

Thinking about Clothes

“Clothes are inevitable. They are nothing less than the furniture of the mind made visible.” James Laver, *Style in Costume*

One is only poor, only if you choose to be
Although we had no money, I was rich as I could be
In my coat of Many Colors my mama made for me.” Song by Dolly Parton

From the adornment of the fig leaf to modern times, covering the body has been fraught with symbolic significance. Early psychoanalysts talked about the genital meaning represented by different items of clothing. Although acknowledging that clothes served as a protection from the cold and the range of natural elements, their focus of interest was upon the conflictual and symbolic nature of clothes. They talked about the struggle between modesty and primitive exhibitionism; addressing the wide span of possible sublimations and displacements on to beautiful clothes.

Surely, like Jacob’s many colored jacket, looking at clothes for its idiosyncratic meanings to us as well as its reflections upon the times and culture we live in, is indeed a many splendored thing.

Flugel, as long ago as 1929 summarizing the literature of the time, wrote in his article “Clothes Symbolism and Clothes Ambivalence” that the object most frequently symbolized by clothes is the phallus, and goes on to list some specific items of clothes, e.g. the hat, the shoe, the tie and even the humble button”. It all sounds a little laughable now; however, he concludes with the following statement which is many ways is the organizing principle of my paper. “Fully to understand the dynamic relations involved in a man’s attitudes to the garments he wears would carry us far towards knowledge of his Whole Psychological Development.” Indeed, Ilene Beckerman’s (1995), little illustrated book, *Love, Loss, and What We Wore* (recently made into a play by the Ephron sisters) is in fact her life story told and drawn through the prism of her clothes. We follow her life starting at seven years old when she wore her Brownie uniform, the clothes her mother made for her before she died when Ilene was not yet 13 years old, her prom and wedding dresses and so forth. She concludes her monograph after she’s become a grandmother and watches her first granddaughter play dress up with her old clothes.

Undoubtedly, many of us can remember events by what we wore. And each of us carries our own storehouse of symbolic meanings these clothes held for us. Recently a 31 year old patient of mine, in trying to recall how old she was when her maternal grandmother died, identified her age by the dress she wore (“It was white dress with hard yellow buttons”).

I will consider women’s/men’s development in light of their relationship to clothes. In the spirit of the 2011 IFPE conference, at which this paper was presented, “Psychoanalysis: Not the Same Old Song and Dance?” we will play with clothes. Let’s go to the store, let’s go to the closet. Let’s go to your closets, let’s go to mine. What do clothes mean to us, how do we feel about them how do we choose them, and what do our choices in clothes say about us and our sense of our selves? Do our choices and sense of style change over time and so on and on?

I also will look at clothes in the context of the clinical situation. For example, do we think about specific patients we’re going to see when we choose our clothes for our work day? How do we decide what to wear? How much do the patients we’re going to see influence our choices? In addition, we will elaborate upon some of our reactions to what our patients wear, and if and when we talk about it with patients.

Further, I will explore how and when the topic of clothes comes up in therapy, including considering some different illustrations of patients talking about clothes and the ways and the therapists’ response to them. What resonates for us as we reflect with our patients upon the meaning of clothes for them?

In a sense, I invite you to sing along and play together as we enter the world of clothes.

“I have nothing to wear” and “What should I wear?” are oft repeated refrains for most of us.

What do we think about when we think about clothes? Or, do we even think about them? Indeed, I do, lots of people do, and many of our patients do, and thus I invite you to open up this arena and cast eyes and mind about. What conscious and unconscious thoughts fly through our heads, like buzzing bees, as we stand before our closet making up our minds about what to wear? How do we develop our unique style Or, do we? And, what does

that even mean? What is each of our particular relation to clothes? What does it say about us who we are, how we are in the world, how we wish to be seen, and the time and place we live in?

