

A STUDY OF SUCCESSFUL BUYING BEHAVIOR  
IN THE FIELD OF FASHION MERCHANDISING

A CREATIVE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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BY

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## ABSTRACT

CREATIVE PROJECT: A study of successful buying behavior: In the field of fashion merchandising

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In the retail industry it is very imperative for major department stores, exclusive boutiques and lucrative fashion companies to provide clothing that propitiates target populations. A retail buyer is someone who selects what items will be stocked in a store, based on demographics and predictions about what is popular amongst consumers. The purpose of this project is to provide supplemental educational material that will explore the buying habits and daily routines of retail buyers. There is a lack of first-hand information that will allow students to explore the “behind the scenes” information about buying that can only be retrieved by interviewing the actual routine of a buyer. By conducting these interviews I was able to collect methods that retail buyers use to seek new trends. This method of measurement (interviews) exposes the thought process of buyers in the fashion industry and display behaviors that produce effective results. An educational CD was made that features the interviews.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background**

Retail buyers are responsible for developing product assortments using market trend analysis information, as well as managing sales and margins. It is a multi-faceted position that includes contract negotiations, inventory management, sales planning, forecasting and close coordination with the merchandising and operations teams (Bonel, 2003). Understanding retail buying behavior has become increasingly important for both consumers and retail buyers.

Developments in the structure of the supply chain have made retail chains gatekeepers to consumer markets, because producers who want to sell their products to consumers, have to sell them to retailers first (Davies, 1990). In order to create and maintain cooperative relationship with retailers, knowledge of retail buying behavior is not to be ignored by producers in the fashion industry (Davies, 1990). These considerations have not yet gained wide acceptance, which is why research findings about retail buying appear to be fragmented and incomplete.

Prior research has been concerned with generating lists of criteria; more research is needed in order to fully understand retailers' selections of garments, and in particular,

the behaviors that stimulate certain buying choices (Bonel, 2003). Previous literature designates a need for focusing attention on the issue of retail buying and in particular, the behavioral characteristics behind buying decisions. As a result of this limited information, there are inadequate education materials available about the retail buyer. This information is important for students who are interested in becoming a successful buyer.

### **Problem Statement**

There is an abundance of underdeveloped information that describes the role of retail buyers in the fashion industry. General material is presented that gives students an overall idea of what is expected of fashion buyers. However, there is an absence of first-hand information that will allow students to have a more in depth understanding of the psyche behind retail buyers' purchase decisions.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this creative project is to provide supplemental instructive material that will explore the buying habits and daily routines of successful retail buyers in the fashion industry. Conducting this study will equip students, professors, and professionals with observed evidence of the behavioral characteristics of successful retail buyers.

### **Rationale**

Prior interviews have successfully been conducted in the fashion industry, most notably within the area of fashion merchandising, to provide students with information pertaining to the influences that help retail buyers make successful purchase decisions (Bonel, 2003). There is a dearth of research that studies the psychological characteristics

of buyers in relation to the actual thought process that a buyer goes through when having to decide what items to place in a store or boutique (Bonel, 2003). As mentioned previously, the purpose of this creative project is to provide supplemental educational material that will explore the buying habits and daily routines of retail buyers; conducting this study will equip students, professors, and professionals with observed evidence of the behavioral characteristics of successful retail buyers.

### **Assumptions of the Project**

The following assumptions were made in the development and implementation of the study:

- The interviews will provide students with detailed information about the buying habits of retail buyers in the fashion industry.
- Students will have a better understanding of what it takes to be a successful buyer after listening to the information presented in the recorded interviews.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following are definitions related to the creative project and are from a book about retail buying (Diamond & Pintel, 2004).

- Retail buyer- a buyer is an individual who selects what items will be stocked in a store, based on his or her predictions about what will be popular with shoppers.
- Target market- a group of customers that the business has decided to aim its marketing efforts towards.
- Merchandising- the activity of promoting the sale of goods.
- Budget- an estimate of income and expenditure for a set period of time.
- Trend analysis- study of changes over time.

- Forecaster- estimation of a future trend or event.
- Inventory management-The overseeing and regulation of the ordering, storage and use of components that a company will use in the production of the items it will sell as well as the overseeing and controlling of quantities of finished products for sale.
- Sales planning- The process of determining the overall sales plan to best support consumers wants and needs.

### **Summary**

Little is known about the intellectual process that retail buyers go through when making important purchase decisions for major department stores. The purpose of this study was to provide supplemental instructive material, which will explore the buying habits and daily routines of retail buyers to equip students, professors, and professionals with observed evidence of the behavioral characteristics of successful retail buyers. Results of this study can be used to inform students of the characteristics needed to develop a successful career as a retail buyer, as well as how to make smart, profitable buying decisions.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

Retail buying is very important because buyers are directly responsible for selecting and ordering merchandise to be sold to consumers. The skill with which they carry out this responsibility directly affects the sales volume of their store and its share of the total retail market. Merchandise buyers may buy for a department, entire store, or a chain of stores (California Occupational Guide Number 118. Interest Area 8, 1995) In this review of literature, the behavioral characteristics, didactic theories, company policies, demographics, and statistics will be investigated to further understand the inspirations behind retail buyers' purchasing decisions.

#### **Behavioral Characteristics**

Lancaster (2011) said the task of buyers are to identify consumers' wants and needs, then purchase those products that will satisfy them. In the retail buying industry, it is essential to not only identify what consumers require, but to also find out why they have certain wants and needs. Lancaster suggested that one strategy that employed by

retail buyers' purchase decisions is the idea of gaining insight into the minds of consumers and studying their buying behaviors, in order to make successful purchase decisions. Once retail buyers get accustomed to the mentality of consumers, which stems from detailed observation of past and present consumer buying behaviors and patterns, successful product selection can be accomplished.

Another facet that plays a significant role in a retail buyers' purchase process is cultural influences, these are learned behaviors that have been passed down from generation to generation (Lancaster, 2011). It is important for buyers to recognize culture influences when making purchase decisions because buying patterns and behaviors tend to vary from culture to culture. For example, a consumer of African-American descent may not be stimulated to purchase the same type or style of jeans as a consumer of Caucasian descent. Being able to decipher and recognize the ethnic variances between cultures is a valuable characteristic to have as a retail buyer. The cultural aspect of retail buying is an important component to understand and be aware of; however, theoretical models that provide preexisting data about merchandising are equally significant.

### **Theoretical Models**

Bonel (2003), states that no theoretical model of retail buying behavior has gained wide acceptance, which is the reason why research findings appear incomplete and fragmented. Conversely, there are theories and models that deal with consumer purchase behavior that are applicable to the motivations of retail buyers, as well as video footage that depict the tasks and duties required of retail buyers. The hedonic econometric model is one where the independent variables are related to quality, such as the quality of a product that the buyer selects for a store (Rajagopal, 2006). The hedonic model explains

the emotional aspect of buying; hedonic consumer consumption is an important intermediary in determining buyers' purchase decisions. Retail buyers may inspire positive emotions among consumers by providing the right mix of merchandise and pricing. Having the right assortment of merchandise in stores can stimulate the consumer to make a purchase decision simply because retail buyers pay close attention to past purchases, store inventory, and the time it takes for certain merchandise to sell out. For example, when consumers walk into stores and gravitate toward certain items, such as white V-neck shirts or black skinny jeans, they become inspired to purchase these items due to the ability of retail buyers to identify the wants and needs of consumers.

