman’s generation “were used to” what a shirt looked like without an undershirt. According to Roman, they “didn’t even think about it” in (19h). He begrudgingly wears undershirts now, which he admittedly “hates.” The younger generation calls him “immodest” when he does not practice the undershirt in (19f).

This is a clear example of one generation adopting the concept of modesty from the previous, alienating a specific practice (the plain suit) and adapting their dress practice to suit the concept of modesty (adding the undershirt). The younger generation in turn applies social pressure on the older generation to adopt their reinterpretation of dress. Heritage literacy passes both ways between generations.
In this chapter I examine our narrators’ modest dress practices in light of Rumsey’s statement that multiple modalities in non-traditional literacy “make meaning much like an alphabet” (Rumsey 2009). We will see modest dress practices behaving like traditional orthographies as described in Sebba (2009) and Clifton (2014). The multiple modalities of modest dress literacy and traditional literacies share the “common function” of the “construction of identities” (Sebba 2009).

Rumsey (2009) says the following about multiple modalities in non-traditional literacies. The first part of this passage was quoted in Section 3.2, and is repeated here:

I use quilts as literacy artifacts because I believe that they exemplify multiple modes, which, according to Carey Jewitt and Gunther Kress, include “image, gaze, gesture, movement, music, speech and sound-effect”(1) as well as pattern, texture, and color. Each of these modes is “equally significant for meaning and communication”(2). If literacy, as I noted above, is a “codified sign system,” then quilts offer a type of pattern or system of signs that make meaning much as an alphabet, alpha-numeric coding, hieroglyph, or cuneiform might.

Rumsey chooses Amish quilts as examples of literacy artifacts. She argues that “if literacy” is a “codified sign system” and if quilts are literacy artifacts, then the “multiple modalities” and “system of signs” present in quilts “make meaning much as an alphabet.”

If modest dress practices among the Mennonites are literacy artifacts like quilts are literacy artifacts among the Amish, then we could expect to see them make meaning “much as an alphabet” as well. As we will see in this chapter, modest dress practices share the “alphabetic” nature of quilts in the presence of multiple modalities. These modalities, like traditional scripts, codify clan and tribal affiliations and construct group identities.
The following passage from Sebba (2009) discusses how traditional scripts may interact with group identities:

 Scripts can function to differentiate social groups at different levels of social organization. Unseth (2005, p. 22) lists ‘factors that can affect how people want to distance or identify themselves by script’ as clan identity, ethnic identity, national identity, political movements, prestige, and religion, and he provides examples for all of these.

Sebba states that a script can “differentiate social groups at different levels of social organization.” Scripts are used to distance or identify groups along a number of factors, including clan and religious identities. Like traditional scripts, modest dress differentiates Mennonites on several levels, including affiliating themselves with the Christian religion, distancing themselves from mainstream culture and differentiating between separate Mennonite groups.

Rumsey (2009) mentions the codification of group identity as a legitimate example of multimodal literacy practices:

 Others within writing studies have offered examples of multimodal literacy practices passed between generations. Ellen Cushman states that bead working is knowledge making. It “codifies tradition, cultural practices, legends, ways of viewing self within world, clan and tribal affiliations, representational styles and so on, depending on its functional and rhetorical purpose” (Cushman, Loom module).

Multimodal literacy practices codify factors including clan and tribal affiliations, legends and “ways of viewing self within world.” Conservative Mennonites use their dress practices as a multimodal sign system to codify their place in the world. In this chapter I examine how they use dress to position themselves in context of secular culture and individual Mennonite groups. In Chapter 7, I discuss how Mennonite women use their prayer veil to position themselves within Biblical storylines.

In this chapter, I also examine the parallels of traditional orthographies and multimodal literacies “making meaning as an alphabet” in light of the following passage from Clifton (2014):
Sebba (2009, 46) claims that a common function of orthography is “the construction of identities.” In discussing the development of writing systems for non-standardized speech varieties, Sebba (2007, 112–118) describes the tension that a developing orthography faces in establishing a separate identity for a speech variety. Almost all orthographies are based on that of another language. The tension arises in being similar enough to the “parent” system to gain status, while being different enough to establish a separate identity for the speech variety.

Clifton states that “almost all orthographies are based on that of another language.” He mentions the tension between being “similar enough to the ‘parent’ system to gain status” while also “being different enough to establish a separate identity for the speech variety.” Section 6.3 discusses similar tensions between Mennonite dress practices and the “parent” dress practices of mainstream culture.

The following three sections cover the codification of religious identity (Section 6.1), parallels with traditional orthography in the construction of social identity (Section 6.2), and multimodalities and affiliation with particular Mennonite groups (Section 6.3).

6.1 Codification of Religious Identity as a Differentiated Social Group

Modest dress practices codify religion and codify group identity as separate from mainstream culture. We see Mennonites wanting to “distance” themselves from secular culture and “identify” themselves as Christian through the way they dress (Sebba 2009).

Christian identity is the ultimate motive for modest dress practices among conservative Mennonites. Claudia shares how she considers her practice of veiling as seriously as an engagement ring with God:

(20) Claudia: I view [my veil] as my engagement ring to God. Like when I go out in public [people say], “There’s something different about you. Not just because you’re dressing modestly, but there’s something on your head. What is it?” And I’m engaged to Christ. I am different. I’m set apart. Something about me is set apart for Christ.

Claudia’s motives are to show that she is set apart for Christ, reserved like a bride is for her husband. She is “different” or “differentiated” (Sebba 2009). We look more closely at a women’s identity as the Bride of Christ in Chapter 7.1. Notice that Claudia does not say
that she desires to be set apart as “Mennonite.” An interesting absence in each narrator’s story is the motive to be known as Mennonite. The narrators emphasize the motive to be identified as a Christian, a follower of Jesus or the Bible.

In the following story, Martha changes the word “Mennonite” to “Christian” as she describes the way she is perceived and the way she wishes to be perceived by others:

(21) a. Martha: When you went out in public and you had your covering on, you were known as a Mennonite, and I think I felt good about that because I wanted to be known as a Christian. [...] I never really was embarrassed to be out in public. When I was in public school and I wore a covering [...] and I wore cape dresses to school, then I was probably looked at as an oddball in public school. They were some other Mennonites in our school, but I don’t think they all dressed as plain as I did. So I got used to being different.

b. Interviewer: Right.

c. Martha: It is okay to be different.

d. Interviewer: To be different... I have heard different people quote Romans 12:1 about being separate from the world.

e. Martha: Yes, that was pretty much impressed in me as I was growing up, “Be separate from the world.” Things that were worldly—dress that the world used, you tried to stay away from.

f. Interviewer: For the recording, what is worldly?

g. Martha: Worldly would be things that people do that aren’t Christian. Things that are not [Christian] would include anything that we can consider wrong or immodest in dress. Or behaviour would be worldly. It’s probably about the best way I can think of saying it.

Martha says that when she went out in public as a high school student, she was identified as a Mennonite by her head covering. She felt good about this because she wanted to be “known as a Christian” as seen in (21a). Again we see the ultimate motive to identify with Christianity: her identity as a Mennonite is secondary.

Martha relates that her community impressed the Biblical injunction to be separate from the world (Romans 12:1-2\(^1\)) on her in her childhood in (21e). She was encouraged to stay away from dress practices the world used, especially if they were considered “wrong or immodest” as seen in (21g). Later in her interview she gives open-toed shoes as an example of worldly dress:

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\(^1\) “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Romans 12:1-2, KJV)
In this story, Martha remembers the days when her church used to have a prohibition against open-toed shoes. Martha mentions the condition of being “worldly” as the primary reason to avoid wearing them. She only mentions modesty as a possible motive—of which she is unsure—when she is asked to clarify the reasoning behind the prohibition in (22c).

Roman also references Romans 12:1-2\(^2\) as a motive for his dress practices. He relates not wanting to “be conformed” in his story about watching non-Mennonites encounter his wife:

\(^2\)See footnote 1 in chapter 6.
Roman relates that the non-Mennonite public realizes that his wife does not belong to mainstream society. Her way of dress is so differentiated that non-Mennonites question her identity, wondering, “Where does she belong?” in (23c) They look at her “script” and read it as foreign.

Roman calls visible codification of Christian identity in his dress his “goal.” He clearly says that he wants the outside world to notice that he and his family are “identifying with something” in their dress practices. This identity is a people “honoring the Creator” as seen in (23e).

Roman states that it is important for Mennonite dress practices to have the primary motive of being “pleasing to God” in (23f). He bases this on the Bible, referencing Romans 12:1-2, “be not conformed to the world” and 1 Timothy 2:9, “that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness” as seen in (23f). This is another example of conservative Mennonite dress practices as an outworking of reading religious texts, as I discussed in Chapter 4.

Separation extends beyond the secular public to other religious groups. Joyce expresses her concern that the flowing veil style may look too similar to Catholic practices:

(24) Joyce: My only main concern [about wearing a flowing veil instead of a net cap]—and it’s probably unfounded—but for me personally—historically, the Catholics would have worn a flowing veil, and I always questioned whether that is part of the reason the Anabaptists chose a distinct style? Distinct, you know, in separating the two groups? Because the Anabaptists broke away from the state church, from Catholicism. I have never been able to find that. I have asked different historians and no one—there is no answer. There is nothing written. One gentleman from Ohio, he said he just always looked at it—because he too never could find an answer—he always looked at it as, “Okay, this group just decided on this, the same as one ball team will be red and the other is blue.” This particular group of believers, the Anabaptists, probably adopted that style, and why there was nothing ever written? It’s just interesting to me. [...] If historically, the Anabaptists felt a need to separate from Catholicism, should we be careful on going back and looking like it? Is that of concern?

In (24), Joyce questions whether the early Anabaptists chose to wear a net style covering to differentiate themselves from Catholicism at the time they broke away as a separate religious group. Joyce and other interested Mennonites have researched the origins of the
net covering and found nothing definitively written about its history. What is interesting in the context of this thesis is that differentiation from other groups is of enough importance to modern-day Mennonites that they look for the same motivations in their religious history.

In example (24) above, Joyce says that she spoke to a historian about the history of the net cap. The historian believed that Anabaptists differentiated themselves from Catholics like one sports team differentiates from another, “as one ball team will be red and the other is blue.” I personally heard the same analogy on numerous occasions during my time as a conservative Mennonite. Sports teams wear different colored uniforms so that they are visually separate from each other. We were encouraged to have the same team mentality. Clothing choices were not always matters of “good or evil” but sometimes team spirit and identification. The early Anabaptists could have chosen the net cap not because the Catholic style flowing veil was immoral, but because they desired to codify their identity as a new team.

Joyce wonders if modern-day Mennonites should be concerned about the flowing veil because the distinction may have meant something to previous generations of Anabaptists. This demonstrates the multi-generational accumulation of literacy knowledge and ongoing decision process fundamental to heritage literacy discussed in Chapter 5.

6.2 Parallels with Traditional Orthography in the Construction of Social Identity

In this section I look at the parallels between traditional orthographies and multimodal literacies “making meaning as an alphabet” (Rumsey 2009) in relation to daughter and parent forms. As cited earlier, Clifton (2014) writes that “almost all traditional orthographies are based on that of another language.” Tension exists between the desire to be “similar enough to the ‘parent’ system to gain status, while being different enough to establish a separate identity.” Parallel tensions exist between the desire “to be similar enough” to mainstream fashion to “gain status” and “to be different enough” from mainstream fashion “to establish a separate identity.” In this sense, Mennonite dress practices relate to mainstream fashions as the orthography of a daughter relates to its parent variety.
Elaine discusses the relationship of Mennonite style and current fashions:

(25)  a. Interviewer: What about the group you are with?
     b. Elaine: Well, the kids really kind of follow the current fashions in a Mennonite style. So layering is really big, all kinds of layers, those really long skirts and those really big striped skirts are really popular right now, in the last year or two.

Elaine states that the younger generation follows the current fashions in a particularly “Mennonite style” in (25b). Alicia (age 21) is one of the “kids” referred to in (18b) who attends church with Elaine (age 60). She makes the same observation as Elaine:

(26)  Alicia: I think [our dress] changes a lot with the ebb and flow of fashion. So right now some shorter skirts might be more popular like right at the knee. [...] Yes, I think it feels like it kind of changes with whatever the current fashion is but just in a different form.

Alicia’s comment is almost identical to Elaine’s statement that Alicia’s generation follows “the current fashions in a Mennonite style” as seen in (18b). Just like traditional orthographies can be based on that of another language, conservative Mennonite styles can be based on that of another culture, mainstream society. Conservative Mennonite fashions are based on two cultural traditions: traditional Anabaptist styles and mainstream fashions. In the previous two examples, Alicia and Elaine focus on how their fashions are based on mainstream examples. Innovation comes in from the outside, and conservative Mennonites adapt it to make it their own.

A good example of a Mennonite style based on mainstream fashion is that of layering. Conservative Mennonite women will purchase clothing designed by mainstream designers and sold at mainstream stores. Instead of wearing these articles as single layers as a mainstream woman would commonly wear them, they will layer the articles together to make them more modest. For example, they will wear one shirt on top of another to add longer sleeves or a higher neckline to an outfit. The source material is obviously from the mainstream society, and yet it is arranged in a conservative Mennonite way.

Alicia expands on her desire to be similar to the parent system of mainstream fashion later in her interview:
Alicia says she likes to “dress in style.” She approaches it primarily as a “fun challenge” which she admits is more fun in colder seasons. Mainstream society dresses more conservatively in cold weather which makes it easier to copy.

Alicia is very positive about blending mainstream fashions into her dress practice. Not everyone allows this same degree of influence in their practice. Unlike Alicia, Charlene questions bringing in practices from the world:

Charlene describes the hair pouf that used to be trendy in Mennonite circles. She believes that it came “straight out of the world” as seen in (28b). The hair pouf is another example of mainstream fashion adapted for conservative Mennonite use. They poufed the front of the hair and rested their veil or covering behind it.

Charlene’s main concern with poufs and other worldly styles is a matter of identity. She describes girls with tall poufs as “trying so hard” in (28c). She says the same of the
worldly style of having face framing curls hanging outside of the covering. She says, “it looks like you’re trying too hard to be something that you’re really not” in (28c). Mennonite girls do not belong to mainstream culture. Adapting mainstream hairstyles into the practice of veiling is an “obnoxious” mixing of identity in (28c).

Charlene and Alicia demonstrate different positions in the tension between mainstream culture and conservative Mennonite identity. Alicia values the status of being more similar to mainstream culture. Charlene prioritizes establishing a separate Christian identity. As discussed in Chapter 4, literacy practices are socially situated (Barton and Hamilton 2000). Charlene and Alicia will experience different social opportunities within the conservative Mennonite community due to how closely they adopt mainstream fashions. Charlene will have advantages among conservative Mennonites who value separation, and Alicia will have advantages among those who value mainstream status.