I grew up in NYC in a middle class Jewish family and neighborhood. How you looked and what you wore were very important to my family and to most of the people I knew, if not all. Critiquing other peoples clothes and style was an ongoing activity; almost a pastime in its own right in my family. My mother positioned herself as the authority, the expert. My father wasn't far behind. And my uncle was in the garment industry as were many of my parent's friends and relatives. It was quite routine and normal for my sister and mother and I to go downtown to the wholesale houses and choose our clothes among people who "knew" what was best and best for you. They appeared and acted as if they were "in the know". Indeed, they were in the forefront of perceiving what was in fashion and the latest styles.... Going shopping was fun for me; an adventure, never knowing what you might find; in many ways, our family's form of an expedition to new and old territories.

I only began to realize as I got older, what little say I had in the matter of choosing my clothes. That was my mother's job and I thought she did it very well. I never doubted her choices for a moment. (Obviously I was a pretty naive child). I can remember a particular time after the rigors of my mother's, my sister's and my shopping tour, relaxing in the comfort of my father's car, after he came to pick us up at the store. My mother said to my father "It's always such a pleasure to go shopping with Samoan". That made me feels very on top of already being so pleased with our purchases. It was only many years and analyses later that I came to realize what my mother really meant by that statement. In short, essentially that I happily agreed with everything she picked out for me, never disagreed or fought with her and consequently never exercised any decision making or inclinations of my own. That process was to take years and years until I could feel both the right, wherewithal, and confidence to figure out for myself what I liked and what looked good on me. To develop that kind of confidence has truly been a developmental achievement for me. Notably different, my five year old granddaughter seems to have very strong opinions about what clothes she likes, what looks good on her, what combinations to put together for herself and what she will wear and what she won't. She seems to know her likes and dislikes in a way I had no concept of earlier. I do now.....

Claiming myself, discovering my own taste and rights to my own taste, occurred quietly throughout the course of my lifetime. I remember all those early years of shopping with my mother; her choosing the clothes and me agreeing and seeming to like them. I have a memory of some specific clothes I especially liked. A yellow dress with a cape collar piped in white. I wore it to my sixth grade graduation and I remember feeling so good in it. The cotton felt so soft and good on my body, the lemony shade of the yellow felt so happy without being too bright; just right, the soft flare of the skirt had the perfect degree of twirl. I especially loved the cape-like collar, so unusual; I'd never had a dress like that. All so pleasing to me. I'm sure everyone reading this essay have your own storehouse of memories of clothes you wore for special occasions or just clothes you loved and were especially attached to. I remember my Sweet 16 dress I picked out with my mother and my mother's friend and her daughter who was older than me but who also fell in love with the dress too and bought it too! All I can remember of it now was that it had a lot of pink in it and ruffles. I just felt so special in that dress, like a Sweet 16 girl should feel! And, then in the earlier years of flying, when flying was a big deal and people got dressed up even to go to the airport, I had this checkered shirtwaist dress that I wore quite regularly when we flew. My husband and I came to call it "my airplane dress". It was very comfortable, suited me and looked good on me to boot. I literally wore it until it just frayed and essentially fell apart. I bet most of you have your memory equivalences; something you loved and literally fell apart. . And maybe are associating to them right now!

I know that I must have gone with my mother to buy both my sixth grade graduation dress and my Sweet 16 dress, both of which I so loved and felt so special to me; although I only remember she and I and her friend and her friend's daughter going to buy the Sweet 16 dress. What I don't remember at all is whether my mother made the choices unilaterally, or whether I participated in the choice. All I can remember is that I loved them and remember them fondly to this day.

It's interesting to consider a paradox here. The fabrics that clothes are made from are generally not long lasting, nor are the styles, and yet, the memory of the clothes and their requisite meanings linger perhaps forever in our minds and psyches. What does this say about the meaning of clothes and our attitude towards clothes and what they represent? There's a certain nostalgia in considering clothes we wore at earlier times in our lives. .Nostalgia is

often considered an aspect of mourning. Impart and Rubin (in press) talk about nostalgia's unique capacity to both facilitate and impede the mourning process, reminding us that it has both an affective and sensory component...