However, the hedonic econometric model is inadequate because it is solely based upon concepts drawn from sociology (Ratchford, 1975). The hedonic econometric model is limited to focusing on human societal problems rather than the cognitive processes of consumer behavior. The Revealed Preference Theory (Samuelson, 1938) is a method that makes it possible to decipher the best possible product decisions when it comes to consumer behavior. This theory states that preferences of consumers can be revealed by their purchasing habits. The Revealed Preference Theory can be applied to retail buyers' purchase decisions because consumers make consumption decisions in order to maximize their utility, which is defined as merchandise that is useful, beneficial, or profitable to consumers. The purchase decisions of retail buyers are determined by the wants and needs of consumers, in which are monitored by studying consumer purchase history. The Revealed Preference Theory does an incomparable job at describing the end result of consumer decisions, which is the product selection; on the other hand this theory fails to explore steps taken by consumers leading up to product selection.

In contrast, The Theory of Reasoned Action, also referred to as the Fishbein model, strictly focuses on the predictions of behavior intention (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The content of this theory does not relate to the motivations of retail buyers, yet focuses on the attitudes of consumers and how those attitudes influence their product consumption. While the Fishbein model is adequate in predicting consumers' purchase behavior related to the understanding of their attitudes, it is limited to consumers' perceptions of merchandise rather than the inspirations, or driving force behind the product selection decisions of retail buyers.

Another consumer behavior theory that can be applied to retail buyers in relation to purchase decisions is the Engel Kollat Blackwell Mode (EKB). This particular model was designed to serve as an outline for organizing the body of knowledge concerning consumer behavior (Blackwell & Kollat, 1973). The Engel Kollat Blackwell Model relates to the purchase decisions of retail buyers because it specifically outlines the decision process used to make buying decisions. The five step process consists of the following steps: problem recognition, search, evaluation of alternative, purchase, and outcome. "Problem recognition" occurs when there is a difference between ones' desired state and actual state. "Search", which is the next step in the EKB model, occurs when consumers begin to look for solutions to the problem. The "evaluation of alternatives" takes place as consumers weigh the pros and cons of the search results from the previous step. The "purchase" phase occurs when consumers actually make a sound purchase decision by selecting merchandise. The last step, which is the "outcome", transpires after consumers have purchased the selected merchandise.

If put on a continuum, the Theory of Reasoned Action would be on the opposite side of the Engel Kollat Blackwell model because its attention is strictly directed toward consumer behavioral intentions and the way consumers act and conduct themselves when intending to make a purchase decision, not the thought processes that cultivate those behavior intentions, which would represent the EKB model perfectly.

Of all theories/models discussed, the EKB model relates most to adaptation of the retail buyers role and their purchase decision making process because it does a step by step analysis of the rigorous regime that buyers go through when making purchase decisions. To further elaborate on the EKB model, it is comprehensive and shows the components of decision making and the relationships among them (Eunice 2008). The EKB model also shows the components of decision making and demonstrates the relationships and interactions that occur throughout the five step process previously described (Eunice, 2008).

Most importantly this model shows that decision making is not a one-way process nor is it stagnant. The EKB model would provide the opportunity to investigate the retail buyer's decision making process related to the consumers decision making process, to analyze every aspect of consumer decision making, to recognize the stage that target consumers have reached in the decision process by understanding that decision making continues even after purchases are made, and facilitates the identification and classification of psychological variables that influence the purchase decisions of consumers (Eunice 2008).

## **Supplemental Material**

There are numerous educational videos and documentaries available about retail buying that describe and illustrate behaviors and skills necessary to be a successful buyer. These videos incorporate short segments of interviews with retail buyers who discuss their perceptions, views, and opinions of skills that they deem necessary in order to be a successful buyer in the fashion industry (Parkins & Ginn, 2009). Skills mentioned in several videos about retail buying include, a buyer's focus needs to be on selecting the best products of high quality in order for consumers to purchase. Retail buyers in the fashion industry need to have an eye for fashion, as well as, the ability to communicate with people on every level (store, corporate office, government) (Wallace, 2011).

Another video featuring a buyer of women's apparel, notes that there has to be a balance between creativity and commerciality; the two aspects cannot over shadow each other (Kashiri, 2010). In another video, the buyer stated that he is solely responsible for driving sales by executing an exciting merchandise mix that brings customers into stores (Carr, 2008). The information presented in available videos gives students a general idea of what is expected of fashion buyers. However, there is a lack of first-hand information that will allow students to explore the "behind the scenes" information about buying that can only be retrieved by documenting the actual routine of a buyer.

## **Summary**

There is limited information about buying in the fashion industry. Related theories stem from consumer behavior research. These include, the Hedonic Econometric Model is one focuses solely on the emotional piece of consumer purchase behavior, but does not cover the cognitive aspect of consumer product selection decisions. The Revealed Preference Theory is a method that makes it possible to decipher the best possible product decisions when it comes to consumer behavior. The Theory of Reasoned Action is one that is strictly directed toward consumer behavior intentions and the ways in which consumers act when intending to make purchase decisions. The Engel Kollat Blackwell Model was created to serve as a framework for consolidating the body of knowledge in relation to consumer behavior.

However, education materials concerning buying behavior are limited and there is inadequate research about retail buying. This creative project will expose the inspirations and motivations behind retail buying in the fashion industry and explore the necessary skills needed for a successful buying career in the fashion industry. This creative project will also uncover the mindset of retail buyers as well as consumers because in order to provide consumers with their wants and needs, buyers need to be knowledgeable about what is in high demand at all times.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

#### **Introduction**

There is an absence of first-hand information that will allow students to have a more in depth understanding of the psyche behind retail buyers' purchase decisions. However, the purpose of this study is to provide supplemental instructive material that will explore the buying habits and daily routines of retail buyers and equip students, professors, and professionals with observed evidence of the behavioral characteristics of successful retail buyers. The methods used to implement the project will be presented in this chapter.

#### **Institutional Review Board Approval**

The Institutional Review Board determined that the project did not require IRB review. However, the researcher completed the CITI training to satisfy the institutional instructional mandates in the protection of human research subjects (see Appendix).

## **Subjects**

The population for this study included three retail buyers from the Kohl's Department Store. These buyers worked in Wisconsin.

## **Procedures**

Prior to conducting the phone interviews, the researcher developed a series of ten questions pertaining to retail buying in relation to fashion merchandising (see Appendix). The questions developed were meant to overcome the lack of primary information available to students about the behavioral characteristics and purchase influences of retail buyers, by obtaining first-hand information from the interviewees. The questions were made to expose the thought process of merchandise purchasers. Once the questions were fully developed, permission to record the series of interview questions was obtained from all three interviewees (retail buyers of Kohl's Department Store) via email. Participants signed a permission and release form provided by the Teleplex Center at Ball State University (see Appendix). Upon permission being attained, the Teleplex Center at Ball State University was then contacted to schedule three individual recorded interviews.

A manager from the Teleplex Center then prepared the recording studio with the appropriate audio settings. Once the technicalities were all correct, the researcher proceeded to dial the interviewee's contact number, and recording immediately followed. During the interview, the researcher took careful notes of what was discussed for further educational use. After the completion of each individual interview, the researcher thanked the interviewees for their participation and all recording was stopped. The tapes were edited and the final version was burned to a CD.