Claudia speaks frankly about the difficultly mainstream status concerns bring into her dress practice:

(29) a. Interviewer: You mentioned it’s difficult [to be modest today]. What makes it difficult?
   b. Claudia: Culture makes modesty really difficult. Sometimes I feel lucky because of my personality because I love difficult things and I love a good challenge. Yet it seems like in this culture that fashion is being scantily clad. To be beautiful you wear less, and I think that’s a wrong message. It’s portrayed so wrongly to all the cultures. From young on up, you see it in the videos, you see it in Hollywood, in New York city, in any magazine. You know a stumbling block in this culture is to be beautiful you eat less, to be beautiful you wear more make-up—and we all know that’s not true. But it’s something that’s really hard to fight for any age group, especially if you’re a girl and you’re insecure and you’re trying to go through public school. You know the popular ones are the ones who are skinny, who are wearing less, it is difficult.

Claudia and the other conservative Mennonites I interviewed live surrounded by mainstream culture. They shop at mainstream stores, mingle with mainstream culture at work and in recreational activities, and even at times attend mainstream schools. The dominant, surrounding culture prioritizes “the ones who are skinny, who are wearing less” in (29). Like Alicia in (27b), Claudia personally came to terms with the pressure by approaching fashion as a “fun” or “good challenge.” She embraces the difficulty of navigating her
identity as a modest Christian and drawing status from mainstream clothing practices by adapting mainstream fashions to meet her moral standards.

Mennonite individuals, as well as Mennonite groups, balance the tension between their desire to be identified as Christian and adapt mainstream fashions in different ways. Section 6.3 looks at differences between different Mennonite groups.

### 6.3 Multimodalities and the Codification of Group Affiliation

This section shows dress practices “making meaning as an alphabet” (Rumsey 2009) as a multimodal system of signs that “differentiate social groups” (Sebba 2009) among the Mennonites. Like the quilts in Rumsey (2009), Mennonite dress practices include multiple modes such as “pattern, texture, and color.” They codify affiliation to particular Mennonite groups.

Rumsey (2009) says the following about “reading” Amish as Amish by their clothing:

> For example, Mary and Elaine are both dressed to signify their Amish beliefs and culture. They ascribe to a pattern, a set of signifying symbols, and are “read” as Amish by their choices of clothing, hairstyle, and head coverings.

Multiple groups and affiliations of Mennonites exist. These group affiliations can be “read” by the group’s “choices of clothing, hairstyle and head coverings” (Rumsey 2009). The spectrum of choices of Mennonite groups who practice the head covering range from very plain, distinct dresses and bonnets, to small lace coverings and store-bought fashions.

The spectrum of Mennonite groups is commonly referred it in terms of conservative to liberal. Alicia describes herself as a “happy medium” between conservative and liberal:

(30) a. Alicia: I consider myself as a happy medium between conservative and liberal. That’s how I would say it.
   b. Interviewer: What is a conservative Mennonite?
   c. Alicia: I would see conservative Mennonite as wearing a dress, whether it’s with cape or no cape, like wearing a hand sewn dress like all the time. To me that would be conservative.
   d. Anything else about conservative Mennonites?
   e. Alicia: Bigger veil or covering, with or without strings. Some you know, no printed fabric just like solid fabric, yes.
f. Interviewer: So, it’s the one end of the spectrum?
g. Alicia: Yes.
h. Interviewer: What’s at the other end? What’s liberal Mennonite?
i. Alicia: Where it kind of blends in with everybody else, there’s not really any standard.

In the Mennonite community, “conservative” is synonymous with “more distinct in from the mainstream, secular society” and liberal is “more similar to mainstream, secular society.” Alicia describes conservative Mennonites as wearing homemade, one-piece dress dresses in (30c) and larger head coverings in (30e). Liberal Mennonites are Mennonites who “blend in with everyone else” in (30i) and fully adopt dress practices typical of Evangelical church groups in North America today.

The progression of clothing practices from conservative to liberal in Mennonite groups is not a gradual progression, but a series of distinct, standardized steps. The following passage from Clifton (2014) returns to the parallels between non-traditional literacies “making meaning as an alphabet” (Rumsey 2009) and the understanding that a main function of orthography is constructing social identities:

The twin motivations of identity and affiliation drive processes of standardization. This standardization can take the form of two groups using a single orthographic system, or different orthographic systems.

As I discussed in Section 6.1, Christian identity is a fundamental motivation in modest dress practices. Conservative Mennonites are primarily motivated to affiliate themselves with the Christian religion. The expression of Christian identity is an ongoing process of adapting their clothing heritage from generation to generation (Chapter 5). Mennonite groups make communal decisions about how to best express their Christian identity today: which clothing practices are mandated, forbidden or left to personal choice. Individuals are expected to adopt the group dress standards as a requirement of church membership. Thus the “twin motivations” of Christian identity and affiliation with a particular Mennonite group “drive the process” of dress practice standardization.
Charlene belongs to a Mennonite group that standardizes its dress practices into written by-laws. She discusses how she desires to be part of her church more than expressing her personal preferences in clothing:

(31) Charlene: I don’t really feel like everything my church asks of me [in relation to dress practices] is my conviction, but I feel like it’s a privilege to be part of that church. I’m committed to being part of the Brotherhood and therefore adhering to those things. And so, if I am going to make a big fuss about it, it’s certainly a waste of time.

She considers her group affiliation a “privilege” and is committed to “adhering” to its dress code in (31). Her identity as a Christian and her affiliation with her group drive her to accept standardization. Charlene demonstrates the team spirit Joyce spoke about in (24) above, part of which is repeated here:

(32) [The historian] always looked at it as, “Okay, this group just decided on this, the same as one ball team will be red and the other is blue.”

Mennonite churches realize that some of their dress guidelines are matters of group spirit rather of issues of morality. Different Mennonite churches require greater or lesser degrees of uniformity among their members. This difference often makes it possible to identify which subgroup a person belongs to by looking at her dress.

In the days when I was a member of the conservative Mennonite community, I remember laughing with my friends about how we could make a “Mennonite Identification Guidebook” in the style of a bird guide with pleats and colors and styles instead of feathers and beaks. We were amused and annoyed that non-members of the community lumped us all together as under the label of “Amish” when we were not Amish at all. While we all might have looked the same to mainstream society, we were keenly aware of how our clothing differentiated us from the other Mennonite groups. Our ability to “read” one group from another, our literacy, was high.

Joyce, the owner and operator of a veiling store which caters to various Mennonite groups, is uniquely suited to write such a guide. She comes into contact with many Mennonite groups on a daily basis, making her insight a useful example of how dress practices vary from group to group.
Table 1 below compiles Joyce’s descriptions of Mennonite groups. The first column contains the group name. The second column is a compilation of Joyce’s description of the group’s dress practices. The third column contains clarifying notes and identifies each of our narrator’s group affiliation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Dress Practices</th>
<th>Clarifying Notes</th>
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Table 1. Mennonite Groups who Patronize Joyce’s Store

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Dress Practices</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horse and Buggy Mennonites</td>
<td>Wear bonnet style head covering with strings.</td>
<td>The only Old Order Mennonite group in this list. They do not drive automobiles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilgrim Mennonites and Eastern Mennonites</td>
<td>Fuller skirts, longer skirts, floral pattern on dresses. No large flowers on the patterns, but “very small, very petite” flowers. Wears cap style head coverings. Wears it “full” meaning that it comes to the hairline in the back and the headpiece would come to the front of the ear. Men wear plain suits to Sunday church services.</td>
<td>Eastern Mennonites are an off-shoot of Pilgrims who dress similarly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Atlantic Mennonites</td>
<td>Floral patterns on dresses. Flowers larger than Pilgrims wear. One-piece cape dresses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keystone Mennonites</td>
<td>Floral patterns on dresses. Flowers larger than Pilgrims wear. Mostly cape dresses, some skirts and shirts. Looser necklines than Easterns. Net style veils and flat, flowing veils to hairline. No head covering strings.</td>
<td>Joyce is part of this group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beachy Amish-Mennonites</td>
<td>Very simple, plain colored cape dresses and net coverings.</td>
<td>Charlene and Roman are part of this group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Fellowship (aka Charity Church)</td>
<td>Flowing veil.</td>
<td>I was part of this group before joining the BMA group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Mennonite Alliance (BMA)</td>
<td>Lace head coverings (maybe 6 - 8 inches in size). Layer clothing, sometimes wear leggings under their skirts or dresses.</td>
<td>Alicia, Amy and Elaine are part of this group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaffiliated</td>
<td>Standards vary from individual congregation to individual congregation. Often similar to BMA.</td>
<td>Claudia is now part of this group (after growing up Keystone).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancaster Conference</td>
<td>Some Lancaster Conference women wear doily style veils, while some Lancaster Conference women no longer practice any style of velling.</td>
<td>Martha is part of this group. Joyce was part of this group at the time of her marriage, before Keystone broke away from Lancaster Conference and became its own group. Lancaster Conference churches are on the borderline of conservative and mainline.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 demonstrates the standardized nature of group affiliation in modest dress practices. Each group has its distinct look. Joyce can discern her patron’s affiliation by the way she dresses and which coverings or veils she purchases. An Eastern Mennonite woman would not appear wearing a store-bought skirt. A Biblical Mennonite Alliance woman would not commonly wear a bonnet style covering with strings.

Table 1 is not a comprehensive list of all of the differences in dress practices between groups. Instead it is a compilation of the differences that stand out as most salient in Joyce’s experience. Joyce’s descriptions illustrate the multimodality of modest dress literacy.

The following is a summary of five modalities Joyce mentions in her descriptions:

(33) a. Head coverings styles: bonnet, net covering, flowing veil, flat veil, cap style, doily, with or without covering strings  
b. Head covering fabrics: net, lace, solid fabric  
c. Head covering sizes: full sized, to the hairline, inch sizes  
d. Prints on dress material: small floral prints, larger floral prints and plain colored (solid colored, no prints)  
e. Dress styles: cape dresses, skirts and shirts, layering, wearing leggings underneath skirt

All of these modalities work together as a whole picture to codify the wearer’s identification with a particular Mennonite subgroup.
CHAPTER 7

Embodied Texts as Critical Literacy

In this chapter I discuss Mennonite dress practice as a critical literacy performance. Critical literacy traditionally involves the underlying power structures in alphabetic texts. As is typical of the era of New Literacy Studies, Johnson & Vasudevan (2012) break away from reading and writing and discusses critical literacy in the context of “embodied texts,” using the body as a multimodal sign system:

What counts as critical literacy might be speaking, dressing or gesturing to express a particular way of being that belies, subverts, and exposes social norms and power imbalances.

In Section 7.1, I look closely at what critical literacy means in Johnson & Vasudevan (2012) especially as performing and positioning with embodied texts such as clothing or makeup. In Section 7.2, I present the Mennonite woman’s prayer veiling as a critical literacy performance.

7.1 Performing and Positioning Embodied Texts

Johnson & Vasudevan (2012) argue for an expansion of “current verbo- and logocentric definitions of critical literacy to recognise how texts and responses are embodied.” In order to understand the argument in Johnson & Vasudevan (2012), we must understand two key concepts: the article’s working definition of critical literacy in terms of “performance and positioning” and the concept of an “embodied text.” I use the remainder of this section to explain these concepts in the context of Rukiya, a 16-year-old girl presented in Johnson & Vasudevan (2012) as an example of critical literacy performance.
An embodied text is a “local, daily text of the body” that reproduces and reinscribes meaning through “bodily repetitions.” These repetitions can include clothing, hairstyles, gestures, accessories and posture (Johnson & Vasudevan 2012). Quite simply, an embodied text is the body as a text: how we dress it, present it and move it to convey meaning. In Johnson & Vasudevan (2012), Rukiya’s embodied text is her clothing and lip gloss.

Johnson & Vasudevan (2012) chose to “conceptualize critical literacy” as performed and positioned. They concede that definitions of critical literacy are “in constant, contextual negotiation” and settle on performance and positioning and as a “working definition.” These concepts rely heavily on New Literacy Studies and apply to multimodal texts as well as alphabetic ones.

Positioning is “the ways people continually put on different selves and assign roles to other people.” Positioning theory is dramaturgical with an “actor and scene.” The actor is the “who I am” coupled with the “who you are” and the scene is “what is going on between us” (Bomer & Laman 2004).

The scene, or storyline (Harré & Moghaddam 2003) is a foundational component of positioning theory. Bomer & Laman (2004) say it best:

In order to speak, a person casts herself and the person to whom she is speaking as those two characters from that story we both know. [...] Storylines are not full narratives, but rather are like kinds of dramatic scenes in which one finds predictable dramatic personae. [...] Positioning, then, is more than simply treating people as if they are x, since it involves defining this social moment as being of y type. The claim is not simply that I/you are these types of characters, but that we are in this storyline that carries a particular type of relationship.

Rukiya, a 16-year-old who discusses her fashion choices, talks about her desire to be cool by wearing the correct clothing and make up. She talks about commercial advertising, positioning herself within the storyline of “duped teenager who falls victim to the forces of targeted marketing, while aspiring to mimic lifestyles promoted by fashion models, television shows, and popular music” (Johnson & Vasudevan 2012). She takes two roles or positions in this storyline. First, she positions herself as one of the victims who succumbs to the commercial schemes by desiring expensive clothes and accessories as seen on TV.
Secondly, she describes her resistance by using 99-cent lip gloss, positioning herself as an overcomer and hero in the same storyline.

Blackburn (2003) defines literacy performance as the way people read and write with agency. Blackburn emphasizes the agency of readers and writers, correcting what she considers an underemphasis in normal definitions of literacy practice. Readers and writers are performers who present to an audience, not passive practitioners of reading and writing.

Blackburn develops literacy performance by combining performance theory and New Literacy Studies. As already defined in Chapter 4, New Literacy Studies concerns itself with literacy events (situated, empirical engagement with a text) and literacy practices (the larger, social and ideological abstractions concerning how literacy is used). Performance theory states that “one performs one’s identities over and over and over again” in ways that solidify and destabilize them. Blackburn (2003) describes the relationship of performance theory to literacy events and practices as follows:

Although [performance] theory is about identities, it can inform the notion of literacy. It can highlight relationships among various literacy practices as they take shape in and over time—past, present and future. If literacy is conceived of as a series of performances in which people read and write words and worlds, then any one performance is situated among innumerable other performances, each of which is both similar to and different from all of the others, both confirming and disrupting them. In other words, it is in the series of performances that literacy has the opportunity to reinforce but also interrupt power dynamics.