In many ways, some of our tender feelings about our clothes, our attachment to our clothes, whether from the distant past, more recent past, or present, may well serve as "evocative objects" (Bollas, 2009). Bollas informs us that these evocative objects tell a story about our lives, calling forth a time that has vanished; that is, much was changing in my life as a result of my sixth grade graduation and the summer that followed. I was having to give up all my attachments to my old school, the neighborhood where the school was, my familiar walk to get there, passing my best friend's house en route, my favorite candy store that I habitually frequented, my teachers, classmates and friends, some of whom I would be separating from and perhaps never to see again. Indeed, my familiar and comfortable surrounds changing before my eyes. My sense of growing up and my decided ambivalence about that state of affairs was palpable... Would my mother still be there to go shopping with me and either pick out my clothes or help me pick them out? Clearly I was one of the kids who felt she needed her mother and couldn't manage very well on her own, and now I was being thrust into the growing up world of junior high school! However, loss and anxiety were not the only feelings I felt. I also felt great excitement about the novelty of the prospect of a new school, new friends, new environment; really a new world. Accompanying my sadness was also a sense of adventure, exploration, curiosity and optimism.

Consider, when Bollas was talking about object-as-thing, he tells us that "we need the object to release our self into expression" (Bollas, 2009. P.87). There are a myriad different functions clothes serve for us ("releasing our self {through our choice of clothes} into expression").

As I write this, I find myself suddenly remembering the summer right after I graduated and wore my yellow and white dress. My whole family went away to Rockaway Beach for the summer. There were family friends around, which was always fun; and I loved the novelty of this very different physical environment outside the city. I loved the air, the light, the beach, the smell of the ocean, and especially the relaxation that the grownups seemed to feel, which in turn made me feel more relaxed. I think it may be the summer I learned how to ride a two-wheel bike, and the sense of mastery and freedom were powerful. I could ride my bike all around Rockaway by myself using

my own pedal power! Yet I distinctly remember feeling sad, very sad. I thought a lot about leaving my grammar school, never to return and the loss of all my connections. I had had a particularly good sixth grade. Things had jelled for me, and I didn't want to give it up.

I thought wistfully about the physical school, the places I knew in it, my friends, some of my teachers. I played through in my mind any number of times the particular events that had occurred in my classroom and in that school the past year. The replayed experiences were vivid.... I had the painful realization that that was all over, never to return. I missed it and them and the prospect of it all being gone made me feel very sad. I remember some yearning to be able to go back again, but I knew it was not to be. It was over and never to be repeated in the same way again. I keenly remember how it hurt to think about it. I had a real sense of loss (Viorst, "Necessary Losses"). My sixth grade was over and now irretrievable.

I guess I was beginning to understand the concept of endings, and the cycle of endings, loss and new beginnings in a way I had never gleaned before. Yet another memory comes to me about that summer. I made a very big decision to break myself of my habit of putting U-Bet chocolate syrup in my milk. I hated the taste of milk and somehow had come up with the idea of putting syrup in my milk to make it palatable. Had that been my mother's idea? I made a concentrated effort to wean myself of this habit. I figured out, that I could drink my milk straight without the syrup, if I had a cookie or something else sweet to eat with it. Now, of course in retrospect that was hardly a great solution, since I now changed my dependence from U-Bet chocolate syrup to other sweets. (Which unfortunately I still have!) But, I guess it was the best I could do at the time. Clearly I was trying to get more grown up. My family was rather bemused and indifferent to the whole matter and, knowing my mother, she was probably happy to supply the cookies.

Now I see how these memories of the summer after I graduated were all condensed and symbolized by my yellow dress.

Clothes were like a talisman in many ways. Growing up in NYC, they ushered in the seasons and in a sense recorded the passing of time. We went shopping for new clothes every season. Came late August/early September we went shopping for school clothes, cooler and colder months ahead, and the holidays. I seem to remember always having sad feelings when each season was over, although also having excited feelings about the season

ahead. Because we lived in a small apt with precious few closets, there were rituals around each season with our clothes. We removed our clothes from the last season, packed them up and put them in the building's basement storage, clearing the way and the space for the next season's clothes. We usually had some clothes we carried over from the last year's season, would unpack those and then go shopping for new ones. I especially liked spring and summer clothes. They were lighter not just in weight, but in spirit; brighter colors, lighter fabrics, more playful and fun. Less serious. I think in those days my whole family was pretty much driven by what was in style that year. There was not that much room or emotional space for free expression, experimentation and creativity.