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed by questions for themes. The themes were determined by one researcher and a second one confirmed the themes. The results of the analysis were associated with several relevant theories that were discussed within the literature review. The Hedonic Econometric Model, The Revealed Preference Theory, The Theory of Reasoned Action, and the Engel Kollat Blackwell Model are theories that proceed to break down the details of consumer preferences in relation to retail buying purchase decisions. Discussion questions were developed to highlight key points in the CD.

### **Research Questions**

As mentioned previously, a series of ten questions were developed to gain insight into the lives and daily responsibilities of three retail buyers from Kohl's Department Store (see Appendix). Various topics were discussed as a result of the development of these questions, which are as followed: the background history of each retail buyer, fashion design inspirations, the most enjoyable aspect of retail buying, selection of the latest fashion trends, cyclicalities of trend development, specific retail departments, difficulties of the retail industry, company policies, traveling expenses, and budget requirements.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this creative project was to: 1) provide supplemental instructive material that will explore the buying habits and daily routines of retail buyers, 2) provide students, professors, and professionals with observed evidence of the behavioral characteristics of successful retail buyers, as well as, 3) to improve the dearth of first-hand information about buying characteristics and persuasive mentality of retail buyers. A discussion of the results will be presented in this chapter.

#### **Sample**

In May and June 2012, three retail buyers from Kohl's Department Store located in Wisconsin, willingly participated in individually recorded interviews. Each buyer specialized in different sections within Kohl's Department Store. The first interviewee, Brian Fowler is a senior buyer of *junior's knits and outerwear*. The second examinee, Jason Stevens, is a senior buyer of *young men's tops* and the last person interviewed, Jen

Serra, is also a senior buyer, but in the *home goods* department with a special focus on bath towels. Each interview lasted 15 to 30 minutes.

### **Interview Summaries**

Ten open ended questions were asked of each of the participants. More questions were asked during the interview process for further probing. The interviews were analyzed for repeated themes. The following is a brief summary of each interview; for the transcription of each interview see the appendix.

#### **Junior's knits and outerwear**

Brian Fowler, the senior buyer for Junior's Knits and Outerwear, buys specifically for the junior's department but started in the fashion industry by buying for other sectors, such as the jewelry department. He also worked as a budget planner, as well as a retailer for Macy's Department Store and Von Maur. During the interview, Brian expressed that his fashion inspiration comes from all aspects of the industry and that he enjoys the challenge of supplying customers with their wants and needs. He said there is no specific daily routine for retail buyers; everyday reports from customers are read, performance is always being evaluated, days are spent with internal vendors, and a lot of interaction consistently happens with advertising and marketing departments.

When Brian was asked about the most enjoyable experience of being a retail buyer, he responded with no reservation that the gamble, excitement, immediate response, opportunity to set trends, and convey to customers what he wants them to wear are his favorite aspects of the buying business. Perhaps the most significant question asked was, what influences the purchase decisions that he makes on a daily basis; surprisingly the trendsetter team plays a major role in the selection of trends. The top

three ideas are narrowed down and the buyer works exclusively with the market and trend setting team to find out what the competition is doing. Brian concluded the interview by expressing the fact that the retail industry can be a difficult one to be successful in, and that many retail companies go out of business. The key to survival is to be very selective as an editor and strategist.

### **Young men's tops**

Jason Stevens, the senior buyer for Men's Tops, buys specifically for the men's department but got his start in the fashion industry six years ago as a retailer for Macy's Department Store. At the start of the interview, Jason was asked who his biggest inspirations were in men's fashion; Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, and Michael Kors were the main designers that he indicated influenced his sense of style. As with Brian, Jason said there is not a day-to-day routine for retail buyers. Jason stated that sales from the previous days are reviewed, all while working in close proximity with the product team. He also mentioned his frequent interaction with assistant buyers, planners, and analysts in order to get the best possible selection of merchandise for the greater good of consumers.

When Jason was questioned about what he loves the most about being a retail buyer, he responded by saying that he appreciates the feeling of gratitude that he gets in being able to work with brand teams and develop trend ideas in the hopes of interpreting these ideas to consumers. Jason finished the interview by articulating what he feels is the biggest challenge of being a retail buyer; restrictions put on the merchandise that can be purchased and the idea that Kohl's Department Store upholds a very family oriented environment with all of their merchandise, poses obvious challenges that require Jason to

be extremely careful with the selection of clothing so that he stays within these guidelines outlined by the company.

### **Home goods**

Jen Serra, the senior buyer, buys specifically for the home goods department with a special focus on bath towels and bathrobes. Jen started in the fashion industry as a retail buyer 22 years ago by working through a training program. Throughout her college career she worked at a retail store on the east coast called Boscoes. She then landed a job at May stores, which was eventually bought by Macy's Department Store. Soon after, Jen was hired by Kohl's Department Store as a buyer for toys and ultimately became the senior buyer in the home goods department where she has been ever since.

At the start of the conversation, Jen was asked who her biggest inspirations were as designers in the home goods industry. Jen replied by stating that she is mostly inspired by the designs of the well-known HGTV series. Jen said each day she attends early morning meetings with vendors, product development teams, and merchandise analysts to look over day-to-day sales and makes decisions about the merchandise based on consumer preferences and sales performance. When questioned about what she loves most about being a retail buyer of home goods, Jen responded by saying that she enjoys the development aspect of it all; she appreciates the end result of her labor, which is seeing the actual product on the sales floor.

The main factor that deciphers which trends are followed and what products are purchased, is the competition. Jen and her team of merchandise analysts are constantly conducting research on what the competition is doing and what products are selling successfully. Jen finished the interview by articulating the biggest challenge for her as a

buyer, which is managing time in a proficiently and effectively. Jen stated that calendar and time management are two very essential aspects of buying that have to be perfected in order to be efficacious in this industry.

### **Question and Answer: Theme selection**

Twelve open-ended questions were asked of each of the participants. More questions were asked during the interview process for further probing. The interviews were analyzed for repeated themes. The following is a summary of the themes in response to each question.

#### **How did you start as a retail buyer and a briefly describe your career path?**

The experience of the participants ranged from eleven to twenty-two years. All began their career in or upon graduating from college. Two of the participants (Jen and Brian) started gaining experiences in college. Brian went to school to study fashion merchandising and Jen worked in retail part time while in college. The third, Jason, said he “lucked into” the job and was hired by a retail company at a college job fair.

All of the participants said that they switched positions and companies during their careers, staying at each position five to six years. These positions were either at other department stores or at a related department within Kohl’s. For example, Jen said: “I was there for five years until Macy’s took them over, I went looking for jobs and that is how I ended up at Kohl’s. I came to Kohl’s as a toy buyer about seven years ago; I was buying toys for three years. I moved into domestics which is where I have been ever since.”

#### **How did you get interested in being a buyer? What motivated you to want to become a retail buyer?**

All of the participants discussed a genuine interest in buying. Two of the participants did not plan to be a buyer. Jason said he “lucked into” the job. Jen studied industrial engineering. Jen and Brian noted early positive experiences working at a retail store.

The motivation to become a buyer was described by all three participants. Brian and Jen said they enjoyed the process of buying and the product. The process of shopping was noted as a childhood enjoyment by one participant and the other noted enjoying the process of buying as a professional. The excitement of the product was discussed with an interest in how to translate trends for a store. Jen said she enjoyed working with the people in retail. Jason was motivated to become a retail buyer because he was intrigued with the job description and has been working in retail ever since.