Literacy performances “reinforce but also interrupt power dynamics.” Johnson & Vasudevan (2012) argues that the body is a text that one uses to “communicate [...] critical perspectives.” Each article of clothing Rukiya puts on and displays to others is a critical literacy performance. She is acting out her identity in her storyline. For example, Rukiya acts out her position of overcomer and hero when she does the opposite of what commercial society tells her she requires to be popular. As Johnson & Vasudevan (2012) conclude, “with each [99-cent] lip gloss application, Rukiya performed a wise spender.”
7.2 Modest Dress as a Critical Literacy Performance

Conservative Mennonite women use their practice of the veil as an embodied text in their critical literacy performances. They position themselves in Biblical storylines and perform within them. They use the veil to express the balance of power they see as best for man and woman in the image of God.

Joyce recounts the following explanation of why she wears a head covering:

(34)  

a. Interviewer: So if I ask you why do you wear what you wear, what’s the principle behind [your head covering]? What is your answer?

b. Joyce: [...] You can start back in creation. God has order in nature. I mean, what keeps the earth rotating? The birds come and they go and they migrate. Everything—just perfect order. God created order. He had order in the in the Garden and he had specific order. So is it wrong for God to have order of mankind as well, if he has order in the nature of the animals and all that? And “he created man for his glory and he created woman for the man.” Already you see God’s order coming through in creation. [...] 

c. What’s interesting is who Satan knew to go to. [...] You know woman is described as “the weaker vessel.” The thing about ourselves is that we mesh everything together, “So when this incident relates to that one and this one to that one...”—and he knew right who to confuse, and it was the woman. Had he went to Adam, [Adam] probably would have been pretty adamant and just said, “No. I mean that is black and white. No.” [...] And well, unfortunately, she didn’t consult Adam. She just decided that. So you see what happens when woman steps out and as the result of it ever since. [...] 

d. I think it’s significant in that—that is who we are as woman. It’s easy for us to compromise. I mean, it’s easy for man, but man typically will look at black and white. It’s all part of God’s order, and apparently there were just issues all through—even in Abraham and Sarah. It’s interesting what happened when she persuaded him to compromise and Ishmael was born. Look what had happened ever since. There again it’s an illustration of woman stepping ahead of the man. And so I think God knew that, “Women, you need a reminder of who you are and the role, the place, that I have called you to be. The protection really is there for yourself, your family and your husband.”

e. [...] What does that mean? I’m saying I’m going to follow God’s headship order. So that means obviously I have a personality, obviously I have choices and I don’t—you know my husband’s and my relationship is such that I don’t need to ask him for every little thing—but if there is something that pertains to the children or major decision, it’s good to consult him. Had Eve consulted Adam in that, maybe it wouldn’t have happened. And had Abraham and Sarah—had he not listened to her or stood what difference would that have made? And so I think there is—again it’s obvious—there is such protection in it.
f. So if it’s a symbol of a reminder because—again in scripture, there are a lot of symbols, a lot of things that we do are reminders. It’s interesting because even society says I’m going to wear a wedding band as a symbol of my being married. So symbols are not an odd thing.

Joyce practices wearing a head covering, a “local, daily text of the body” that she repeats every day. She uses her covering to perform herself as a woman in her place, positioned within Biblical storylines. She exposes and subverts power imbalances that she perceives in society today.

Joyce positions herself in the Biblical storyline of Creation. She casts herself as a character “from that story we both know” (Bomer & Laman 2004), the storyline of Adam and Eve falling from grace in the Garden. Eve made a decision on her own without consulting Adam, and as a result, brought sin into the world. Joyce positions herself as a daughter of Eve, susceptible being confused and choosing evil because she does not see the world in “black and white” in (34c).

Joyce also positions herself in the Biblical storyline of Sarah and Abraham. Sarah persuaded Abraham to have a child with Sarah’s servant. Because Abraham listened to Sarah’s bad advice, Ishmael was born. There has been tension between the descendants of Ishmael and Sarah’s son Isaac ever since. Joyce positions herself within the same world as Sarah. Like Sarah, she requires protection from her tendency to make bad choices that could harm herself her family and her husband in (34d).

Within both of these storylines, Joyce performs the woman who is in her God-given place. She performs the woman who is behind her husband, trusting him on major decisions. She performs a woman who is protected because she is sheltered by God, Christ and man. She also performs a woman who needs reminded to be in her God-given place.

Joyce perceives a power imbalance when women are making major decisions for or leading men. She attributes many of the problems in the world today as a result of a “woman stepping ahead of the man” in (34d). She wears her veil to bring things back to their natural order, where the man is the leader and protector of the woman. She is subverting society and its imbalance, where she sees women as seizing too much power for themselves. By wearing a physical reminder of God’s headship, or power structure, she exposes unveiled women as out of place.
Elaine also shares why she wears a head covering. Like Joyce, she positions herself within Biblical storylines. Her reasons highlight a woman’s divine power:

(35)  

a. Elaine: [The veiling] is a practice that comes out of the scripture, 1 Corinthians 11, where it talks about a woman wearing a veiling on her head in honor of God.  

b. [...] Something that’s very interesting to me and I have been looking at—researching this—is that men and women both were created in the image of God. So, in Genesis where it says God created man in his image and “male and female he created them.” Women distinctively reveal the image of God in some different ways, in some of the same ways but in some different ways from what men do. I would see the veiling as being a part of that distinction, in a sense.

c. In the Old Testament, in Isaiah and Jeremiah and in Deuteronomy 32, there are a lot of scriptures that describe the feminine aspects of God. In Deuteronomy 32 God is the “mother-God” who is taking her children through the wilderness, and feeding and protecting and guiding them. In Isaiah and Jeremiah the imagery is used of God as mother, God as the womb who is birthing these children and nourishing them.

d. The whole concept of God as mother as well as God as father—if you’re taking that back to the First Corinthians 11 passage, then a women as she is veiled is—it says it’s a sign or a symbol and it gives her power—so I think the feminine really reveals, you could use the term “veiled glory” or the metaphor of veiled glory to describe what women bring to bear. [...]  

e. It’s interesting that when you look biologically, women’s primary sexual organs are internal and men’s are external. Maybe that sounds a little crude, but I think that’s all part of how we’ve been designed. Life is created from within women and they bring it to bear in the world.

f. I think women are much more intuitive. So another primary place to see this image of God, feminine image of God, is Proverbs 8, Lady Wisdom, the feminine counterpart to the creator. And she has a voice and she calls out, but she must be pursued in order to be found. She brings—delight is a big word—she brings delight. The creator delights in her and she delights in him. There’s something about creativity and playfulness in what she bringing to bear. So instead of being a ruler or a king or someone who is—yes, prescribing order—she is coming alongside and she’s more queenly or bride-like. That’s fascinating isn’t it?

Elaine positions herself in the Biblical storyline of people being created male and female in the image of God in (35b) and in the storyline of God relating to people as a mother throughout human history in (35c). She also positions herself in the story of Lady Wisdom, the “feminine counterpart” to the male Creator God in (35f).

By veiling her hair, which she considers her glory, Elaine performs the divine feminine, who is also veiled. She performs a being who is intuitive, delightful, playful, pro-
tective and nourishing. She performs creativity, bringing life into the world. She assumes the role of a woman who has something divine to offer to men—not as a ruler—but as a supreme mother figure and guide.

Elaine’s practice of the veiling turns common power assumptions about women’s veiling on their head. Elaine’s practice is an embracing of divine power. She is identifying herself with the nature of God as mother. Her head is veiled in the same way that God is veiled in the Biblical storyline. She is too powerful, too sacred and too glorious to be seen. Elaine seeks to balance the divine feminine with the divine masculine by embracing sacred femininity as an equal expression of being made in the image of God.
CHAPTER 8
Conclusion

In this thesis, I have presented conservative Mennonite dress practices through the lens of literacy practice. This examination is possible because of the contribution New Literacy Studies have made to the definition of literacy. Scholarly works now recognize multiple literacies and multimodal texts beyond traditional reading and writing. I look at two literacies significant to Mennonite dress practices: the reading and writing of traditional alphabetic text and a multimodal literacy practice where clothing functions as a multimodal sign system.

Many nonverbal modalities exist in conservative Mennonite clothing. These modalities include style, color, looseness, pattern and size. Conservative Mennonites bring these modalities together to communicate a meaningful message with their dress.

Conservative Mennonite dress fits New Literacy understandings of literacy in terms of literacy events and literacy practices. A literacy event is an empirical happening situated in place in time that involves a text. In Mennonite dress practices, clothing is a multimodal sign system that functions as the text in literacy events. An example of a literacy event is when a Mennonite woman puts on her prayer veiling in the morning. A literacy practice involves the larger conceptual underpinnings such as how a text is used to influence behavior, by whom it is created or read, and how it relates to power structures within a community. Through the lens of literacy practice, Mennonite dress practices explain why a woman wears a prayer veil and her husband does not, or why one woman chooses a white veil and another one chooses black. Conservative Mennonites express their gender roles and church affiliations through coding and decoding identity in their clothing.

Conservative Mennonites intend their identity to be “read” by other people through their clothing. First, they seek to identify themselves as Christians. They also aim to
identify themselves as moral, chaste individuals who conform to gender roles. Lastly, they use their clothing to associate themselves with particular Mennonite subgroups.

Mennonite clothing parallels traditional orthography in terms of the codification of identity. Mennonite clothing draws from two sources: traditional Anabaptist styles and the styles present in mainstream society. I show how the tensions that arise when choosing between two sources parallel tensions in choosing between orthography systems. Mennonite clothing, like traditional orthography, functions to differentiate social groups.

Mennonite dress practices can be explained through the lens of heritage literacy practice. Mennonite dress practices involve a decision-making process that happens on an individual, family and church level. They decide whether to adopt (incorporate without change), adapt (change and incorporate) or alienate (reject entirely) innovations into their dress practice. These innovations can be components of dress such as zippers or button closures. They weigh the influence of traditional Anabaptist styles and mainstream fashions as each generation evaluates what it means to be a Mennonite Christian.

Conservative Mennonites perform and position themselves through their dress as an act of critical literacy with an embodied text. I show examples of Mennonite women using their veil to position themselves within Biblical storylines such as Adam and Eve and Abraham and Sarah. These women perform as godly women in their God-given place each time they put on their veil. I show how they expose unveiled women as out of the balance of power between genders and also how they align themselves with divine feminine power through the act of wearing a prayer veil.

I also show how modest dress is an outworking of the traditional literacy practice of reading and writing religious texts. Without Biblical directives and storylines, conservative Mennonite dress would not exist in the form that it does today. Their dress practices are a doing of what they read in the Bible and a primary motive for their clothing choices is to obey scripture. Conservative Mennonites commonly use a second religious text, a written church standard or guidelines. When a conservative Mennonite signs this written document, he or she agrees to follow the dress code it dictates. In this way, conservative Mennonites use their ability to read and write traditional alphabetic texts to regulate and standardize dress practices among members of a church congregation.
By considering Mennonite dress practices through the lens of literacy practice, I have achieved my aim of explaining why conservative Mennonites wear the clothing that they do. I have shown that they make dress choices to codify their Christian identity in the context of their Anabaptist heritage and relationship to mainstream culture. Their clothing system involves a multimodal sign system that functions as a text within literacy as a social practice.

My thesis assumes New Literacy’s definitions of literacy as a social practice, the presence of multiple literacies and the relevance of multimodal texts. I do not overreach by offering a definitive answer to literacy’s fuzzy borders in debate today. Rather I demonstrate that New Literacy’s definitions bring clarity to a real world situation in conservative Mennonite dress.

Like the definition of literacy, the concept of what constitutes a nonverbal modality has fuzzy borders. Nonverbal modalities do not operate like verbal modalities. They are not divisible into sequential parts, grammars or other linguistic categories. Further research will aid the understanding of nonverbal sign systems as the disciplines of literacy and semiotics continue to evolve and interact.

I also acknowledge that the term “text” itself may fall short in its definition as “multimodal texts” may not include traditional linguistic elements or coherence. I expect that as multimodal literacy studies continue to develop, the definition of text will expand or will be replaced by a better term.

My research is also limited by the eight individuals who sat down with me to record their perspectives on their dress practice. Each individual whom I recorded held their dress practices in high value. Although they may have gone through a period of life where they rebelled against their heritage, each of them came to embrace conservative dress. They desired to share their perspectives not only with me, but explain them to the world in the best possible light. I have not included the perspectives of conservative Mennonites who may find their way of life confusing or low value. Because of my small sample size, I cannot make the claim that every conservative Mennonite is as articulate and motivated as my eight narrators.
The corpus of material I collected in the recorded interviews contains data far beyond what I have been able to include in this thesis. Two areas stand out for further analysis: a taxonomic analysis of Mennonite clothing and an expanded discussion of how modesty is taught within the community.

My narrators listed the articles of clothing they wear. This data is a good start toward creating a folk taxonomy of conservative Mennonite dress practices. Further interviews could be conducted following a methodology for eliciting semantic categories and the data written up as a taxonomy of a cultural domain. This would preserve the labels conservative Mennonites give their clothing articles and a description of the styles that they wear.

My narrators also related how they teach modesty and dress practices within the community. Amy in particular shared accounts about how the concepts are taught in her church, her family and discussed among her peers. Due to the size limitations of this thesis, I was not able to include a discussion of the particulars of how dress practices are taught. Further analysis could address questions such as, “Who speaks about modesty with whom? When do they speak about it? Where do the interactions take place?” This would give a fuller picture of the passing between generations essential to heritage literacy.

Lastly, further research should include the recording of additional oral histories. Of particular interest are more male narrators and larger sample sizes from each of the conservative Mennonite subgroups. More histories will provide a fuller picture of conservative Mennonite dress practices, and they will also add much value to the archived corpus of oral histories for other studies in the future.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Texts

The portions of the interviews referenced in the main body are listed here in greater context.

A.1 Alicia

Alicia describes what she is wearing to the interview:

(36) a. Interviewer: Can you describe the outfit that you’re wearing for me today?
    b. Alicia: Okay, the outfit that I am wearing is mostly from Salvation Army.
    c. Interviewer: Okay.
    d. Alicia: And right now I am wearing a collared gingham shirt, underneath a t-shirt and then kind of like a mid-length skirt and tights, grey tights.
    e. Interviewer: Okay, where would you wear this kind of clothes?
    f. Alicia: Where?
    g. Interviewer: Yes, where would you wear this outfit?
    h. Alicia: I wore it to work today. I would probably wear it—I was doing some shopping. It’s a little more dressy than it would be for like everyday type of things, but, yes, when I go out or going shopping or something.

Alicia describes fashion changes in her church:

(37) a. Interviewer: Do you see changes in dress in your particular part of the Mennonites?
    b. Alicia: As far as standards or?
    c. Interviewer: Anything you see.
    d. Alicia: I think it changes a lot with the ebb and flow of fashion. So right now like some shorter skirts might be more popular like right at the knee. I see that a lot. I am trying to think of other examples. Then you have also the long maxi skirts, kind of the clingier fabric. Those are coming back into style, so I see those a lot too. Yes, I think it feels like it kind of changes with whatever the current fashion is but just in a different form.
    e. Interviewer: What are you hearing on a church level about modesty or modest dress?
Alica: I would say I haven’t heard a whole lot more recently, just because I’ve been different places. Especially the church I am at now, they have talked about it in the past—had a sermon on it—but purposely have not gone into specifics about “this is modest and this isn’t.” Just the whole belief behind why modesty is important. It’s more what’s stressed, and not so much the details.