During my adolescent years I went shopping with my friends, especially my best friend. During that period, I distinctly remember wanting to dress the way all the other girls did. I specifically did NOT want to stand out. Fitting in with all of them felt just right to me.

I don't remember much about clothes during my young adulthood one way or the other, although I'm quite sure I also continued to shop at the wholesale manufacturers with my mother, and possibly my sister. Being in style was a serious and important matter for the whole family. I always liked clothes, was interested in them. I was quite inhibited and somewhat cautious and uncertain. I did not think I had any particular knack or gift for being creative around clothes. I would often look at other woman's clothes and admire how well put together they were, but I didn't think I could quite do that for myself.

Before I went off to graduate school in social work, leaving the city and moving 3000 miles away to Berkeley CA, which was a gigantic move for me, an uncle who worked in the garment industry gave me a talking to, his form of a goodbye lecture. In effect, he talked about clothes and how I should dress and how important that was. By then, being a kind of snobbish and somewhat intellectual young woman, I was appalled. How superficial! Really! Even insulting! Why would anybody be thinking about clothes at a time like that? I certainly wasn't. Although in fairness to my uncle, my mother and I had gone shopping in preparation for this new phase of my life. And I felt quite prepared, clothes-wise anyway. I remembered recalling Polonius' soliloquy to his son, Laertes, as he strikes off on his own and heads for Paris. "Buy as costly clothes, as can pay for, But not made fancy, rich, and certainly not gaudy. For the clothes often tell what kind of man you

are, the apparel oft proclaims the man....” In my graduate school years, and my early motherhood years, clothes were not very central in my life, although I cared about how I looked and what I wore. All the while, my mother was ever present in her pronouncements about what looked good on me and what I should wear. Even so, I was gradually finding my own path regarding clothes choices for myself. It probably helped that my mother was 3,000 miles away much of the time. I found small stores that I liked, and salespeople who got to know me and we’d work together on finding clothes that seemed to suit me. I was in the process of discovering what colors most suited me, what cuts more flattering to my body and shape, and so on. I have always had fun shopping with a sense of positive anticipation, albeit accompanied by worrying that I was spending too much money. And I was - and do.

I became friendly with a woman whose life revolved around clothes, particularly high style. She had a great eye, a lot of money, and had come from a family where clothes were central to their lives. Since she never worked, and had access to considerable funds, once her child care and family duties were fulfilled, she could devote the rest of her time to shopping and buying, and shop and buy she did!.. She was, and is, a phenomenon to be reckoned with. She would come alive as soon as she entered a store. I think it was with her and our many shopping expeditions that I came to develop my own sense of taste, style and finally figured out what suited me best. We especially preferred artisanal clothes, and went to many artists’ design shows, got to know some of the artists, and worked with them. It was all very exciting and a lot of fun. I like wearing art; I appreciate the time, imagination, knowledge, creativity and work connected with each item I buy and I feel proud supporting their work and wearing their clothes.

Quietly, moving in like soft south sea island breezes, my pleasure around clothes with all its attendant meanings evolved for me into a “conflict free area zone” (Hartmann, 1964).

Throughout all these years, some of my clothes my mother liked, some she didn’t. She was the eternal critic until the day she died. And, until the day she died some three and a half years ago, she cared very much how she looked, what she wore, how she put it together, just as her mother had done before her, until the day she died, both dying in their mid-late 90’s.

For a period in her life, my sister was very much in the jet set life scene. To that effect she had a personal shopper choose her very expensive designer couture clothes. My mother would quite regularly critique this professional woman's taste, letting me know, and whoever else would listen, how that woman put my sister in the wrong cut, wrong color, wrong print, wrong, wrong, wrong. My mother TRULY believed she knew best. And, for many years I too thought she knew best.