**Who is your biggest inspiration as a fashion designer?**

All of the buyers had unique encouragements that inspired them. These inspirations related well with their positions. The men’s wear buyer, Jason, stated that he is inspired by the classic styles of Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, and Michael Kors. The home goods buyer, Lisa, indicated that she has been encouraged by the HGTV home series, as well as by the modern, classic, and contemporary looks. The junior’s buyer, Brian, specified that his is inspired by all levels of the fashion business. He said: “We look at designer business to understand where they are going with the fashion direction in Europe and New York. We also really try to understand what is happening with our competitors and really look at our vendors as trend resources.”

### **What is a typical day like for you as a buyer?**

Every buyer that was interviewed stressed that there is not one “typical day” as a retail buyer. However, each buyer did express that days are filled with long, early morning meetings and they work with many people who are involved with the product in different ways including trend team members, vendors, product development teams, merchandise analysts, and financial planners. Brian and Jen said the first task they do is look at the sales from the previous day. Brian described it as analyzing how the customer voted on the products offered. Jason Stevens and Brian Fowler both pointed out that they serve as developmental coaches for assistant buyers within the Kohl’s company. Brian summarized: “At the end of the day I spend the majority of my time setting strategy and developing people.”

### **What is your favorite aspect about being a retail buyer?**

Brian said the most enjoyable aspect about being a buyer is the gamble and excitement with regards to reading the customer accurately or not. All three described satisfaction with the development of and seeing the final results of their work. Brian expressed that he loves the idea of being able to set a trend and see it come to life on the sales floor. Jason had an analogous response by saying that his favorite part of buying is that he revels in working Kohl’s private brand teams, developing ideas for products and seeing the fruit of his labor succeed within the store. Jen stated she has fun working with her product development team by actually making prototypes of products from scratch for the home goods department and delivering it to the floor.

**What factors play a role in your selection of the latest fashion trends?**

The buyers discussed selecting and editing of products for the store by comparing competitors. For example, Jason said that he constantly goes to market and observes the actions of “benchmark” brands. Jen said she takes the time to really study and observe the competition to identify new trends. Two of the buyers said they spoke with vendors about trends. The convictions of vendors to help narrow down the top three ideas are factors that Brian feels plays an important role in the selection of new trends. Jen and Jason said they examine sales from the previous year to understand what big ideas are next. In addition, Brian and Jason mentioned using trend services.

**As a retail buyer in the fashion industry, do you feel responsible for the cyclical nature of developing fashion trends?**

All three buyers responded with comparable points of view in saying that they do not feel at all accountable for the actual development of new trends, but for the interpretation of these trends to a mass audience. Jason described “A few years ago flannel was in, so it’s how do you take flannel and evolve it into a modern day look at the price points affordable for customers while keeping the right trends and colors, fabrics, and hems.” Similarly, Brian noted that “it is all about the conviction that our market and competition has.” In home goods, Jen said that trends are interpreted from clothing trends that appeared in stores six to nine months earlier.

**Do you focus on specific departments when selecting merchandise to purchase?**

All three buyers focus on a particular product category. Brian Fowler strictly focuses his attention on buying for the junior’s knit and active wear department, which is

the sixth biggest department for the Kohl's Company. Jason Stevens and Jen Serra also concentrate explicitly on their individual departments which are the young men's tops and home goods (bath towels/robes).

**What is the biggest challenge you face as a retail buyer in the fashion industry?**

Each buyer answered this question slightly differently. The retail industry was noted to be a difficult one to be successful in and many companies have suffered from retail consolidation. Therefore, Brian feels that the biggest challenge of all is being able to maintain and sustain as a company long-term. Jen expressed her biggest challenge as a home goods buyer is calendar management. She said she has to meet with a lot of different people and various trend teams so the primary challenge is being able to balance out your time efficiently. Jason stated that the fashion industry has a very dynamic environment in which trends move quickly through the market; the most difficult aspect for him is trying to see what impact the competition has on the retail business and what improvements can be made to enhance the company to stay relevant and competitive amongst the competition. Brian discussed time management later in the interview stating that as a student, time management was an important skill to develop. As a buyer there are many tasks to complete at one time, so it is important to be able to "manage and multi-task. Two buyers, Brian and Jason noted that reading the consumer and timing their selections well was another challenge of being a buyer.

**Are there company policies or restrictions that you are required to follow when purchasing merchandise?**

All of the buyers said there are company policies that must be followed. They said financial plans that are developed by a financial planner must be followed in order to stay within the buying budget. Brian discussed product selection within the financial framework and the company's key ideas. He said: "So if we say that we are going to take a stand for three big ideas, whether it is lace or neon colors, then that is not a restriction. We keep in mind that we abide by the big ideas fueling the company's business..."

Two buyers discussed broader policies. Jen also indicated that Kohl's has a clear standard of ethics that has to be followed and Jason preceded to explain that Kohl's is a very family oriented company and all of their exclusive brands have to meet the "family oriented" requirements.

**Is there excessive traveling involved with being a buyer, if so, does this make your job easier or more demanding? Are you reimbursed for traveling expenses or are expenses compensated for by the company?**

Each buyer does a significant amount of traveling throughout the year. Brian Fowler travels 15 times a year because the junior's department moves at a fast pace and trends are constantly in rotation. Jason Stevens and Jen Serra both specified that they take at least one trip per month, which puts a hindrance on the amount office work that they are able to get done. All of the buyers said travel helps them understand the retail market. Brian described "...we are in market, seeing our vendors, looking at products, talking about big ideas, talking about what's next. We are also looking at the competition..." Jason discussed traveling to understand the market by observing the consumer. He said:

“Parts of the job make it easier because it (travel) helps me to understand the west coast lifestyle being in LA and understanding the surf-stake environment versus being in Milwaukee.”

**What advice can you give students who are looking to pursue a job in the fashion industry as a retail buyer?**

All of the participants said students should learn as much as you can while in school or on the job. With the educational resources available today, Brian Fowler said that students should learn and absorb as much information as they can while in school. Jason noted that buyers must continually “stay on top of new products.” Jen stated that becoming a senior retail buyer takes years to accomplish. She feels that students need to gain retail experience and become familiar with the customer and learn how to do the basic retail tasks, such as filling merchandise from the back room onto the sales floor. She discussed flexibility in working for several positions at different locations before moving to the next level. Jason also said students must have a passion for the product and develop analysis skills.

**Summary**

Replies from each of the retail buyers were summarized and analyzed for themes. Questions were answered about the daily routines that buyers go through and what is expected of them as employees of Kohl’s Department Store. Brian, Jason, and Jen had comparable answers to the majority of questions asked; for example when asked about a typical day as a retail buyer, each said there was not a typical day for a buyer. The interviewees depicted well their lives as retail buyers by talking about specific instances and situations that occur in the workplace, at market, and on buying trips.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this creative project was to deliver additional informative material about the buying routines and daily practices of retail buyers to make an educational CD for students, professors, and professionals. The CD highlights the characteristics of prosperous retail buyers and contributes to the absence of first-hand information about retail buying. Three buyers from Kohl's were interviewed. In this chapter the results will be discussed further with regards to insights about buying behavior gained related to previous research and a brief discussion of the content in the education CD.