Interviewer: Are there any controversies about modest dress that you’re aware of?

Alica: Yes, where one family would be okay with this another family might not. You know there would be more conservative people currently coming to our church that you might still wear dresses all the time. Then you have the other people that will wear short skirts 90% of the time. It’s not so much that they’re arguing about it; it’s just there’s obviously difference of opinion that they’re wearing.

Alicia describes her modesty standards and the influence of the general public:

Interviewer: Is there anything that you won’t wear for modesty reasons?

Alica: There’s lots of things. One style—I don’t know if it’s as popular right now—but where it kind of goes in—I don’t know how to describe it. Kind of like a V down in between on your chest. It accents your breasts, and that style always bugged me. I never liked that style because it just brought out a little bit too much. I never really liked the design of it; so definitely something I wouldn’t wear. Mini skirt—like where it’s between the thigh and half way between. I am trying to think of others for modesty reasons. I feel like the style changes so often, and if I find something I like I can find ways to wear it that’s modest, like by layering, because I do that a lot. I would say in the summer I wouldn’t really wear tank tops, unless I might wear a t-shirt underneath it if I do. There’s like odd designs nowadays. I’m trying to think of examples of that. Where the shirt is designed so that it opens on the back—I don’t really like that style, and so that probably helps, but I wouldn’t wear something like that. Anything that shows your stomach—obviously I wouldn’t wear that. Or another thing too that’s becoming more popular is the really form fitting skirts with long slits on either side. Doesn’t really appeal to me in any way.

Interviewer: Modesty reasons or fashion reasons?

Alica: Modesty and fashion, yes. It clings to your legs. You can see exactly the form of your legs and to me it doesn’t even look nice.

Interviewer: So, when you say “popular” you mean popular where?

Alica: It’s becoming more popular. I would have noticed it more this past summer in the South somewhat definitely more than up here because the fashion here is a little more trendy.

Interviewer: You mean like among Mennonites or?

Alica: Not so much among Mennonites, just in the general public.

Interviewer: Just in the general public. How much does the general public influence what you wear?
j. Alicia: For me personally it influences quite a bit because I like dressing in style and finding ways to do it modestly. To me it’s kind of a fun challenge. Sometimes it’s frustrating, but depending on the time of year it’s fun. So right now it’s fun. Yes, I would say for me personally it would influence me a lot. I don’t know for others—how that would work.

Alicia’s discusses honoring God with modest dress and reading Revelation recently:

(39)  a. Interviewer: You mentioned honoring God, how does modest dress honor God? Can you expand on that concept?
   b. Alicia: I think the one thing I see is—this isn’t so much about honoring God as it is about it gives me an opportunity often to share. People ask, maybe not so much about my veil, but, “Wow. you look really nice.” Or it doesn’t happen really often. I would say something that has been important in the past, that kind of goes, in a sense, up until more recently—it seems it’s often gone with the Christian church, is not just the Anabaptists—something that of sets us apart. It’s a way that is honoring to God just because if I am going to walk down the street dressed in very little clothing, my body is a temple. Treating it with dignity instead of baring it for all the world to see.
   c. Interviewer: What do you mean it sets us apart?
   d. Alicia: I think it sets us apart because often to the world there’s no reason really to have modesty. You can be modest for the sake of honoring or submitting to men in the Muslim culture, for example, where they’re submitting to the authority. That’s not always a good thing either. Whereas here there is more of a freedom to honor God. It’s not really bondage to me. I don’t see modesty as something that’s bondage. “You should wear this” or “you should wear black shoes” or “you should only wear this type of dress or this type of skirt.” I see it more as a personal conviction. This is a way I can honor God. This is a way I can honor the people around me. There’s not as much shame involved or—I don’t know if I’m using the right word there—but it is just different. I have been reading Revelation recently and the different examples or images that God gives of a prostitute—when you think of a prostitute, you don’t think of someone dressed modestly. And he gives that example the darkness. So I think of it as the opposite of the darkness.

Alicia describes the difference between conservative and liberal Mennonites:

(40)  a. Interviewer: Do you consider yourself to be a conservative Mennonite?
   b. Alicia: I consider myself as a happy medium between conservative and liberal. That’s how I would say it.
   c. Interviewer: What is a conservative Mennonite?
   d. Alicia: I would see conservative Mennonite as wearing a dress, whether it’s with cape or no cape, like wearing a hand sewn dress like all the time. To me that would be conservative.
   e. Anything else about conservative Mennonites?
f. Alicia: Bigger veil or covering, with or without strings. Some you know, no printed fabric just like solid fabric, yes.
g. Interviewer: So, it’s the one end of the spectrum?
h. Alicia: Yes.
i. Interviewer: What’s at the other end? What’s liberal Mennonite?
j. Alicia: Where it kind of blends in with everybody else, there’s not really any standard.

A.2 Amy

Amy describes what she is wearing to the interview:

(41)  
a. Interviewer: Can you describe to me what you are wearing today?
b. Amy: Sure. I am wearing just a t-shirt, a sweater, a jacket with a skort—which is like a mix of a skirt and with pants underneath. How do you describe it? There’s a slit in one end so that I have full flexibility. Mostly I wear this for anything in sports. Or if it’s something in water, in mixed swimming or something—not swimming necessarily but in water—if it’s water softball or something. That kind of stuff.

c. Interviewer: Tell me about it.
d. Amy: Well, like our youth group plays this—or water wiffleball—and then to slide home, you have to slide on this long water slide thing. All the bases are big buckets of water that we stand in. I always wear this because it’s modest; it’s not going to cling to me or anything.

Amy discusses her veiling:

(42)  
a. Interviewer: You haven’t mentioned your covering yet. Can you describe what you’re wearing?
b. Amy: I’m wearing a lacy head covering, a veiling. There’s a difference. When we say “covering” we would be referring to like an actual covering. We call this a veiling because it’s just cloth. It just hangs on your head. That’s how I get the distinction. I don’t know how big it is. Maybe like size 8? I don’t know if you would know the sizes. How would you describe it? It half covers my bun, which is on the lower part of my head, and it’s from the top of my head down to almost cover my bun. It’s black, and that’s what I’m wearing. What shall I say?
c. Interviewer: Go ahead say anything you want.
Amy: Well, I wear a veiling—why I wear a veiling? The biggest reason I wear veiling is because I believe that God specifically said that women should cover their heads. Is it 2nd Corinthians? One of the Corinthians, I forget right now. I personally think that He says it pretty clearly, and so that’s the main reason. I am not sure God why all wants me to, but something I’ve heard—I don’t know—I’ve heard that something with the angels, to show the spirit world that I am under the protection of God. So that’s the main reason. There’s also symbolization that I am under the the headship of Christ and that women are under men. I guess that’s a whole other can of worms that women are meant to be submissive—essentially. It’s just another way for me to show that. I don’t know if the Bible actually specifically says that, but yes. I think it might say something like that; I don’t know.

Interviewer: What do you mean by headship?

Amy: As a “men to be accountable to God, and for women to be accountable to men” kind of thing. Men are the head of the home, so they wear the pants in the family. So as the head of the home so we look up [to them]—does that make sense?

Interviewer: You mentioned veiling sizes?

Amy: Oh, there’s every veiling size. There’s a Mennonite lady in Lancaster who actually makes veils—Joyce’s Veiling’s—which is so nice because my cousins in Canada make their own veils and stuff. I am glad I can just buy them. That’s where a lot of Mennonites get their veillings and coverings. I don’t really know how she sizes them all, but she has like a whole bunch of all different kind of lace and all different kinds of ways around the edge—all different kinds of that. I think it goes for every like half inch, a different size. And black and white—I’ve seen every kind of veiling. They can go really long, like hanging way down your back even and covering all of your head, or just little, round like the size of putting your fingers in a circle and that’s how big they are. There’s so much variety.

Amy discusses her male peer’s perspective on woman’s dress:

Interviewer: You said that the way you’re dressing impacts guys. What do you mean by impacts guys? What impact does clothing have on guys?

Amy: I am really getting this from talking with my brothers about girls. I have really good relationships with my brothers, and so I talk with them about a lot of stuff. We talk about girls. And hearing them talk, “W”ell that girl...” Their opinions on girls—it’s throughout all the conversations that I’ve had with them. I feel like they have a higher level of respect for girls who dress modestly, with the combination of the spirit and the dress. In my talking with them, I would definitely think that clothing impacts how they view a girl. I have good relationships with my cousins too, and I’ve heard them say before, “Oh, I like that girl but then I was at Bible school with her, she wore some stuff that I was surprised that she would wear. I was kind of disappointed.” They notice that stuff and sometimes I was very surprised that that would actually be a turn off for them.
Amy discusses making clothing choices for herself:

(44) a. Interviewer: Does your veil, modest dress, the whole package—does that inter-relate with your walk with God? Would you consider it to be part of it?
b. Amy: I would think so. Again, going back to what's inside coming out and yes, I think in having a relationship with God—with that being the centre of my life instead of getting guys' attention—that would affect the modesty and my relationship with God. I am saving myself for my husband; that would affect modesty and the spirit of modesty. And then the veiling, I would believe in living out of the Bible; so that would affect it. Yes, and I think that in your relationship with God, God made women feminine and I think femininity is important and that he made distinctions between women and men. And so, having a relationship with God is going to affect that. He is going to help you develop your femininity, and one way to live that out is the way you dress. I for sure personally believe that. I am not going to judge people who don't.
c. Interviewer: What's your testimony about the veil? I know you shared about the rest of your clothing what's your history, your testimony there?
d. Amy: When I started wearing a veil I had a bigger one because my mom wears a bigger one. I would ask my brothers what they think about it—and it was quite a bit bigger—and I remember my brother didn't say that he didn't like it, but I could tell he didn't really like it. So I think that affected me, the fact that I knew he didn't really like it. If he would have been, “Oh, I really like it” I might have stayed with a bigger veil. I don't know that I've really thought about that before, but yes, I am sure. Within a few weeks I got a smaller veil, and since then I've maybe accidentally—because I order them online—and I ordered a different size or something, I've fluctuated a little bit, bigger and then smaller veil. But it is basically the same—except when I was talking with my cousin in Greenland. We were talking about it—the veiling—and I had a smaller one. Then I was like, “This is it for me.” I just wanted to wear a bigger veil. So I came home and I bought a bigger veil. Just a little bit—but yes.
e. Interviewer: Because?
f. Amy: Simply because I didn’t want my veiling to be a fashion thing, and I didn’t want to just be trying to fit in with my group. I didn’t want to be trying to be cool. I wanted it to actually be for the right reasons.

A.3 Charlene

Charlene describes what she is wearing to the interview:

(45) a. Interviewer: Can you describe the outfit that you’re wearing for us today please? Like, starting from the bottom?
b. Charlene: I have socks on, simple short socks, and I have a white dress on with a navy-blue sweater over it. And it's a cape dress, which means that I have an extra piece of material around the bodice part of it.
c. Interviewer: Okay, and that’s your outfit?
Charlene discusses the looseness of her clothing:

(46) a. Interviewer: How long do you usually wear your dresses?
   b. Charlene: It depends if they’re for church or for work or whatever, because at work I don’t want to be tripping and I don’t want to be tripping at church either. Usually for work I would make them ankle length or a little shorter. And then for church maybe closer to the floor.
   c. Interviewer: To the floor, is that preference or is that conviction?
   d. Charlene: It’s some of both. I feel like if you have short dresses it’s so hard to be modest sometimes and really cover. I also don’t really like to be showing off lots of my legs. So I prefer to have them longer. The personal preference part of it too is that I just feel more ladylike and more feminine in a long dress. That’s just my personal preference.
   e. Interviewer: Yes, this is so interesting.
   f. Charlene: But I also feel like it is more of a conviction too, or I would be changing my dress length all the time with the styles around me too.
g. Interviewer: What do you mean?

h. Charlene: What I mean is if I believed in just changing with whatever preference I felt led to, at any time, then I would probably have short dresses right now, because that’s the in thing again. That’s the style in the general public right now. But I do feel like it’s definitely comes from a conviction too of the modesty of a longer dress, that covers better.

i. Interviewer: Yes.

j. Charlene: But I still think you can have a long dress that is very seductive if you make it in a certain way. So, it’s not just the length it’s also the looseness of it.

k. Interviewer: Right, how loose do you wear your clothing?

l. Charlene: I mean I don’t think there’s anything wrong—in having a beautiful dress that is fitted nicely. Of course it’s okay to have some shape to it. A woman has curves and those are beautiful. But neither do I feel like it’s right for me to wear stuff that is pulled tight and shows stuff like my underwear line, or even like the bottom curve. That’s one standard that I have for my dresses or clothing that I wear. When I am wearing it, would someone be able to see the whole curve of my breast or whatever? Or are they just seeing the gentle slope of the top? That’s one standard that I would have where I would draw a line.

m. Interviewer: Okay, so “bottom curve” is?

n. Charlene: If it was so tight that you could see exactly how big the breast is.

Charlene discusses taking the Bible literally:

(47) a. Interviewer: You mentioned steps. I’m sure you’ve seen people take steps in the direction that you’ve spoken about. Can you tell me what those steps generally are? What are the steps?

b. Charlene: Well often their clothing and often their coverings get smaller first, and their clothing starts becoming more and more just like the general public. It’s often just in sync with their attitude about if they feel like separation from the world is truly important or not.

c. Interviewer: That makes sense. What do you mean their clothing looks more... what specifically?

d. Charlene: Just clothing that is either very revealing in some places or name brands that are just kind of dark and don’t have good connotations at all if you research them. Things like that. Although some Mennonites can be pretty preppy dressers and I feel like there’s a lot of people that don’t really know what they’re wearing. They wear it kind of innocently as far as name brands and things. But yes, I am not sure, you might have to ask again if I haven’t finished the question.

e. Interviewer: Yes, I was thinking of the progression towards that.
f. Charlene: I am not sure how to explain it better, but I feel like it so often goes with just the attitude and often flows from some kind of reaction. “This is just not worth it. The Bible isn’t really saying this. The Bible is just talking about our attitude.” Which I think is totally important and that is very, very key. If you don’t have the right attitude, the attitude of following God, and living a lifestyle in your thoughts and action separately, then it’s not worth dressing modestly or dressing separately or dressing Mennonite, whatever. But if you are really earnest about following the Bible exactly how it says, I think you are going to have be pretty different somethings.

g. Interviewer: Yes.

h. Charlene: And taking it literally is one thing that I appreciate about the Mennonites. It’s not like we take everything literally; I think we have some pretty huge weak points. But at the same time I feel like it’s probably—and I don’t know, this is my perspective—probably one of the cultures that takes the Bible most literally as in, “Oh, it says that, so we are going to do that.