In many ways, it's taken me a lifetime to grow into my views about clothes and to have confidence and not be too hard on myself, when I made some mistakes (which I do). In a sense it's a telescoped story of my growing into myself. In short, my life's development. Imperceptively, like a quiet south sea breeze, my relation to clothes has evolved into "a conflict free zone" (Hartmann, 1964). I can now enjoy clothes and be less inhibited. I am far from consumed by them or needing to buy a lot all the time. I truly have come to see them as a form of self expression, different costumes to put on, as it were, conveying different aspects of myself and my mood. I have grown to see clothes as a means by which I can express myself and happily present myself to the world.... This is who I am and I finally feel good enough about myself and my presentation

Clothes are how we interface with the world. They cover our nakedness, protect us from the world and the world from us, but they also reveal who we are, how we see ourselves, our social class and the times we live in. Thus, simultaneously, clothes both cover us up and reveal us. In the novel *Clothes on Their Backs* by Linda Grant, the heroine tell us, "The clothes you wear are a metamorphosis. They change you from the outside in." (Think of Bollas here, of the object releasing our selves into expression).... "A new dress. Is that all it takes to make a new beginning? This shred of dyed cloth, shaped in the form of a woman's body? My clothes acted as a kind of carapace, armour with which I protected my inner softness..... And if life took you to uncertain, strange margins, to the places where people struggled to express their whole being, through dress, whatever forms such individuality took, that that's where I would go."..

Through the years I've come to appreciate the artistry, imaginativeness and craftsmanship that are involved in designing and making fine clothes. At any given time of the year, in U.S. and abroad, one can see museum shows devoted to clothes and high fashion, in different ways, all the styles in the shows reflect social, political, economic circumstances of the times. The

shows portray the archetypes created by mass media and hardly represent any of us ordinary folk. None the less, in reviewing the shows, *The New Yorker* tells us, “The archetypes do suggest the way that each ideal makes subtle alterations to the notion of a woman’s place, and to the code that determines who is worthy of respect and who isn’t.” (September 20, 2010) To be sure, most people don’t wear couture, having neither the body nor especially the finances that these shows are highlighting. But, one of the many fascinating aspects of the shows, is how they do reflect larger historical trends in taste, mores and of course wealth, while at the same time capturing the technical innovations, artistic sensibilities and fantasies that trickle down to more practical designs that are available to most women and men . In line with my heightened appreciation of the artistic aspects of clothes, one can also consider some designs as art; fiber art combining features of painting, sculpture, architecture, body art, and theatre and exquisite craft”(*The New York Times*, May 7, 2010. Consider for a moment another kind of art show. It was entitled “No Man’s Land”. The artist was Christian Boltanski and it was at the Park Avenue Armory, New York City, in May 2010. The show consists of a five-story crane claw and a 25 foot-high mound of salvaged clothes. Every few minutes the crane picks up a random assortment of shirts, pants and dresses from the mound and releases them to flap back down haphazardly. Clothes here are certainly not about high fashion. A deeper, darker aspect of clothes and their meaning are represented here. The artist tells us they are meant to represent survival and death and the randomness of life”.

Turning for a moment to the matter of the centrality of social class and its relationship to clothes, I want to share with you a powerful book *Landscapes for a Good Woman*, by Carolyn Kay Steedman, a sociologist who writes of her growing up as a daughter of a working class mother in South London during the 1950’s (2003). Steedman, graphically and poignantly, writes about the social world she and her mother knew about, and their place within it. She tells us “My mother did what powerless women have always done and do still, she worked on her body, the only bargaining power she ended up with, given the economic times and the culture in which she grew.” Appearance was connected to her choice of clothes. She goes on to tell us what her mother learned by the 1960’s. She learned through magazines and anecdotes “how the goods of that world of privilege might be appropriated, with the cut and fall of a skirt, a good winter coat, with leather shoes , a

certain voice, but above all with CLOTHES, the best boundary between you and a cold world.”