#### **Insights about Buying in the Fashion Industry**

The interviews provided information about the career path of a buyer for a large retail chain. As indicated by buyers in the interviews, a career as a retail buyer in the fashion industry takes years to accomplish. The average person will secure the top spot as a senior retail buyer after at least 10-15 years of in-store retail experience, often changing positions before obtaining this position.

Another point made in these interviews was the many responsibilities of retail buyers. Each day the buyers described meetings with their trend teams, product analysts, assistant buyers, and financial planners, as well as office and paper work that have to be completed before market trips. As discussed in previous literature, Jason Stevens indicated it was important for retail buyers to learn the culture in which they are buying for (Lancaster, 2011). Jason indicated that when he visits cities, such as Los Angeles he takes time to learn and explore the culture of the city in order to make successful buying decisions. The interviewees also discussed the responsibilities of a buyer are to research and develop new fashion trends while still having to monitor their competition to see what moves they make and why.

The skills needed to be successful in this profession were also conversed about in the interviews. Time management was the main skill stressed; there are many duties and accountabilities as a retail buyer and time management is needed in order to be able to carry out the requirements of this career. Having proficient product analysis capabilities is also an important skill to possess. Retail buyers have to be confident in their ability to evaluate merchandise so that it meets the wants and needs of consumers and represents the Kohl's brand well.

Previous studies have not utilized theories that relate to buying behaviors and characteristics of retail buyers in a way that effusively explores and examines the step-by-step thought process that merchandisers undergo before, during, and after purchase decisions are made (e.g., Rajagopal, 2006; Samuelson, 1938). The consumer behavior models seem quite limited; participants rely a lot on industry as well as the buying consumer to make purchasing decisions. However, this creative project thoroughly put

into practice theories relative to retail buying, such as the Hedonic Econometric Theory, which explains that buying relies on quality, such as the quality of a product that the buyer selects for a store. The hedonic econometric model indicates that there is an emotional aspect to buying and the buyer considers the emotion of the consumer. Retail buyers motivate consumers to purchase by providing the right merchandise and pricing (Rajagopal, 2006). All three of the participants discussed selection of the right trends and buying within a budget with limited discussion about pricing for the customer. The buyers discussed maintaining the Kohl's family image in product selection. This theory also relates to the responses given during the interviews because when each buyer discussed attending market, they said they looked closely for merchandise and fashion trends that will aesthetically appeal to the consumers, but also will be valuable to customers and made with the highest level of quality.

Another theory discussed that can be related to retail buying is the Revealed Preference Theory (Samuelson, 1938). This theory describes the predictions of behavior intention and focuses on the attitudes of consumers as well as product influences. This can be related to responses of the interviewees who indicated that merchandise selection is not just about choosing the most popular trends, but by digging a little deeper and observing customers actions, reactions, and attitudes while shopping in Kohl's and at competitors. The participants also discussed monitoring customer reactions by keeping a close eye on what sold. Every decision made is based upon customer likings. In addition to the consumer all three participants said they used industry focused sources to predict trends.

## **Creative Project**

### **Educational CD**

Current education videos about buying feature short segments of interviews with retail buyers and discuss buying with limited information that to understand buying first-hand (Carr, 2008; Kashiri, 2010; Parkins & Ginn, 2009). This educational CD consists of audio interviews with three retail buyers from Kohl's Department Store. The CD is arranged into three separate sections in which each buyer interviewed responds to a series of questions about buying. This educational CD is unique to any other CD or form of educational supplement because it captures "real time" situations and occurrences by interviewing buyers in their element. It captures the tangible environment of retail buying. The CD also includes questions to prompt discussion about buying.

### **Discussion questions**

Questions were developed and added to the CD to prompt discussion and reflection after listening to the audio recordings of the buyers at Kohl's. The discussion questions were developed in relation to the interviews conducted and responses of each interviewee. Such questions will stimulate critical thinking skills of students by challenging them to organize their thoughts and process the information that they heard after listening to each interview. These discussion questions also prompt students to develop their own opinions and beliefs about retail buying. The questions are:

1. After listening to interviews and the responses given by each buyer, do you have a different outlook about the current fashion trends? If so, what new outlook do you have? And how have the interviews changed your perceptions about the development of fashion trends?

2. What skills are important to be a successful buyer? After listening to the job responsibilities from each buyer, do you feel that having a job in the fashion industry is something that you can see yourself doing? Why? Why not?

3. How do you feel about retail buyers having to abide by a specific budget when shopping for merchandise to sell to consumers? Does it put a restriction on the creative abilities of retail buyers? Do you believe that having to maintain a company budget might hinder the quality of merchandise seen in stores or does it provide structure to the product selection process?

### **Summary**

By doing the recorded interviews, buyers within the fashion industry talked about pertinent information that is closely associated with theories explained in the literature review. They discussed consumer preference, merchandise quality, and the importance of product analysis. The information gathered in the interviews supplements the education material regarding retail buying and how purchase decisions are contingent upon consumer preferences, as well as constant interaction with other industry professionals.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this creative project was to provide supplementary educational material that examines the procedures, practices, and motivations of retail buyers and to prepare students, professors, and professionals with information about successful retail buying. It also ripens the lack of first-hand information about buying characteristics and the mindset of retail buyers. The conclusion of the study, limitations, and recommendations for future research are presented in this chapter.

#### **Conclusions**

This creative project utilized consumer behavior theories such as the Revealed Preference Theory, and the Hedonic Econometric Model to explain retail buying in the fashion industry. The interviews completed for this CD support these theories and serve as a representation of buying behaviors and characteristics of retail buyers. However, the researcher found that theories were limited to the consumer. Each of the buyers indicated

that they work within the industry, nurturing and developing each other, as well as, using industry based sources to spot new fashion trends.

The educational CD of interviews conducted with the retail buyers from Kohl's Department Store takes a more hands on approach in the attempt to satisfy the lack of information in regards to specific influences that buyers use to make decisions about the selection of merchandise. The interviews identified first-hand information, directly from buyers in the industry, that allowed the learner to experience what happens behind the scenes, and gave a glimpse of the technicalities and logistics that are practiced within this profession.

### **Limitations of the Study**

As the reader examines the results of this study, several limitations must be considered:

- The participants were buyers from only one department store (Kohl's Department Store).
- The number of participants was limited to a total of three buyers.

### **Recommendations for Further Research and Development of Educational Materials**

Based on the results of the present study, additional research on the behaviors of successful retail buyers should be conducted to obtain first-hand information from a variety of sources. The following suggestions are made:

- Considering that interviews were conducted with retail buyers specifically from Kohl's Department Store, buyers from other department stores, such as Von Maur, Macy's, or Nordstorm's could be contacted and asked to

participate which will provide more examples about how buyers use store/company policies when making purchase decisions.

- Since three buyers were selected to participate in the recorded interviews, more buyers could partake in the interview process of this creative project. New sections divided by store, product, or career path could be added to the CD.

Further research needs to be done, which is beyond the scope of this creative project to develop a comprehensive theory for buying as a professional in the fashion industry rather than depending on theory about consumer behavior.