Charlene discusses changing church standards:

(48) a. Interviewer: Does your church have agreements about beards?
b. Charlene: We do.
c. Interviewer: What would they be?
d. Charlene: I think so—I think we still do, things have been changing over the years—yes, I think it’s still that once you’re married that you wear some kind of—it is still a full beard? I’m not sure. I would need to look again. A full beard would be the whole way around, like from the side burns down and around. Then for awhile there was something about not having mustaches but that’s okay now.
e. Interviewer: That brings out one of the last big areas I wanted to go into. How is your church changing? Is it changing? Has it changed since your parents’ generation? Your grandparents?
f. Charlene: The dress standards have, yes. It’s been changing in the ways of—I don’t know always if the changes are good, and yet I think that as culture changes over time, you have to be making changes. I mean obviously, like having a standard now about not being allowed to have—let’s think of an example—VCRs. That’s obsolete because who uses VCRs anymore? We use DVDs. And for a while it used to be like we don’t really watch movies. Well now you can get movies on CD, you can watch them on the computer, and so I mean there’s still standards for which ones you are encouraged to not watch and to watch. Yes, so that changed; that’s an example. As far as dress, yes, it changes with time. But I am not sure how to explain how it changes.

Charlene discusses the veil as a sign to the angels:
a. Interviewer: And why do you wear a covering?
b. Charlene: In the Bible, in First Corinthians, it talks about coverings our heads as a sign of submission to God and to men in our lives. So I feel like that’s why. It’s out of submission to God. It’s for modesty principles as well, to cover my hair. In there it also says that God gave us our hair as part of the glory that God gave us. Then it talks about covering that glory, and so that’s why I feel too like I should cover it. So, it’s modesty, its submission and there’s a verse about it being a sign to the angels of protection. So I feel like it’s also a protection from evil forces. I think there is power, and I feel like there’s been lots of stories of people who took it off and were able to do evil things that they weren’t able to before. Like there is one testimony of a girl—I think it was in Lancaster city—she wanted to use a Ouija board and she could not use it—it did not work for her—until she took off her covering. And to me that’s a huge thing. There is more power in it than we think sometimes. Not that is a little—it can sound a little questionable—because it’s like, “Well, if she’s using the Ouija board maybe she had already made some choices you know that weren’t so good.” But at the same time, I think that was still there. There was a girl from that was with a family in our church from Lancaster city. They taught her the importance of the veil. And for the longest time she was scared to take that thing off because she could feel it’s protection on her.

c. Interviewer: What do you mean by protection?
d. Charlene: Protection as far as keeping evil forces, evil spirits and things like that from attacking her because she had a lot of things in her past—demonic type of things—that would come back to her. And since then she had made the choice to not wear it because she’s changed communities and because she just lost the conviction for it. But to me, I don’t feel like a Christian who doesn’t wear it is not right with God. I feel like they’re missing out on a huge blessing that they could be experiencing. Also, it’s an obedience thing because God is calling us to it in the Bible. I know I heard one story of a professor that was teaching in a college. It was a class of hermeneutics. He was going through the Bible from cover to cover. When he got to First Corinthians, there was a student in the class that was Christian—maybe Mennonite—and he was like, “This is going to be interesting to see what he says about this.” And so, they got there too that day. The professor got up and he was like, “Well, so according to the law of hermeneutics and the way that we’ve been taking the Bible totally literally, this passage—there’s no getting around it that this passage means that this is a cloth on the lady’s head. It’s not talking about your hair being your covering.” And he said, “So therefore since we don’t believe that, we’re just going to skip over it today.” Well I feel like that’s a good excuse, but at least he was being honest and admitting that this is what the Bible is saying because so many people find way to explain it away. So that’s how I feel about it.

e. Interviewer: Yes, describe more how the protection of the angels works?
f. Charlene: I feel like it’s definitely for more than that, but it’s a sign to the angels that I’m God’s and I’m submitting to his authority in my life. Therefore it gives you this covering of protection. Does that answer your question?

g. Interviewer: Yes.
Charlene discusses her mother’s elastic waist dresses:

(50) a. Interviewer: Do you mind stepping back to your childhood and talking through your history of what you’ve worn? The external stuff? And then we can go through again for how you’re feeling inside.

b. Charlene: Okay, so I was raised obviously in a Mennonite family, and mom and dad would have worn—I would have worn dresses from little up. (Of course as a baby, not always dresses.) I would have worn dresses ever since I can remember. Definitely the style has changed over the years. Sometimes of course, as a child or as a teen, Mom would want us to wear stuff that we weren’t always that excited about, because we maybe thought it looked old or out of date.

c. Interviewer: Like what?

d. Charlene: Well I don’t know if I can remember exactly, but maybe a dress. Okay—so the style had changed in our circles—the style had changed from elastic to pleats or gathers in the waist instead. I wore elastic for some time when I was younger, and it was okay. Eventually I just did not, I couldn’t stand it anymore and I thought it looked terrible. I thought it wasn’t comfortable either and stuff, and so I didn’t want to wear. And she didn’t force it on me.

e. So yes, sometimes she’ll pull a dress out of the attic and be like, “Hey one of you girls could wear this” and we’re like, “We don’t want to.” I feel like my dad taught us very clearly and strongly about conviction for dressing modesty and why we dress modestly. And so, I don’t feel like I had a lot of questions or problems myself. And its partially personality with me like, “Why do we have to do this?” Things like that.

Charlene discusses the hair pouf:

(51) a. Interviewer: What’s the “showy way” of doing your hair? I am so curious.

b. Charlene: See there it goes down to matter of opinion again. I guess to me it would be if you—so years ago the in thing for Mennonites was to pouf their hair really much, and I’m guessing it came straight from out in the world. Because when you look often at styles people have, you can see exactly where they came from. Like if you look at magazines—I am like, “That’s where it came from.” And I don’t think that’s... I’m still settling in on some of the way I stand with how much you really change with the styles and how much of that is good. I don’t think that its always good that we’re changing like that.
c. But anyways, so back then years ago the pouf was in, which was like a big pouf in the hair. Sometimes girls would have such tall ones, it was truly distracting. It didn’t even look nice; it looked terrible. It looked like they were trying so hard. I would call that showy, but I think like you can also drape your hair and cover almost all your face and be showy that way too. You could also have all kinds of curls fall down around your face—especially as a Mennonite girl it looks very obnoxious. I think because it looks like you’re trying really hard again to be something that you’re really not. And so, I would call those some showy ways—or maybe if you just always had braids and twists and fancy things all over.

Charlene discusses her commitment to her Church:

(52) a. Interviewer: Is there anything that you are wearing that you don’t know why?
b. Charlene: That I am wearing right now?
c. Interviewer: No, I mean in general.
d. Charlene: Oh, in general?
e. Interviewer: Practices or standards or anything that you don’t know why, but you do it anyway?
f. Charlene: Not sure and that’s some of why I think our church has changed because people are like, “Okay so why are we doing this?” and then we’re like, “Well, that is kind of obsolete anymore. It’s not really needed, that standard or whatever it was.” Not sure if I can really say. I am pretty sure that there is something.... I don’t really feel like everything my church asks of me is my conviction, but I feel like it’s a privilege to be part of that church. I’m committed to being part of the Brotherhood and therefore adhering to those things. And so, if I am going to make a big fuss about it, it’s certainly a waste of time. So yes, I can’t really think of anything exactly.

A.4 Claudia

Claudia describes what she is wearing to the interview:

(53) a. Interviewer: Can you describe the outfit that you’re wearing today?
b. Claudia: Yes, what kind of description would you like?
c. Interviewer: Anything, like start with your shoes and go on up?
d. Claudia: I chose to go with combat style shoes because of the winter weather and then I also chose just to layer a lot today and I am wearing, boot warmers, leggings, knee length skirt, quarter length sleeved yellow top and a vest over the top of that as well.
e. Interviewer: Okay, you seem to have something under your shirt?
f. Claudia: Yes, this is something that is pretty much my staple outfit is something that comes to like my bones right here, that’s kind of cut off where I make sure every day I am wearing a t-shirt or a tank top that comes to a moderate length.
Interviewer: Okay, you mean like the bones on your neck?

Claudia: That's right.

Interviewer: To cover? I am just clarifying for the recorder.

Claudia: Or two fingers down.

Interviewer: Or two fingers down. So, this is like normal clothing for you?

Claudia: This is yes, for my daily attire, I try to layer a lot, you kind of have to if you're going to make things work.

Interviewer: Yes, what do you mean by layer?

Claudia: I mean by layering, to be modest it doesn't just happen. Unfortunately, and so it makes in the summer time you are probably going to be warmer then you wish you would be because you're wearing leggings sometimes or you're wearing more t-shirts underneath. But it means that you have to be conscious about what you're wearing in a different sense.

Interviewer: Because you're wearing clothing on top of clothing.

Claudia: Right.

Claudia discusses the looseness of her clothing:

Interviewer: Yes, you mentioned a while ago pushing the line. If you were going to wear something that pushing the line for you, what would that be?

Claudia: Tighter clothing for me is definitely pushing the line. Right now I actually am pregnant, and so it's kind of an interesting battle for me to be like, “Okay so as I grow bigger, culture says that you can wear tight things when your pregnant, it's fine because, it's not really your bellyish.” But still it's definitely a new learning cycle for me in the whole issue of modesty just because, “Okay so am I just going to keep wearing my same clothes as long as I can or am I going to go out and buy looser things?” So, probably the three areas where I there would be temptation for me to compromise is tighter clothing and just a little bit lower neckline like, “Do I have to wear something underneath it? That's so close.” It's just so close, and so I have made a personal standard for myself so that I don't have to battle with it all the time. I will be— what are these bones are called ...

Interviewer: I think they're your clavicles?

Claudia: So, either my shirt has to come to my clavicle bones, or I get myself three fingers below it. Just so that when I am bending down that will never show cleavage. So, I will usually do the three-finger test, but it's a really hard thing because sometimes it can be four. So I have bought a lot of scarves, so that if I am wearing something lower then I’ll just throw on a scarf. Then the third thing is just shorter skirts. That’s just really tough. Because there’s just so many really great skirts that come to the knee—right above the knee—but then when you’re sitting down, they come up really far.

Claudia’s discusses how her dress reflects how she views herself:
a. Interviewer: What do you mean by dressing up?

b. Claudia: My mom always taught me that the way you dress yourself is presenting the way you feel about yourself. So when she would homeschool us every day she would dress up. She would never come down in her pajamas and she never let us. She said it’s a reflection of how you view your home. And so, if you dress up, you know you give a testimony of who you are. So I kind of like doing that. And probably because I just don’t like just doing what everybody else does, and it seems like the world dresses kind of causally.

c. Interviewer: What would you put on your casual clothing list and what would you put on your dress up clothing list, like specific articles?

d. Claudia: Actually, my casual clothing list would be long skirts. I am not sure why that is. So, I don’t actually wear long skirts very much because I like to layer with leggings and leg warmers in the winter. And actually, in the summer I made a personal choice to wear leggings as often as possible. Like on the really hot days I won’t, but just because of growing up and seeing—I spend a lot of time in committee meetings or in group meetings with staff or just because of the settings I’ve been in where you look across the room in your Anabaptist groups, and you can see up the girl’s skirt on the other side, and she has no idea. I think that people are trying to be modest, but their version of modesty is, “As long as I’m wearing a skirt, I’m modest and that’s my standard.” When really if they would be wearing pants, it would be more modest than if they would be wearing a skirt.

e. Interviewer: Right.

f. Claudia: So, I think that modesty is not just a set of rules. It’s not just of set of rules when you go to a certain church. “This is modesty if you wear this, if you put this on your head, this length of skirt.” Rather modesty is the inward adorning of the heart that reflects the security, and you’re saying, “I value my brothers in the world, I value who they are as men.” And so, am I going to take the time to look at myself in the mirror? Am I going to take the time to value myself as a woman and not to just throw something on? But to say, “Is what I’m wearing affecting other people? And how can I glorify the Lord through what I am wearing?”

Claudia discusses Anabaptist culture and modesty of the heart:

(56) a. Interviewer: Did you have anything else on that train of thought you were thinking about?

b. Can I talk about the Anabaptist culture a little bit?

c. Interviewer: Oh yes absolutely, we’re going to cover—hopefully—everything.
d. Great, I would say growing up in this community of Anabaptist Mennonites—Lancaster county is really great for hosting them. But there’s an obvious pattern that I see in these churches of people really focusing on the outward and rather than on, as the scripture says, “the inward adorning of the heart.” So growing up, modesty was something that was an outward thing, and it was something that was never really taught about my heart necessarily. It was something that you do on the outside, but no reflection on the inside of the heart. So I really rebelled against that. I really hated it because, “What’s the reason? What’s the purpose?” If there is no purpose why would I even do this? Why would I live this way—fight so hard—for something if it only makes me look stupid?”

e. In studying, it’s been a great challenge for me to realize that there’s such a beauty in modesty and that it’s obtainable even though it’s difficult. A little slogan I’ve had is that, “modesty is hot or modesty is not.” Modesty is hottest in the literal way. I was giving some speeches on modesty in my life. I tell them literally there will be times when it’s not easy. In the summer, you will have to wear different clothes. You can’t just wear your strappy things if you’re wanting to have the title of modest. But yet so much more than just teaching the outward—like I think even for my own children—in our culture I have a burden to teach that is not just the things you put on, but it’s such a reflection of the heart.

f. Interviewer: It sounds...

g. I know—which you have to be secure in the Lord because it’s... yes.

h. Interviewer: Because it’s?

i. Because until I found my security in Christ, I really wanted the affirmation of man, and I thought the only way to be fashionable was to dress immodestly. “How can I do this behind my parents back? How can I change in the car as I am driving to the party so that my parents never find out, so that I look cool at the party?” And never realizing that immodesty doesn’t make you fashionable and you can be fashionable and modest. What I really wanted was the approval of man, and I wanted to be fashionable. I wanted to make a statement, and I think once I found my approval in God alone, that erased a lot of problems. Then also realizing that it’s exciting—the challenge of being fashionable and being modest in a culture where fashion means taking off more.

Claudia discusses why she wears a head covering:

(57)  a. Interviewer: Why do you wear the head covering?
b. Claudia: The head covering comes from a passage in scripture that says—it's in Corinthians—and it says a woman should be veiled when she prays. So in our culture, well why not be ready to pray all the time? Again this is something I had to wrestle through like so much because I am not going to do something if my parents say so. But I am going to do it if God says so. I think that there's many different ways to do it when we pray. If God says so, then I guess, “Well, let's do it.” But there's more to it. I view it as my engagement ring to God. Like when I go out in public [people say], “There's something different about you. Not just because you're dressing modestly, but there's something on your head. What is it?” And I'm engaged to Christ. I am different. I'm set apart. Something about me is set apart for Christ.

c. Interviewer: Can you describe for the recording what you're wearing?

d. Claudia: Yes, on my head?

e. Interviewer: Yes.

f. Claudia: On my head I am wearing the typical Mennonite style head covering and it would cover about half my head and about half my hair bun on the back.

g. Interviewer: Okay, what color is it?

h. Claudia: It's black.

i. Interviewer: And what it's made out of?

j. Claudia: Lace. It's made out of lace.