I think we can all agree that clothes carry a vast and deep panoply of meanings; symbolic and metaphoric in nature. Thinking about clothes and their meaning to each of our patients and to us, may shed light on deep, dare I say closeted, pockets of our psyches. Way back in 1977 I wrote a paper about listening and metaphor in the clinical situation, and I cited as one example a patient whose oft repeated refrain was the difficulty she had finding suitable clothes to buy. She'd go to stores and look and look, but almost always come home empty handed. Her explanation for such frustrating experiences was the following: “Others had gotten there first and had picked out the newest and best clothes and left the junk behind.” Somehow, in her way of thinking, there was a very limited amount of the good stuff, to which she could never get access to it. Invariably she came too late. I think you can all play with some of the metaphoric meanings of her beliefs around clothes. She was in treatment for many years, and eventually she began to find clothes she liked and took great pleasure in her purchases; a felicitous indicator of deeper psychic changes.

So, let's look some more at the clinical situation, and start by answering a question I posed earlier. Do we think about patients when we get dressed for our work day? I do think about the patients I'm going to see on any specific day and choose my wardrobe accordingly. Some patients don't seem to ever notice ever what I am wearing, and with them I am less thoughtful about what I choose to wear. With other patients who comment about my clothes, or whom appearance and clothes are important to them, I dress more carefully and perhaps take a bit more effort... With certain patients it's fun to wear something new and different... I like to feel good in what I'm wearing and try not to wear the same thing I wore the last time I saw the same patient. Some patients I feel I can be more casually dressed than others... In short, overall I like to look nice and well put together. I enjoy the novelty of deciding what to wear each day, based on the weather, the degree of comfort and the patients I'm seeing that day, although sometimes I'm lazy and just don't put out much energy around what I wear. And, that's okay too. How I dress, including clothes, shoes, jewelry, is but one of several ways I bring myself into the consulting room. Although I've moved very far from my original training and its prohibitions against expressing too much of your

personality in your clothes, I have some mindfulness about what might be inappropriate dress: e.g. I'm reminded of a male supervisee whom I had many years ago. He wore jeans with an eye catching fly; thereby making it inevitable that your eyes would be drawn to his nether region. That felt inappropriate and I remember how uncomfortable it was to talk to him about it as all the staff was urging me to do. In regards to patient's attire; with some patients I might well comment about something they were wearing, particularly if it seems to have some relevance to our work. With other patients I would never comment on their clothes. In all of these areas around clothes; mine or my patients, I feel much freer to comment upon, talk about and discuss than I did formerly.

In general, I would say that throughout therapy, most of my female patients and many male patients invariably talk about clothes in a variety of different contexts. With some frequency, patients share memories of going shopping with their mothers.

Rhoda D. is now a woman in her mid 50's whom I have seen for over 25 years. Rhoda is a very smart, extremely thoughtful, somewhat proper and conservatively dressed professional woman married with no children. She comes from a very wealthy family stemming from a family business started by her maternal grandfather. Her grandparents, especially her grandmother were very important to her. Rhoda is the oldest of four siblings and the only daughter. Much was expected of Rhoda, growing up. Perfectionism was the name of the game in the family. Her mother was obsessive and demanding and was frequently volatile. Clothes, dressing well and in high style was her mother's credo. Rhoda has early memories of hiding in one particular closet. The closet she chose was a storage closet, so all of the clothes, many of which were coats and other outer garments, were encased in plastic, so she couldn't cuddle next to the fur coats and feel cozy. None the less, being surrounded by those clothes served as an oasis for her. In this closet she could feel at peace. She also could hear her mother. When her mother's voice got to a certain pitch, Rhoda knew it was time to come out. In all the years she used this closet as her temporary safe base, her mother never knew it. Rhoda was an extremely vigilant child, forever on guard and on the lookout. She actively problem solved her way through childhood, anticipating her mother's moods and positioning herself accordingly. Rhoda's mother was a shopper par excellence. She went to the finest stores, knew the salespeople, managers and buyers. She was up on the latest fashions. Dressing herself and her daughter well was a serious manner,

nothing frivolous or light about it. Certainly not much fun. To this day, she knows ahead of time when a sale is and what will be on sale, and it's a matter of urgency that her daughter drops whatever to accompany her, then and there, to the store. There was a rather rigid ritual around clothes. Clothes had to be reviewed at the end and at the beginning of the season. Nothing must be kept that was deemed out of style. From Rhoda's point of view, her mother could be absolutely ruthless when it came time to getting rid of the old things.. Out with the old, In with the new. But, Rhoda had her attachments to her clothes and other things, and it was very painful to her to let them go. Her mother simply couldn't fathom that attitude. It appeared to be almost Rhoda's duty to keep up the high style that both her grandmother and mother maintained. In a manner of speaking, Rhoda had to uphold her family's social reputation by her deportment and dress. Quite a burden to be sure.