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## **APPENDIX A**

A-1: IRB training certificate

A-2: Adult Consent Form

A-3: Interview Questions

**A-1 IRB Training Certificate**

**CITI Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative  
 IRB Members - Basic/Refresher Curriculum Completion Report  
 Printed on 1/18/2012**

**Learner:** brandi robinson (username: bnrobinson2)

**Institution:** Ball State University

**Contact Information** Department: family and consumer sciences  
 Email: bnrobinson2@bsu.edu

**IRB Members - Basic/Refresher:** This Basic Course is appropriate for IRB or Ethics Committee

**Stage 1. Basic Course Passed on 01/17/12 (Ref # 7286704)**

<b>Elective Modules</b>	<b>Date Completed</b>	<b>Score</b>
Introduction	01/16/12	no quiz
Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction	01/16/12	3/3 (100%)
Students in Research	01/16/12	10/10 (100%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBR	01/16/12	4/4 (100%)
History and Ethical Principles	01/16/12	6/6 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBR	01/16/12	5/5 (100%)
The Regulations and The Social and Behavioral Sciences - SBR	01/17/12	5/5 (100%)
Basic Institutional Review Board (IRB) Regulations and Review Process	01/17/12	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk in Social and Behavioral Sciences - SBR	01/17/12	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBR	01/17/12	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent	01/17/12	4/4 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBR	01/17/12	5/5 (100%)
Social and Behavioral Research for Biomedical Researchers	01/17/12	4/4 (100%)
Records-Based Research	01/17/12	2/2 (100%)
Genetic Research in Human Populations	01/17/12	2/2 (100%)
Research With Protected Populations - Vulnerable Subjects:	01/17/12	4/4 (100%)

An Overview		
Research with Prisoners - SBR	01/17/12	4/4 (100%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Prisoners	01/17/12	4/4 (100%)
Research with Children - SBR	01/17/12	4/4 (100%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Children	01/17/12	3/3 (100%)
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBR	01/17/12	4/4 (100%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Pregnant Women, Human Fetuses, and Neonates	01/17/12	3/3 (100%)
International Research - SBR	01/17/12	3/3 (100%)
International Studies	01/17/12	1/1 (100%)
Internet Research - SBR	01/17/12	4/4 (100%)
Avoiding Group Harms: U.S. Research Perspectives	01/17/12	3/3 (100%)
FDA-Regulated Research	01/17/12	5/5 (100%)
Human Subjects Research at the VA	01/17/12	3/3 (100%)
Research and HIPAA Privacy Protections	01/17/12	5/5 (100%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees	01/17/12	4/4 (100%)
Hot Topics	01/17/12	no quiz
Conflicts of Interest in Research Involving Human Subjects	01/17/12	5/5 (100%)
The IRB Member Module - "What Every New IRB Member Needs to Know"	01/17/12	7/7 (100%)
I Have Agreed to be an IRB Community Member. Now What?	01/17/12	5/5 (100%)
Ball State University	01/17/12	no quiz

**For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI participating institution. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI course site is unethical, and may be considered scientific misconduct by your institution.**

## A-2 Consent Form



**CONSENT AND RELEASE**

I, the undersigned, irrevocably grant to Ball State University ("Ball State") the right to use my appearance in photographs, sound recordings, and/or video/film recordings for any purpose it deems proper. I understand that these photographs/recordings may be used to publicize Ball State through publications, newsletters, news releases, and other printed materials; television/radio ads; and publicity materials on television and the Internet.

I irrevocably grant permission to Ball State to use my appearance in photographs or sound/film/video recordings in any manner and media throughout the world in perpetuity. I consent to the use of my name and any biographical material about me.

I understand that the images or recordings of me may be edited in Ball State's sole discretion at any time. I understand that I may or may not be given credit for my appearance in photographs or recordings.

I expressly release Ball State, its agents, trustees, officers, employees, licensees and assigns from and against any and all claims which I have or may have for invasion of privacy, defamation or any other cause of action arising out of or relating to my appearance in the photographs and/or audio or visual recordings created by Ball State.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Printed Name*

### **A-3 Interview Questions**

#### Interview Questions:

1. How did you become interested in fashion and what motivated you to become a fashion buyer?
2. Who is your biggest inspiration as a fashion designer?
3. What is a typical day like for you as a buyer?
4. What is your favorite thing about being a buyer?
5. What factors play a role in your selection of the latest fashion trends?
6. As a retail buyer in the fashion industry, do you feel responsible for the cyclicity of developing fashion trends?
7. Do you focus on specific departments when selecting merchandise to purchase?
8. What is the biggest challenge that you face as a retail buyer in today's fashion industry?
9. Are there company policies or restrictions that you are required to follow when purchasing merchandise?
10. Is there excessive traveling involved with being a buyer, if so, does this make your job easier or more demanding? Are you reimbursed for traveling expenses or are expenses compensated for by the company?
11. Are there budget requirements that have to be followed when selecting merchandise?

#### Conclusion:

12. For the conclusion of the interview I will ask you what advice you can give to students who are looking to pursue a career in the fashion industry as a retail buyer.

## **APPENDIX B**

B-1: Interview Transcriptions

## **B-1: Interview Transcriptions**

*Jen Serra: Home Goods*

- 1. What is your title and position at Kohl's Department Store? How did you start as a retail buyer and a brief description of history and background information on your career path?**

I have been in the retail business for about 22 years now and I started off with a small retail company called Boscoe's, which I was there for ten years. I spent five years in the store and five years buying. I went through a buying training program they had while I was in college, when I graduated from college they offered me a great job. I got recruited by May Company in St. Louis, which is a department store that owns about 700 stores. I was there for five years until Macy's took them over, I went looking for jobs and that is how I ended up at Kohl's. I came to Kohl's as a toy buyer about seven years ago; I was buying toys for three years. I moved into domestics which is where I have been ever since.

- 2. How did you get interested in being a buyer, what motivated you to want to become a retail buyer in the domestic goods department?**

Originally it started off as a great part time job while I was in college and it was pretty interesting, I got to work with a lot of great people in retail. The whole buying aspect was always interesting to me, about how the product makes it to the floor. How somebody finds a trend, then that translates into a buy, and then ends up on the sales floor

for a customer to buy is always interesting to me. When I was going to college, I was not retail major, I was actually industrial engineering. I switched to business when I realized that retail was where I was going to be. So, just the overall process always interested me and when I was at Boscow's, they had a really good training program for buyers where it was a lot of training specifically for buyers. How you meet with vendors, how you would translate trends and buying trends and bring products into the store was what they trained me on.

**3. Who would you say your biggest inspiration is as a fashion designer?**

Well I buy for the home store, so I like a lot of the home designers. I am a big fan of the HGTV stuff. I think that clothing trends and designs inspire styles in the home department. My personal favorite is Prada and Gucci; those are two of my favorite designers. As far as home goods, there are a lot of different people that are just inspiring. There are a lot of colors and styles, such as Baja style and lighter woods with industrial look blended together. The modern classic and contemporary look I like-that I try to get into the store.

**4. What is a typical day like for you as a buyer?**

A lot of meetings that start early, I am usually in the office by like seven-seventy-three. Officially Kohl's hours are from 8-5, but I am usually there pretty early to start the meetings at 8:30. I like to have a good hour to get through emails and organize my own calendar and meet with my team. It is a lot of meetings internally and a lot of meetings with vendors. You don't do a lot by yourself in retail because it is a big team sport.

You're meeting with vendors, trend teams, and product development partners and then you are meeting with your visual partners to figure out how to get things done. So it's a lot of meetings and time with the team.