Claudia discusses what makes modesty difficult:

(58)  
a. Interviewer: You mentioned it's difficult [to be modest today]. What makes it difficult?

b. Claudia: Culture makes modesty really difficult. Sometimes I feel lucky because of my personality because I love difficult things and I love a good challenge. Yet it seems like in this culture that fashion is being scantily clad. To be beautiful you wear less, and I think that's a wrong message. It's portrayed so wrongly to all the cultures. From young on up, you see it in the videos, you see it in Hollywood, in New York city, in any magazine. You know a stumbling block in this culture is to be beautiful you eat less, to be beautiful you wear more make-up—and we all know that's not true. But it's something that's really hard to fight for any age group, especially if you're a girl and you're insecure and you're trying to go through public school. You know the popular ones are the ones who are skinny, who are wearing less, it is difficult.

c. And I don't know how I would have done it with parents who wouldn't have—even when I didn't believe it—said, “No, you are going to do this.” So, it is kind of scary looking at having children and knowing that there's going to be times when I am going to have to make decisions and they don't understand. I think that our relationship with God is like that too. We have to trust him because he sees so much more. The same thing with our parents. You know they aren't always making the right decision, but we have to trust them because they understand things that we don't. So, I would say for teenage girls especially, it's a tough few years to walk through—especially in the area of clothing.

d. Interviewer: What would you want to pass onto to your daughters?
e. Claudia: I think definitely first of all that modesty is an inward adorning of the heart, and modesty is your relationship with God—caring so much more about what he thinks about you than what society thinks or your closest friends or the boy you want to be your boyfriend or the boy you want to be liking you. I think modesty is a hard thing to teach because you can’t just force it on somebody and say “this is the way it’s going to be” or else it becomes just a rule. It has to become something that they desire from the inward parts of their heart. If we can do modesty, meaning it in this culture, in a way that looks attractive—in a way that looks beautiful—and that doesn’t just make you look like you’re dying, but rather in a way that’s like, “Wow that’s beautiful. That’s attractive.” Then there’s something really cool about that. And that’s the way it should be.

A.5 Elaine

Elaine discusses what she is wearing to the interview:

(59) a. Interviewer: Can you describe what you’re wearing today, just the practical?
b. Elaine: Well, yes, I don’t know if my outfit today is typical or not, but it is a dress that’s long, and I don’t necessarily always wear my dresses this long. I don’t wear prescribed length necessarily, some people in their conservative traditions would really have a certain prescribed length. But so, it’s a long dress that has a skirt and then I am wearing a jacket on top of it.

Elaine’s discusses fashions as they come and go:

(60) a. Interviewer: What patterns have you seen as fashion styles come and go?
b. Elaine: I was just down in Florida, and there’s a burgh in Sarasota called Pine Craft. It’s where all the Amish and the conservative Mennonites go. Have you been there?
c. Interviewer: No, but I see lots of Facebook pictures.
d. Elaine: Okay, yes. The reason I kind of smile when I think about that is when you’re down there the Amish ladies from Indiana and Ohio have a certain kind of covering, the Amish ladies from Lancaster have a certain kind of covering, and so you can kind of know by looking at people what locale they come from.
e. Interviewer: Right, yes.
f. Elaine: That isn’t answering your question that you asked necessarily, what’s changed. Well, for example when I was just starting with the youth group, way back before the cape dresses were all one piece—the cape was also a separate thing that was put on top of the dress and hooked with a belt—somewhere right about the time I started with youth group they started sewing the cape into the waistline. So that it was attached instead of detached, and that was kind of a big—everything that changes is—a big deal because it is viewed with suspicion. So when I was in the youth group our skirts had pleats in them—yes, mostly pleats or maybe gathers. Then the tradition started (it was the rage for ten years) to put elastic in your waistline. Then you didn’t have to wear a belt. Just little stuff like that.

g. Interviewer: Yes.

h. Elaine: So now elastic is out and belts are out. I think most of the girls that wear cape dresses now make them way more long than we ever wore them. Like basically down to the ankles all the way. Yes, so there is seasons of everything.

i. Interviewer: You’re describing the cape dresses. What about the group you’re with.

j. Elaine: Well, the kids really kind of follow the current fashions in a Mennonite style. So layering is really big, all kinds of layers, those really long skirts and those really big striped skirts are really popular right now, in the last year or two. Let’s see what else—the way they wear their hair. I still like to wear my hair up higher, but the kids are now wearing them really low. So it does go by seasons.

Elaine discusses women’s glory, power and the veiling:

(61)  a. Interviewer: You mentioned the veiling, which is something that is distinctively Anabaptist. Do you want to just jump into that?

b. Elaine: Well we can talk about it, that’s fine. You know, I think most Anabaptists would really feel like it’s not distinctively Anabaptist. Although the Anabaptist groups and the conservative traditional groups are the ones that really have maintained the practice, it is a practice that comes out of the scripture, 1 Corinthians 11, where it talks about a woman wearing a veiling on her head in honor of God. There’s a lot of different ways to describe it, to show the traditional prescribed order.

c. Interviewer: The prescribed order is?

d. Elaine: Well in that scripture it talks about God the father, being over Christ, or Christ being subject to God, and that a man is subject to Christ and that a woman is—sorry to use the word “subject” but anyway—that a woman follows the directives of man.

e. Interviewer: Why do you apologize to use the word “subject”?

f. Elaine: Well, because it’s been misused so much. I think that whole teaching has been used in a very harmful way in some places because of male dominance, or men taking advantage of that. It’s a big discussion.

g. Interviewer: It is. Tell me more about it if you don’t mind sharing.
h. Elaine: Yes, well you know I am not sure what you want to hear. I do not particularly state it according to the traditional or the way that some people would say it, where it’s seen as more of kind of law and order like, “this is what it says, and you do it because you do it in obedience.” So it gets kind of legalistic. Something that's very interesting to me and I have been looking at—researching this—is that men and women both were created in the image of God. So, in Genesis where it says God created man in his image and “male and female he created them.” Women distinctively reveal the image of God in some different ways, in some of the same ways but in some different ways from what men do. I would see the veiling as being a part of that distinction, in a sense.

i. In the Old Testament, in Isaiah and Jeremiah and in Deuteronomy 32, there are a lot of scriptures that describe the feminine aspects of God. In Deuteronomy 32 God is the “mother-God” who is taking her children through the wilderness, and feeding and protecting and guiding them. In Isaiah and Jeremiah the imagery is used of God as mother, God as the womb who is birthing these children and nourishing them.

j. The whole concept of God as mother as well as God as father—if you're taking that back to the First Corinthians 11 passage, then a women as she is veiled is—it says it’s a sign or a symbol and it gives her power—so I think the feminine really reveals, you could use the term “veiled glory” or the metaphor of veiled glory to describe what women bring to bear. or how they like maybe we reveal more of a veil or mystery is kind of like one of those.

k. Interviewer: You have been sharing such interesting stuff so far.

l. Elaine: Is that what you're looking for?

m. Interviewer: Anything that you want to share is what I’m looking for, and you are doing deeper to it—it’s really good talking about mystery and femininity.

n. Elaine: It’s interesting that when you look biologically, women’s primary sexual organs are internal and men’s are external. Maybe that sounds a little crude, but I think that’s all part of how we’ve been designed. Life is created from within women and they bring it to bear in the world.

o. I think women are much more intuitive. So another primary place to see this image of God, feminine image of God, is Proverbs 8, Lady Wisdom, the feminine counterpart to the creator. And she has a voice and she calls out, but she must be pursued in order to be found. She brings—delight is a big word—she brings delight. The creator delights in her and she delights in him. There’s something about creativity and playfulness in what she bringing to bear. So instead of being a ruler or a king or someone who is—yes, prescribing order—she is coming alongside and she’s more queenly or bride-like. That's fascinating isn’t it?

A.6 Joyce

Joyce describes what she is wearing to the interview:
(62) a. Interviewer: Can you describe for the recording what you’re wearing today?
b. A dress one piece dress. Actually it is very simple cape dress, but I do the sweater
top like a cardigan sweater.
c. Interviewer: A cardigan sweater, what color is your dress?
d. Today, it is just, I would say off-white tan, and the sweater is purple.

Joyce’s discusses mandatory vs. encouraged:

(63) a. How does church membership influence what you wear? Your personal church
membership?
b. Well, our particular group, I mean personally, I don’t know that I would nec-
essarily change what I do. The only thing that I may not do, but again it’s not
a mandatory—like our particular group, it’s not mandatory for the cape dress
or that it would need to be a one piece dress. They would encourage. It’s all
written as “encourage.” Yes, that’s the word. There are some church groups who
would make it mandatory. “You may not. That’s what you do. And you will do
it if you want to be a member of this church.” A lot of it in our group is left to
personal choice. Modesty is the key and they would definitely encourage longer
dresses. However, what is interesting as a teenager, we would—and I remember
for myself when I started wearing longer skirts—all these skirts started to come
in. We wore them barely to our knee even when I got married. Now I did wear a
long dress on my wedding. But twenty-five years ago, it was us girls, teenagers,
my mother, everyone included, we wore dresses barely came over the knee and
that was normal. You know that was our rule of thumb where you wore your
dress.

Joyce discusses the Christian woman’s veiling:

(64) a. Interviewer: So if I ask you why do you wear what you wear, what’s the principle
behind [your head covering]? What is your answer?
b. Well it may be lengthy.
c. I have all the time. I don’t want to take all your time. You’ve got another 11
hours of recording on that [pointing to recorder].
d. Oh dear! Okay. Well, you know I have a firm belief that the answers that we
give need to be understood by anybody. And really the principle of the headship
covering is it’s headship and God has perfect order. I remember an incident that
I had a couple come in—the reason they came here to our home was unrelated
to my business—but they saw what I did and began to ask questions and in-
stantly, you know, this person knows nothing; I mean they are not even—maybe
churched to a degree, but know nothing. And how are you, in those moments,
Megan? I’m sure you had them too like, “Lord, I need an answer now!” And you
know it was an answer, the answer that God gave me at that point was just I
have used since and it was just so beautiful because those people just were like,
“Yeah, yeah.”
e. You can start back in creation. God has order in nature. I mean, what keeps the earth rotating? The birds come and they go and they migrate. Everything—just perfect order. God created order. He had order in the in the Garden and he had specific order. So is it wrong for God to have order of mankind as well, if he has order in the nature of the animals and all that? And “he created man for his glory and he created woman for the man.” Already you see God’s order coming through in creation. Okay, this couple is like, “Yeah, we see that. We understand what you are saying.” And so come into the new testament—and well back up in Creation, what’s interesting is who Satan knew to go to—to cause her to where he was. You know woman is described as “the weaker vessel.” The thing about ourselves is that we mesh everything together, “So when this incident relates to that one and this one to that one...”— and he knew right who to confuse, and it was the woman. Had he went to Adam, [Adam] probably would have been pretty adamant and just said, “No. I mean that is black and white. No.” But what he tempted Eve with was the very thing that Satan himself fell from, and it was he wanted to be like God. So he plants in her mind that if you do this, you are going to be like God. And well, unfortunately, she didn’t consult Adam. She just decided that. So you see what happens when woman steps out and as the result of it ever since. Although, you know it’s interesting, God knew that that was going to happen, and he had already a plan of salvation—already in mind—knowing that what going to happen to give man a choice. He gave her choice and this is what she chose.

f. I think it’s significant in that—that is who we are as woman. It’s easy for us to compromise. I mean, it’s easy for man, but man typically will look at black and white. It’s all part of God’s order, and apparently there were just issues all through—even in Abraham and Sarah. It’s interesting what happened when she persuaded him to compromise and Ishmael was born. Look what had happened ever since. There again it’s an illustration of woman stepping ahead of the man. And so I think God knew that, “Women, you need a reminder of who you are and the role, the place, that I have called you to be. The protection really is there for yourself, your family and your husband.”
g. You know the question that I get asked sometimes is, “Okay, will that piece of fabric on your head save you?” No, I don’t believe it’s going to save me. Your obedience is important. And if I look at scripture in entirety, because God warns us not to take away or to add—so if I can look at scripture, take it at face value. Unfortunately in society today, I mean churches today, there are just so many pieces of compromise all over, and what’s happening? So even if I say, “Okay, I don’t think I need to understand 1 Corinthians 11 as he is describing it there at face value, but I’m still going to hold to some other debated issues—you know, homosexuality right now in particular.” How am I going to pick and choose? So if I’m going to take face value the whole scripture, this is what he is describing as headship and in 1 Corinthians 11—especially Paul—and we believe that all description was given by inspiration. It wasn’t just Paul’s writing. It was God’s inspiration through Paul, especially to the church there in Corinth. And if they needed it there and in their culture, don’t we all the more today in our society and all? So he was saying the protection was—and we still see in the Jewish men today—they would wear the yamakas with their caps. He is saying, “No, I’m going to separate you, the Christian man.” He is to be uncovered, which would have been differed from the Jewish. The man is to be uncovered and the woman is to be covered. So there again, it was because he is the glory of God. that’s why God told Adam, “You are the glory of God and woman is for your glory.” Whenever there was glory described in scripture, it was always covered, whether it was in the Tabernacle, whether it was even God’s face. Glory was always covered. So she is to be covered—the glory, her glory, who is the glory.

h. Again, she is a picture of the church in relating to Christ and the church being the bride of Christ. So if the woman is a picture of the bride and Christ, she used to be covered. It’s really a symbol, a reminder—the covered head—and it is distinct. It’s radical. It’s not, you know, “to be practiced.” I know there are a lot who I have listened to, teaching by various groups, Baptists and some other fundamentalists and they would say, “Yes, it’s here. It’s definitely that Paul taught it, but it’s radical and it’d be very difficult to get our women to do it, although I believe it.” And obviously in the Mennonite Church, the Anabaptists, it has been practiced, so it’s little more comfortable in those particular settings. The beautiful thing is that there are those who do see it, understand it on their own and are willing to be bold and radical. You’ve seen so many who understand the order of headship and the beauty that it creates in their homes.

i. But at the same time, I have to look at my own life in that. My son asked me, “Okay Mom, every time you put [your covering] on in the morning, do you think about being submissive?” Uh, good question! I think about it now that he pointed that out to me. Maybe I do, but you know, “Okay, I’m going to be submissive today.” What does that mean? I’m saying I’m going to follow God’s headship order. So that means obviously I have a personality, obviously I have choices and I don’t—you know my husband’s and my relationship is such that I don’t need to ask him for every little thing—but if there is something that pertains to the children or major decision, it’s good to consult him. Had Eve consulted Adam in that, maybe it wouldn’t have happened. And had Abraham and Sarah—had he not listened to her or stood what difference would that have made? And so I think there is—again it’s obvious—there is such protection in it.
j. So if it’s a symbol of a reminder because—again in scripture, there are a lot of symbols, a lot of things that we do are reminders. It’s interesting because even society says I’m going to wear a wedding band as a symbol of my being married. So symbols are not an odd thing.