Rhoda's conflicts were indeed fraught with anguish. Choosing clothes and her whole relation to clothes is fraught with pain that is blatantly alive. One of the major topics through all our years of work, has been about her closet, sorting through clothes, deciding which ones to get rid of and which to keep, and purchasing new clothes. As she goes through sorting out her clothes, her mother's words from when she was a child still ring in her ears. "These have to go, they don't fit you...or they don't look good on you anymore, etc." Rhoda says, "I have a hard time making decisions, what should I choose, what should I save, what should I let go"? Rhoda's sense of deprivation. sense of loss and abandonment and identification with the items given away are palpable. "It pains me to think of the old clothes in the bag." She frets that if she lets things go, she may not find the equivalent quality again. We have had many, many discussions through all these years, about her attachment to the past and her associations to each article of clothing. She feels it also says something about the future. In a very profound sense, she has come to see that so many of her feelings around clothes say something to her about the "meaning of life". Once again, Bollas's notion of "evocative object" inevitably comes to my mind. Rhoda says she grew up hearing, "Your mother is so attractive, and she dresses so beautifully". Rhoda never felt she was as attractive as her mother nor could she dress as beautifully. Self contempt and despair have been constant companions for Rhoda every step of the way, although the depth and extent of her despair has been considerably mitigated through the years of our work.

Shopping with her mother was fraught with utter anguish from childhood on. Her mother would pick something out and even if Rhoda didn't like it, she'd end up getting it, because "Otherwise I'd leave empty handed". Using her analytic way of thinking she has thought and thought about what happens around clothes for her with her mother and with herself. She says, "My mother is intuitive and I'm not. I have to think things through more carefully." As she's gotten older, she likes some of her mother's choices for her, but certainly not all. She's come to see that her mother doesn't pay attention to details the way Rhoda does and often chooses things for her now middle aged daughter that may be good looking, but not really right for her figure, her life style, etc. With time, Rhoda has become more in touch with her ability to know what she likes, and feels more comfortable with her choices. Parting with things is still a struggle. In many ways, one could say that her lengthy treatment has been conducted around the crucible of clothes.

Another middle-aged patient who has had life long struggles around accepting her body self recalls how hellish it was going shopping with her mother. She distinctly recalls her mother picking something off the rack and saying "That would be the cutest thing on you." Whereupon her daughter would think, "Who do you think I am. All those frilly clothes. They're just what I don't like". Invariably they'd end up having a huge fight. Another patient in her late 30's talks about how she doesn't know what to wear for the many groups she participates in as a volunteer. She bemoans the fact that she feels she "can't get it right". She's come to think that the women in these groups wear a kind of uniform that she has yet to fully decipher. She says "I worry before an event. I don't like to call attention to myself. I like clothes that have plain, classic lines; I don't think the others do. She recalls her times shopping with her mother and their fights... Reared in the Catholic faith, she recounts the very last time she went to confession. She and her mother had gotten in to a terrible fight at the department store and she had screamed at her, "I hate you!" She says with some pride, "when I finally turned 16 I got my driving license, got a job, bought my own clothes and never went shopping with my mother again!"

Talking about mothers and daughters shopping and yelling at each other at the store, puts me in mind of a painful scene from the recent movie "Please Give". The mother and teenage daughter are shopping for jeans. The daughter wants a special designer brand; the mother says it's too expensive. The daughter tries on a number of other less expensive jeans and feels

miserable. The mother says they look good, the daughter feels they look horrid, and end up yelling in the store at the mother “I hate you!”...

I end with a quote from Oscar Wilde:

“One should either be a work of art, or wear a work of art.”

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