**5. What is your favorite thing about being a buyer for the home goods department?**

I really like the development aspect of it; about 18 months ago we thought we really need an attribute towel which is a towel that doesn't fade, gets softer after washing, that you can bleach, and that dries quickly. So we went about building a towel exactly that way. The idea of having an idea, and then building something from scratch with brand new color palettes, brand new construction, while developing it along with your partner, and delivering it to the floor is probably my favorite thing about buying.

**6. What factors play a role in your selection of home goods?**

Competition and trend are the two biggest things; we spend a lot of time going comp shopping to see what they have on their floors not just in our areas but also the fashion areas. So, like what colors are trending in fashion clothing, will probably be trending in home goods within six to nine months. Whatever big bold colors that are trending in clothing will make its way over to home goods. So we will have some of the bright yellows, oranges, and corals that are trending in clothing right now. We try to understand how color and trend evolves. So we look at the competition, and in our stores to see what is working for us. Then we look at sales from last year, to understand what big ideas are to come.

**7. Are you specifically focused on buying home goods or do you venture out into other departments?**

How it is structured is that I am the towel and bathrobe buyer; I have an awareness of what goes on in the other departments but I am specifically responsible for buying in those categories. There are different buyers responsible for other categories.

**8. What is your biggest challenge of being a buyer in home goods?**

The calendar management, you want to meet with a lot of different people, see a lot of different vendors, and also spend a lot of time with your own team. So honestly, time management/calendar management is a more challenging thing and making sure you spend the right amount of time developing your people and developing your product, marketing it and making sure you are dividing up your time well is the biggest challenge of them all.

**9. Are there any company policies or restrictions that you have to follow as a buyer for Kohl's and also is there a budget that you have to follow?**

Yes, absolutely on both counts. Kohl's has a very clear standard of ethics that has to be followed. You don't lie or do anything deceitful just to make a sale; you have to be honest and fair and not lie to get to where you want to go. As far as the budget is concerned, I have a counterpart and planner, so my job is to really develop and picking the right product. There is a counterpart that owns the check book, they kind of go through and say okay, here is where our sales trend is, here is where our open to buy for

the month/season is and here is what we can afford to buy. We constantly evaluate that based on our sales trend.

**10. What kind of advice can you give to students looking to pursue a career in the fashion industry as a retail buyer?**

I think it takes a while to get to into the buying spot, there are a lot of steps that have to be gone through and there are lot things that you have to understand. Some of the best buyers are people that have also done some retail store experience. Understanding the customer, understanding how to fill from the back room, six months to a year at any retail store gives you that kind of background knowledge that is really important as you move your way up in the buying ranks or planning ranks. The knowledge of how products get to customers is really important; and then it is just being realistic with your time. At Kohl's, if someone comes in from college, they come in as a merchandise analyst which consists of four steps to being a buyer. You don't just move in four steps and then become a buyer; you are normally an analyst in two different locations, then you would move to an assistant buyer in two to three different locations and then a planner in one to two locations, then a buyer. So, there are a lot of steps along the way and it is really important that you get as much knowledge that you can.

*Jason Stevens: Young Men's Tops:*

**1. What is your title and position at Kohl's Department Store? How did you start as a retail buyer and a brief description of history and background information on your career path?**

I am the young men's tops buyer at Kohl's; I have been there for six years and have been in the retail industry for 15 years. Of those 15 years I have been a buyer for 12 years- I started at May's Department Store which is no longer in existence. I came to Kohl's about six years later.

**2. How did you get interested in being a buyer, what motivated you to want to become a retail buyer in the fashion industry?**

I kind of lucked into the job, I attended a career fair at college and there was a small regional department store in Pittsburg that was interviewing. The job description sounded interesting to me so I applied for the job and ended up getting it and have been on that career path since.

**3. Who is your biggest inspiration as a fashion designer?**

I tend to go a little more classical so Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, and I also like what Michael Kors does in terms of the men's wear line, which is a little more updated.

**4. What is a typical day like for you as a buyer?**

There is no typical day, but every morning we check the sales from the day prior. I spend a lot of times in meetings with my product team. At Kohl's a large part of my business

deals with private and exclusive brands, so a lot of time is spent with the product team on what direction we want to go reviewing samples and swatches-also kind of leading my team as well. I work with my assistant buyers and my analysts, planner, and specialist to give direction as to where we need to go from a business standpoint.

**5. What is your favorite thing about being a retail buyer?**

I really enjoy working with our private and exclusive brand teams to develop ideas for products in the market and figuring out how to interpret it to our customer base- working with the design team, and seeing the product develop. It is pretty gratifying to see something like that come to life.

**6. What factors play a role in the selection of the latest trends and how do you select your merchandise to sell to customers?**

There are a number of factors that play a role in the selection of trends. We are constantly in the market shopping and trying to see what our benchmark brands are doing. We also listen to a lot of input from vendors to see what information they have on selling. We also subscribe to a trend service to get information from things like European trends and lastly there is historical data that we look at to see what things have historically sold well in the past- and how did you evolve those into the latest trends.

**7. As a retail buyer in today's fashion industry, do you feel responsible for the cyclicity of developing the fashion trends? And can you give me an example of your interpretation of a fashion trend?**

At this level or retail, probably not so much as developing the trend but interpreting them to a more mass audience. I don't think that we are pushing the trends we are trying to be a quick and correct. A few years ago flannel was in, so it's how do you take flannel and evolve it into a modern day look at the price points affordable for customers while keeping the right trends and colors, fabric, and hems. Also, how do you not make it your dad's flannel but more appropriate to consumers with the more updated designs with being in a Western model.

**8. Do you focus on specific departments or do you branch off into different departments?**

Within the young men's department there are three sections of core consumers: the classic consumer, we use Abercrombie, American Eagle, Aeropostle, as the benchmark. Then there is a more contemporary consumer like The Buckle, and Aqua 6. Then there is an action sport consumer which is really from a specialty stand point that has a benchmark such as Pac Sun, small skate and surf shops, so when I am selecting merchandise, I try and say in these three sections.

**9. What is your biggest challenge as a retail buyer?**

There are a couple of challenges; one is that trends move a lot quicker now, it used to take six to nine months for the trend to move. Trends move a lot quicker from the coast to Europe as well as over the internet. The other challenge is that there is a very dynamic environment that is constantly changing, so for us at Kohl's we try to see what impact the

competition has on our business and what things we need to do to make sure that we stay competitive.

**10. Are there company policies or restrictions that you are required to follow when you purchase merchandise?**

We have a limit on how much we can purchase so I have to make it fit within the financial plan. We are also a family friendly company; the urban outfitters are one of our benchmark stores and there is a lot of graphic t-shirts that would be inappropriate for Kohl's to merchandise. The same thing goes for Abercrombie and Hollister because their humor t-shirts would be inappropriate for the Kohl's environment.

**11. Is there excessive traveling involved with being a buyer, and if so, does this make your job easier or more demanding? Are you reimbursed for expenses or do you have to pay out of pocket?**

I make four trips to New York, two trips to Vegas, two trips to LA, and three trips to our stores in various locations around the country that we don't get to see. So a little less than one trip per month; we get reimbursed for expenses. Parts of the job make it easier because it helps me to understand the west coast life style being in LA and understanding the surf-skate environment versus being in Milwaukee. At the same time, it is still time away from the desk, away from productive things here at the office, so in that aspect it makes it a little more difficult.