Joyce discusses her teenage years:

(65)  a. Interviewer: You mentioned back in your teenage years, sorting through what your convictions were. Do you mind sharing whatever you feel comfortable with that sorting through process and how you came to you convictions?

b. Joyce: Well on one thing—I watch my children, who they are. My oldest, like I said, is twenty-one. My daughter is almost nineteen. They were going through—you know, I say that my husband and I needed to—obviously being that—For myself, coming to the church at ten-years-old, not really knowing if this is what I wanted to do, I didn’t understand it. When you reach about fifteen, sixteen—up to eighteen, “Is it really who I am? Do I want this for my life?” It’s like you watch some adults struggle through the very same things. They are doing it at thirty. Where probably because of our churched environment, we would struggle with that maybe at a younger age, but it’s the same principle. You know, “Is this really what I want for my life or where I really want to go?” I know for myself, at that point of just adopting conservatism, I guess is the best way to say it is that it seems like (and part of it again was probably my personality) the plainer the look, the plainer the face, the more sober the face. And do we have to be like that? Do you have to look sad to be conservative? You know, “If that’s the way you’ve got to look—if that’s the way that the two go together, I don’t want any part of that.”

c. Joyce continued: But it’s just seemed like God spoke and brought friends and influences into my life saying, “You know what? You can be simple in life, but joyful.” So that was probably what I struggled through the most. Saying, “You know what? I don’t need to alter my personality. I can be joyful, I can be radiant and still be simply conservative—you know if you want to term it that.” That was probably the hardest hurdle. Not that I ever wanted to leave what I was taught because I did embrace it, and later in life, I have a greater understanding obviously. Hopefully I can pass that same passion on to my children, to my next generation. You know, “We can live radiantly.”

Joyce discusses the flowing veil in the context of a question about different Mennonite groups:

(66)
a. [The Charity group] would have introduced the veil, the flowing veil. Well actually no, let me back up. The actual flowing veil would have been brought in, and I don’t know the year, although it would have been probably early 70s I will say. It’s just interesting because it’s history, but it’s when it began. Northern Youth Programs in Canada, Clair and Clara Schnupp would have started the mission there in Ontario, and with the natives there found just much more practical to wear a black flowing veil. Where they came up with that, I don’t really know, but they set a precedent of history making because it was what they required of themselves and the staff to wear a flowing type veil.

b. When that was introduced, well, actually prior to that, the Lancaster Conference would have been at the point of wearing what would have called a doily. So that would have been before this. So maybe there was some form of longer, fuller more conservative look to that idea? I don’t know. I never really asked them. Maybe I should. Where they came up with that? It may be interesting, but it was definitely introduced to Lancaster Conference and to the church because that’s when we would have been teenagers—late 70s, early 80s—and in my teenage years I remember the covering lady now had these veils. We wore for casual purposes and that kind of thing. Well, the Charity movement, if you want to call like that, they definitely promoted the flowing veil. And I think it was a style that crossed all barriers. It’s wasn’t distinct of any particular group and was comfortable, practical and so wasn’t hard to adopt. As that became more and more worn and more accepted in the community, other groups—women wanted to do it. Now obviously in the 70s, 80s, NYK had introduced it, but we never really said, “Okay, this is something we are going to do on the home front.” It’s okay for missions because it’s practical—in that sense we understand that, but not on the home front.

c. Well Charity brought it in even more and so women began to want this type of head covering because it’s practical, it doesn’t smash, all these things. Churches began to need to visit it. “Okay. What are we going to do with this? This is a request. Yes, it is full. It is a head covering. It’s definitely head covering.” So it forced groups to visit it. “Are going to adopt this as a head covering style as well?” So as Keystone formed its fellowship in particular, each individual church could adopt that. Overall, it was said, “Yes, you can wear. We encourage you to be white in consistency with our white net coverings.” So the color was important, and that it’d be to the hair—well, actually to start a little longer—but today it’s to the hairline. It needs to be unadorned, which means it needs to be solid fabric—discourage the laces or lace on the edge even. So those two things in our group.
d. Well, what is actually happening, which is interesting, is obviously in the younger generation, it’s much more accepted. I would say when it first came out, there was a certain stigma that went with it. Like it was seen as even in the 70s and 80s, probably coupled with the doily effect that would have been in Lancaster Conference. “Okay if you start wearing that, eventually you wear nothing.” So it held a certain stigma of losing out. Today, I would say that certain stigma is probably lessening in a big way because it’s worn consistently and it’s worn longer and the girls are fine with it. It’s not seen anymore as something that, “you’re losing it.” It’s accepted. I think it’s a positive thing in the broad sense because it does. It is a style. Obviously the cap style—and I have never been able to actually find a real source as to where the bonnet style actually came from, which is called a European style head covering. Other than if you look at old history pictures, it’s similar to what the Pilgrims wore. It’s almost just like a nightcap, bonnet, fabric. And so was that why the Anabaptists…?

e. My only main concern [about wearing a flowing veil instead of a net cap]—and it’s probably unfounded—but for me personally—historically, the Catholics would have worn a flowing veil, and I always questioned whether that is part of the reason the Anabaptists chose a distinct style? Distinct, you know, in separating the two groups? Because the Anabaptists broke away from the state church, from Catholicism. I have never been able to find that. I have asked different historians and no one—there is no answer. There is nothing written. One gentleman from Ohio, he said he just always looked at it—because he too never could find an answer—he always looked at it as, “Okay, this group just decided on this, the same as one ball team will be red and the other is blue.” This particular group of believers, the Anabaptists, probably adopted that style, and why there was nothing ever written? It’s just interesting to me.

f. Interviewer: It is interesting.

g. Joyce: What is interesting to me is—personally I need to just because of what I do here—I think that what is probably more passion of my heart is that if historically, the Anabaptists felt a need to separate from Catholicism, should we be careful on going back and looking like it? Is that of concern?

A.7 Martha

Martha describes what she is wearing to the interview:

(67) a. Interviewer: Can you describe what you’re wearing, the outfit that you’re wearing?

b. Martha: What I’m wearing now?

c. Interviewer: What are you wearing now?

d. I’m wearing a skirt with sort of a paisley design of green and some other colors. And I am wearing a turtle neck white top. And I am wearing—right now I have my bedroom slippers on.

Martha discusses nylons and shoes:
(68)  a. Interviewer: You mentioned black stockings a couple of times, why black stockings?
b. Martha: That’s a good question. We had to wear black stockings. See, first when nylons came out, these thin nylons looked like you didn’t have any stockings on. They were pretty “sinful.”
c. Interviewer: Tell me, what are nylons? You mean like this?
d. Martha: Yes, nylons like you have on and like I have on now.
e. Interviewer: What did you wear before them?

f. Martha: Cotton stockings, I guess—long stockings—what did we wear? There was a time when I was quite young when nylons came out. Then when they wore these thin nylons, it was the church—somebody—got the idea that women ought to wear black stockings. I think some churches still do, some of the real conservative ones. And yet it’s funny because now it is also modern and stylish to wear black stockings with certain outfits. I see people wearing black stockings and it’s okay. So, I think the way I wear this color of stockings and my dresses are a decent length, then I don’t think that there’s anything so sexy about nylon stockings.

g. Interviewer: Do you always wear something on your legs, some kind of stocking or nylon?

h. Martha: Yes, well when it’s hot in the summer just around casually I might wear socks, but I haven’t done that a lot and I do have some knee socks you know stockings up to my knees in the winter.

i. Interviewer: When you go out in public do you usually cover?

j. Martha: Yes, I usually have nylons on out in public.

k. Interviewer: Why is that?

l. Martha: I don’t know that’s just the way I dress—normal dress.

m. Interviewer: Do you know the rationale? Why black stockings? Do you remember?

n. Martha: I guess so that they didn’t look like your legs—your bare legs. It was supposed to be immodest to show your legs.

o. Interviewer: Okay.

p. Martha: When I was young, and they had black stockings

q. Interviewer: Do you remember why nylons were sinful when they first came out? Do you know why they were called sinful?

r. Martha: Well because they—do you know it’s funny because I can’t remember what we wore before that. I guess we wore some kind of stockings. The preachers used to talk about the silk or nylon stockings that didn’t look like there was anything there. It was supposed to be a no-no.

s. Interviewer: That’s really interesting, do you remember any other things that preachers used to say or that came out over the years that were controversial?

t. Martha: I am not coming up with anything other than what we’ve talked about. No, I don’t know.

u. Interviewer: What about shoes?

v. Martha: Oh, yes. You were supposed to wear closed shoes—not have shoes with the toes out. There were times when having your toes out of your shoes was worldly. I think there’s some churches where they wouldn’t wear sandals to church. But they would wear them through the week, most people I think.
Interviewer: Why closed shoes?
Martha: So you don’t see people’s toes? I don’t know. I guess that was more modest. It was just because plain black shoes were the thing to wear to church. Yes, white shoes. Oh white shoes—there was a time when white shoes were not acceptable in the plain churches. Then after a while that gradually changed to you could wear brown or blue or white, white in summertime. I wear white shoes.

Interviewer: What kind of footwear do you wear?
Martha: I have black shoes that are tie shoes for winter for church, and I have other beige colored shoes made for winter. But for summer I like sandals with straps. You know, open. I have black sandals and I have white sandals.

Interviewer: Open toed shoes?
Martha: Yes.

Interviewer: About when did these big changes take place? By what decade were you dressing like you’re dressing now?
Martha: Maybe at least by the 70s—maybe I didn’t wear white sandals. Maybe until the 80s? I am not sure. I am not sure when I wore white sandals first. But I got them. For our wedding in 2008, I have white shoes. But for me it might be different from most of the people would have worn sandals probably before I did.

Martha discusses the generational transition away from cape dresses:

Interviewer: I am curious where your personal standards are? How long a skirt is, or neckline or tightness? Where are your personal standards?
Martha: Well I don’t like to have low necklines that show the crevice between your breasts and I would keep them a little higher than that and I don’t wear sleeveless things. I like them to have sleeves. I like them to be not too tight straight skirts. I want them to be a bit flared so that they don’t show—when I sit down I don’t want them to go up. I like to have them about a couple of inches below the knees, mostly a little longer. That’s about what about my dress standards are.

Interviewer: Has that changed through the years, has it always been that way?
Martha: Yes, there’s things I think are pretty much the same, ever since I stopped wearing cape dresses. Yes, I still want to wear modest dresses.

Interviewer: Tell me more about the transition away from cape dresses? Was that a big thing at the time or...?
Martha: Not so much. It just kind of went gradually and I sort of went along with my social group. Other people were not wearing cape dresses all the time, and I wasn’t the first one or the last one to change. I think I changed as other people were changing, but still some of my friends wear cape dresses. Not very many, but there’s one of my high school classmates I think that still wears plain dresses, and my sister in law still wears plain dresses—my first husband’s brother’s wife. So you know there’s some, but they don’t seem to feel really badly about other people not wearing them. Even their churches where they go, they don’t all wear cape dresses anymore.
Interviewer: Okay, but some do still. You mentioned plain dresses, what do you mean by plain?

Martha: “Plain dresses” is a dress with a cape in my mind.

Interviewer: Okay.

Martha: Yes, like I say the plain churches like the Beachy and Eastern Pennsylvanian—they are plain, they wear plain dresses. And their dresses are often long and high necks and not real splashy colors. And capes, those are plain, you know.

Interviewer: When you made the transition away from cape dresses, was it your parents’ generation, your grandparents’ generation changing with you? Or was it your generation?

Martha: My generation first, but eventually even my mother was not always wearing capes as I recall. Many of my parents’ generation are not wearing capes anymore.

Interviewer: Was there a discussion about it?

Martha: It depends which church they go to. Churches that are more lenient about dress, and these conservative churches still wear them.

Interviewer: They still do?

Martha: Yes.

Interviewer: Was there a discussion about switching away from them?

Martha: I don’t know, I think it just kind of happened gradually. Yes, I don’t know if we made any big decision, “Now we’re not going to wear cape dresses.” I don’t think so. I think it was just decided it’s okay. I probably wore cape dresses for church and not for work for a while. I don’t remember those details, but it was kind of gradual.

Martha discusses being dressed differently from the world:

What about your identity as a Mennonite? As a Christian? How does that go into your dress?

Martha: Oh yes, well that is something over the years, you know, when you went out in public and you had your covering on, you were known as a Mennonite, and I think I felt good about that because I wanted to be known as a Christian. It seemed like when we were younger being Mennonite and being Christian were more about being plain—was more the same thing—which is now different because we know that there are other people who are Christian who do not dress plain and who are not Mennonite. But when we were younger it was the right thing to be plain and to be a Mennonite. Yes, you probably didn’t even grow up in that kind of atmosphere, but anyway, I never really was embarrassed to be out in public. When I was in public school, I wore a covering in 7th and 8th grade. In fact, I think I started wearing a covering in 5th grade and then 6th and 7th and 8th. And and I even wore cape dresses to school then. I was probably looked at as an oddball in public school. They were some other Mennonites in our school, but I don’t think they all dressed as plain as I did. So I got used to being different.

Interviewer: Right.
d. Martha: It is okay to be different.
e. Interviewer: To be different... I have heard different people quote Romans 12:1 about being separate from the world.
f. Martha: Yes, that was pretty much impressed in me as I was growing up, “Be separate from the world.” Things that were worldly—dress that the world used, you tried to stay away from.
g. Interviewer: For the recording, what is worldly?
h. Martha: Worldly would be things that people do that aren’t Christian. Things that are not would include anything that we can consider wrong or immodest in dress. Or behaviour would be worldly. It’s probably about the best way I can think of saying it.

A.8 Roman

Roman describes what he is wearing to the interview:

(71) a. Interviewer: Can you describe the outfit you’re wearing right now?
b. Roman: Okay, I am wearing a short sleeve, button down the front shirt up collar and regular white or beige dress—I don’t know if they’d—would these be dress pants or not?—and brown shoes.
c. Interviewer: What kind of shoes?
d. Roman: I don’t know what these would be called, Oxfords or Loafers or something? I wouldn’t know, I wouldn’t have a clue.
e. Interviewer: And what about your socks?
f. Roman: They’re just regular white cotton socks.
g. Interviewer: Where would you wear this kind of clothing?
h. Roman: Most anywhere where I would want to be dressed up more than I would for work, but not for church generally. For church I would wear darker colors and usually I would wear a suit.

Roman discusses his Sunday suit:

(72) a. Interviewer: What’s your suit like?
b. Roman: My Sunday suit, I wear a hook and eye.
c. Interviewer: Okay.
d. Roman: Type, we don’t require hook and eye anymore, you can have button suits, but I just haven’t got one for many years and so mine is simply straight cut.
e. Interviewer: Okay, what’s the difference.
f. Roman: It doesn’t have the lay down collar and I don’t wear a tie with it.
g. Interviewer: Okay, so that makes it a plain suit.
h. Roman: Right.
i. Interviewer: Okay, with that be like the definition of plain suit or how would you define it?
Roman discusses the younger generation’s change to Sunday dress practice:

a. Interviewer: Do all the men wear suits to church?

b. Roman: No, but most of the men my age or older would. I would say that even most of the men over 40 had suits on. Very few younger than that.

c. Interviewer: Why is that?

d. Roman: I don’t know.

e. Interviewer: What do the young guys wear?

f. Roman: They just wear a shirt. And the young guys the wear these t-shirts underneath. I hate to wear a t-shirt under mine. They think I’m immodest if I don’t do that, sometimes especially if it’s thin—but I don’t usually wear a thing shirt. Nowadays a lot of the younger guys will wear a t-shirt under their white shirt, and it’s not always even white t-shirts. Sometimes it can be pretty obvious. If they do that, a lot of them will just hang their shirt back in the closet—won’t even wash it if it’s fairly clean—because they had the t-shirt underneath. I probably could do that too, but I tend to sweat pretty easily; so I avoid the shirt underneath.

g. Interviewer: So the young guys are wearing light colored t-shirts underneath white button-down shirts?

h. Roman: Sometimes—not so much. Do you wear a t-shirt, Ralphie? [directs question to his teenage son]
i. Ralphie: I wear a white t-shirt.

j. Roman: Every Sunday?

k. Ralphie: Yes.

l. Interviewer: But you don’t, and they say it’s immodest not to wear one?

m. Roman: Well, they think that, the younger generation. It’s funny, we used to do that all the time. You just didn’t think about it. They really think that if you wear a strap t-shirt like we used to do all the time—there were these strap t-shirts. What you call, not a muscle shirt—that’s just sleeveless—but long with the thin straps. You can see that through most shirts—regular white shirts you can see right through. Growing up, we were used to that. We didn’t even think about it.

n. Interviewer: The younger generation doesn’t like it?

o. Roman: They do the t-shirts. They’re really into their t-shirts.

Roman discusses separation and people looking at his wife’s differentiated dress:

(74)  
a. Interviewer: About separation from the world and how it relates to dress?

b. Roman: Okay, yes, we feel like one of the most obvious ways we can be separate from the world is by the way we dress. I think we have to admit that as a people regardless of what we believe, whether Mennonite, Baptist, Atheist or whatever—as a people we look at somebody because of how we’re made. We are made, God said in 1 Samuel to Samuel, “Don’t go by outward appearance, man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.” Being as we can’t see hearts, we look at the obvious and it’s the body. And so, it’s dress or lack thereof or the manner of which we’re dressed is a huge thing. We immediately see that. We can’t help it. We can’t see through the chest into their heart and see what kind of person they are. But I think the more we dress moderately plain—I don’t know how to say this—not severely plain, not mixing in. The more we dress in comfort of who we are and who we were as a people, the less distracting and the more innocent we can keep ourselves from stuff that compromises.

c. So principles for dress would be for women that they feel covered and not pressured to conform. They feel feminine without pressure to expose unnecessarily their femininity. I think there’s something about a woman that’s feminine regardless of how she’s dressed. It’s more than their dress, it’s a spirit she carries about her. But having said that, that spirit is largely created by how you choose to apply the principles. Okay, what are the principles? Principles—modesty would be one and Peter says “that women dress themselves in modest apparel” and then he specifically starts pointing out things that are distracting. He says “braided hair.” There are different interpretations of what braided means, but one interpretation is that that hair was braided with gold to attract attention. It was strictly a thing of attracting attention. I think that specifically what God didn’t want Christians to do is to attract attention to themselves unnecessarily.
d. I mean let’s face it, a woman like my wife is dressed goes out in public—and I thought about this when we travelled on our 30th Anniversary to Prince Edward Island, a place where they see very few Mennonites. When we travelled, when we went on our Alaskan cruise, I thought about it again, how we were out of the community. Now we were with a bunch of Mennonites on the ship, but meanwhile travelling so many times—I love to walk about 10 feet behind my wife; I can blend in pretty good. And people will go like this... [motions with eyes and body]

e. Interviewer: Can you describe for the recording what you are doing, as they can’t see?

f. Roman: Their eyes just follow—they look at my wife, they look at her face and then they go down, you can see their eyes go all the way down to her feet and then back up to her face and then back to her feet. Oh, it was so interesting to watch that! On Prince Edward Island, we go shopping. I was standing 10 or 15 feet away from my wife and somebody would walk in and see her but they didn’t see me. I was like behind a rack of clothes or something, and I can see this thing. That was so interesting to see how their eyes would just go down and then back up again and then down and back up again and they were trying, without even thinking about it, they were trying to say, “Where does she belong?” She doesn’t belong with me. She doesn’t belong. Sometimes if I would be beside her, I would feel that same kind of thing. They were looking at me to see how I related to her. It was so just amazing and when I really thought about it when was when we were invited to a Jewish wedding, Orthodox Jewish wedding in New York city, and I took my wife down. One of my sons wanted to go and I took my four daughters, Charlene, Althea, Hadassa and Heather, and they were dressed in their wedding attire like they wore to Dwight’s wedding, just a couple of years before. And wow, did we get looked at! People weren’t used to it, and they’d look at the covering and then they’d look at the dress, then they’d look back at the covering and they’d look down at the dress and noticed how long it was. To these people, “What’s going on? Is this a special occasion? Where do they belong? What are they doing? Where are they going?” Interesting.

g. Interviewer: That’s interesting. What did you think about it, how did it make you feel?

h. Roman: I always feel glad to be beside her—she’s so much better looking than I am! But, no, I feel like “wow....” I think it’s something you say to people and I think this can be done, a Baptist could do it, by what you’re representing and people even if they don’t recognise what you’re representing when they look at the two beside each other, they know enough to say okay, religious and then from there on they are going to start saying, you know what my grandma used to dress like that, or something like that. And so, there’s a lot of departure from modesty today, but there’s also a lot of enough of understanding that people realise that you know what I think it is bigger than themselves. I think that if anything, it would be my goal that people would see me and say, “Okay, he is identifying with something.” And the longer they would know me the more they would identify me with somebody who was honoring the Creator. Even if they didn’t understand that all very well.
i. I think a lot of times people don’t. I don’t think I understood for a long time why I did that, why I had honored anyone. And I think for a lot of plain people it’s honoring their church. That’s not a bad reason, it just shouldn’t be the only one. I think honoring your church is a wonderful thing, but it shouldn’t be the only one. Down in our heart of hearts, we need to understand that I am doing this because I believe it’s pleasing to God. Because I believe it’s somebody’s interpretation if not mine—hopefully mine—of what the Bible means when it says that we shouldn’t “be conformed,” that women should dress in “modest apparel with shamefacedness.”
APPENDIX B

ELAN Annotations

The following eight tables show ELAN annotations for each recorded interview.

(75) Alicia’s Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Code</th>
<th>Subjects Covered</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>00:00:00.030 - 00:01:39.140</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:01:39.140 - 00:04:20.000</td>
<td>What she is wearing, clothes she likes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:04:20.000 - 00:07:28.000</td>
<td>Men’s clothing, wearing jeans to church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:07:28.000 - 00:10:20.000</td>
<td>Relationship with parents and modesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:10:20.000 - 00:13:34.800</td>
<td>Men being visual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:13:34.800 - 00:17:08.571</td>
<td>Differences between churches, blending in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:17:08.571 - 00:20:29.015</td>
<td>Levels of dressing up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:20:29.015 - 00:24:34.801</td>
<td>Mother, conservatism, specifics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:24:34.801 - 00:27:38.408</td>
<td>Things she would not wear</td>
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<tr>
<td>00:27:38.408 - 00:28:35.605</td>
<td>Contemporary society, distinctive attire</td>
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<tr>
<td>00:28:35.605 - 00:36:05.195</td>
<td>Her story in modesty and dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:36:05.195 - 00:39:53.211</td>
<td>Clarifications, personal convictions</td>
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<td>00:39:53.211 - 00:43:55.245</td>
<td>Honoring God with modesty</td>
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<td>00:43:55.245 - 00:46:22.556</td>
<td>Jewelry and make up</td>
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<td>People who have left the Mennonites</td>
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<td>00:50:36.621 - 00:52:28.801</td>
<td>Wearing pants</td>
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<td>Masculinity and femininity</td>
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<td>00:53:59.571 - 00:54:53.180</td>
<td>Pennsylvanian Dutch</td>
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<td>Veils and reasons to wear them</td>
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<td>Veils and practicalities of wearing them</td>
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<td>When she started wearing veil</td>
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(76) Amy’s Interview

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<td>Definition of modesty</td>
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<td>Spirit of modesty</td>
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<td>00:23:52.120 - 00:26:15.410</td>
<td>More details about fashion show</td>
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<td>Practical, specific advice about modesty</td>
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<td>00:27:47.300 - 00:32:42.310</td>
<td>Her personal journey</td>
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<td>Pants</td>
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(77) Charlene’s Interview

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<td>00:08:20.600 - 00:10:14.010</td>
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<td>Personal boundaries and colors</td>
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<td>Her clothing background/story</td>
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<td>Separation and the world</td>
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<td>00:26:26.400 - 00:28:52.210</td>
<td>Why does God want you to dress this way?</td>
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<td>Definition of modesty</td>
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<td>00:31:45.010 - 00:37:17.900</td>
<td>Masculinity and femininity, seduction</td>
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<td>Parents, make up, jewelry, etc.</td>
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<td>Steps away and also name brands</td>
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Claudia’s Interview

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<td>00:00:43.570 - 00:03:13.565</td>
<td>What she is wearing, layering, obtaining</td>
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<td>00:03:13.565 - 00:10:21.500</td>
<td>Dress up, protecting brothers, purity</td>
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<td>00:10:21.500 - 00:11:39.331</td>
<td>Culture, beauty and gift</td>
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<td>00:11:39.331 - 00:14:30.965</td>
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<td>00:14:30.965 - 00:20:11.065</td>
<td>Culture and clarifications</td>
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<td>00:20:11.065 - 00:27:39.031</td>
<td>Her personal story</td>
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<td>00:27:39.031 - 00:36:36.331</td>
<td>Practical clothing items and relationship with parents</td>
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<td>Marriage</td>
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<td>Her personal standards</td>
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<td>What makes modesty difficult?</td>
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<td>Summary of modesty</td>
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<td>Sleeve length, make up, footwear</td>
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<td>Work clothes, swimming, athletics</td>
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<td>Men's clothes, the world, style changes</td>
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<td>Charlene shows the dresses in her closet</td>
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### Elaine’s Interview

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<td>Her mother’s clothes</td>
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<td>Attracting attention and tightness</td>
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<td>Image and relation to other people</td>
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<td>00:53:13.020 - 00:57:16.100</td>
<td>Modesty and footwear</td>
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<td>Swimwear, athletics, scarves, jewelry</td>
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<td>Adornment and legalism</td>
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<td>Clothing and walk with God</td>
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<td>Heart of modesty and closing conversation</td>
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<td>Her veiling and when she wears it</td>
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<td>Head covering, age and skirt length</td>
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<td>Can you share your personal standards?</td>
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<td>00:27:41.210 - 00:43:02.040</td>
<td>Different groups part 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>00:43:02.040 - 00:51:18.790</td>
<td>Different groups part 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>00:51:18.790 - 01:00:23.810</td>
<td>Clarifications and definitions</td>
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<td>01:00:23.810 - 01:02:19.210</td>
<td>Uncomfortable parts of veil or covering</td>
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<tr>
<td>01:02:19.210 - 01:12:45.320</td>
<td>Why do you wear a head covering?</td>
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<td>01:12:45.320 - 01:14:55.500</td>
<td>Other clothes</td>
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<tr>
<td>01:14:55.500 - 01:16:55.700</td>
<td>Jewelry, Make Up, swimwear, neat and tidy</td>
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<tr>
<td>01:16:55.700 - 01:20:03.010</td>
<td>What did you sort through personally?</td>
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01:20:03.010 - 01:28:12.810  Men's clothes
01:28:12.810 - 01:30:32.110  Dress clothes, how clothes make you feel

(81) Martha's Interview

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<td>00:02:22.550 - 00:06:54.410</td>
<td>Describe what you are wearing today?</td>
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<td>00:06:54.410 - 00:08:39.710</td>
<td>Which type of Mennonite are you?</td>
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<td>00:08:39.710 - 00:10:43.080</td>
<td>Church standards and average dress</td>
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<td>00:10:43.080 - 00:12:15.890</td>
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<td>00:12:15.890 - 00:16:10.230</td>
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<td>00:16:10.230 - 00:22:20.620</td>
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<td>00:22:20.620 - 00:25:11.390</td>
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<td>00:25:11.390 - 00:26:51.000</td>
<td>What do men in general wear?</td>
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<td>00:26:51.000 - 00:27:55.990</td>
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<td>00:27:55.990 - 00:31:48.500</td>
<td>How has clothing changed over the years?</td>
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<td>00:31:48.500 - 00:34:18.700</td>
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<td>00:34:18.700 - 00:36:50.000</td>
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<td>00:36:50.000 - 00:38:29.020</td>
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<td>00:38:29.020 - 00:40:50.300</td>
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<td>00:40:50.300 - 00:42:05.010</td>
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<td>01:05:21.010 - 01:09:58.130</td>
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<td>01:09:58.130 - 01:12:23.980</td>
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Roman’s Interview

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<td>00:12:01.410 - 00:18:31.031</td>
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<td>00:18:31.031 - 00:30:54.098</td>
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<td>00:30:54.098 - 00:37:05.031</td>
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<td>00:37:05.031 - 00:39:53.431</td>
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<td>00:39:53.431 - 00:45:04.603</td>
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<td>00:55:42.665 - 01:02:50.065</td>
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<td>01:36:03.465 - 01:40:20.000</td>
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<td>01:40:20.000 - 01:41:41.100</td>
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<td>01:41:41.100 - 01:43:52.031</td>
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<td>01:43:52.031 - 01:48:59.565</td>
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<td>01:48:59.565 - 01:51:58.631</td>
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<td>01:51:58.631 - 01:54:02.065</td>
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<td>02:09:49.831 - 02:10:13.798</td>
<td>Ending and thanks</td>
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References


Rumsey, Suzanne. 2009. Heritage literacy: Adoption, adaptation, and alienation of multimodal literacy tools. *College Composition and Communication* 60. 573-86.