**12. Are there specific budget requirements that you have to follow when selecting merchandise?**

I have a budget planner who I work with; together we decide if we have enough money to make the purchases that we want to make. However, it is not unlimited spending, we just have to work together and prioritize and say okay I have this much I can spend this month; what product categories and looks/lifestyles do I want to spend it on. This is an ongoing process so we are held to certain financial metrics. Sales, gross margin, and turnover have to be balanced to get the right product and hit those numbers.

**13. What advice can you give to students looking to pursue a career in retail buying?**

I think you truly have to have a passion for product and be a student of the industry. Also, you have to stay on top of new products and trends and having a good analytical background is very helpful as well for this level of retail.

*Brian Fowler: Junior's Knits and Active wear*

**1. What is your title and position at Kohl's Department Store? How did you start as a retail buyer and a brief description of history and background information on your career path?**

I am a senior buyer for junior knits and active wear for Kohl's Department Store. I came to the company about six years ago as an assistant buyer in jewelry. I have also held a couple of roles in planning and buying since then. Before that I started my career about eleven years ago out of Ball State University at Von Maur Department Store, which is a department store out of Davenport, Iowa. I started there in the executive training program and was promoted to a buyer for my first job and shortly after that promotion I was

promoted again to the young men's contemporary department. A couple years after that I decided to move to a larger organization called May Department Store based out of St. Louis, which is also a part of Macy's Department Store. I was there for a few years mostly in men's clothing. I then came to Kohl's Department Store when Macys in May merged and have been here ever since.

**2. Can you tell me who your biggest inspiration is as a fashion designer?**

We take inspiration from a lot of different things; we look at all aspects of the industry. We look at designer businesses to understand where they are going with the fashion direction in Europe and New York. We also really try to understand what is happening with our competitors and look at our vendors to be trend resources. There is not necessarily one in particular but we have a large trend team here at Kohl's as well as working externally with other vendors to understand what is coming next and what we will be inspired by. In general, I take my inspiration from all levels of the fashion business.

**3. How did you get interested in being a buyer, what motivated you to want to become a retail buyer in the fashion industry?**

I have always enjoyed shopping, which sounds a little cliché, but I think that most people in retail start out doing that. I can remember going into department stores at Christmas time back when I was growing up and remember the way things looked, the shine, the glamour, the smells- everything about it got me excited about retail. I knew that when I came to college, that was something that I wanted to pursue. It was something that I

enjoyed for a long time; my first job in high school was in retail. It was a great decision and one that I am happy that I made; retail is a tough industry but it is also a very rewarding industry too.

**4. Can you explain to me what a typical day or week is like for you as a retail buyer?**

There is no typical day, but there are a lot of things that I do within my role as a retail buyer. First and foremost, every day we get a report card from our customers; I get to look at sales so I know how customers reacted to merchandise. So that is really the first thing I do every day to understand how I did, how the company did, and how the total junior's department did. After that, we spend a lot of time meeting with our external vendors, whether they come to us or are in market. We spend a lot of time with our internal product development partners looking at future developments for our private and exclusive brands. That is a big part of what I do, I probably spend a good five to ten hours a week with our product development partners talking about our exclusive business and where we are going with things. We do a lot of advertising and marketing, so there are always things to do. Two of the main things are about driving and setting strategy and developing people. I am one of ten people on the team and my job is to work with my assistant buyers and help them get to the next level where they want to be. I also serve as a mentor and coach for the rest of the team. At the end of the day I spend the majority of my time setting strategy and developing people.

**5. What is one of your favorite things about being a retail buyer?**

The thing that I love the most is that buying is a gamble; we get immediate responses from customers. I enjoy the gamble, excitement and adrenaline rush of placing a bet. It is very rewarding to be able to set a trend and convey to customers what they should be wearing and then getting a reaction from consumers to me is the most rewarding thing about being a buyer.

**6. What are the major factors that play a role in the selection of trends?**

I think it all comes down to the convictions of our vendors and forecaster to narrow down to the top three ideas. Our job is to be editors and say what the big ideas are. For example, coming out of a couple of markets ago, it was all about bright neon colors. The first three appointments that we had in New York that day, everyone was talking about neon. From sort of high to low, good to better to best, contemporary to classic, it was all about neon so we better get on it, and went out and chased almost a million units of it. It depends on the conviction that our market and competition has- what is JCpenney's doing, what is Macy's doing, what is Forever 21 doing? And trying to get an understanding of what the competition is doing in general. At the end of the day our job is to be editors and we have to take a stand and convey to customers what they should be buying.

**7. Do you focus on specific departments when buying merchandise?**

I focus on knit tops and active wear for juniors; it is a pretty narrow market. I tend to focus on just the juniors category, which is the sixth biggest category for the Kohl's company.

**8. What is your biggest challenge as a retail buyer?**

I think the biggest challenge is that the retail industry is tough. We've really seen the economy take such a dive that it is just unpredictable for retailers. As a result of that, we have seen some retailers go out of business and consolidate, and the total industry start to decline. I think the biggest thing is that we have to challenge ourselves that when business gets tough and the environment becomes difficult, you have to be even more selective as an editor of the product and really as a strategist for the business which puts pressure on us all the time and when customers tell us that they want something at a lower/higher price, our job is to be as quick and nimble as we can in reacting to the feedback that they are giving us- their feedback is ultimately our sales. Technology changes the way people shop so that definitely forces us to be smarter about how we approach our job.

**9. Are there any company policies or restrictions that you have to follow when purchasing merchandise?**

The biggest one is fitting it in with the financial framework. We have financial plans that we develop as teams. The biggest restraint is to make sure that we have the available receipts to be able to spend on these products. The second piece is abiding by the company's big ideas and key initiatives for the organization. So if we say that we are going to take a stand for three big ideas, whether it is lace or neon colors, then that is not a restriction but we keep in mind that we abide by the big ideas that are fueling the company's business within the categories.

**10. Do you have a proposed budget that you have to follow?**

The way that our team is set up, there is a buyer, and there are planners, assistant buyers, analysts, and specialists. My job is to say, decide the big ideas that we need to go after, and as a team we talk about that. The planner's job is to develop a financial framework and a receipt plan, and a sales plan that allows us to execute those strategies. So we have a planning organization that is solely devoted to creating those financial frameworks and plans to help us be able to execute our product visions.

**11. Is there excessive traveling involved? And if so, does this make your job easier or more demanding? Does the company reimburse you for traveling expenses?**

It depends on the area; I travel the most out of any buyer in the company. I travel roughly about 15 times a year and because the juniors business is so fast, we really have a market single month a year-which isn't necessarily the case for other departments. I travel more with my job as a buyer for junior's compared to when I was a jewelry buyer, because I only traveled about six times a year; which is significantly less. So it probably makes it more demanding the more you travel, I spend about a week out of the office every month to get the rest of my job done- which again is developing people and strategy. Of course there is the paper work and other tasks that I have to get accomplished, so it definitely makes it more demanding. But for me the travel piece is the fun part of the job because we are in market, seeing our vendors, looking at products, talking about big ideas, talking about what's new, what's next. We are also looking at the competition, in Macy's, Bloomingdales, JcPenny's, Saks Fifth Avenue, really looking at what they are doing and how I can apply some of those big ideas to my business too. So for me to travel is the fun

part of it because you get to interact and spend time on product and how you execute your strategies in the business. There is a travel budget that each department gets, so we put together our travel plans twice a year. I sort of frame it out for my assistant buyers and planners and just kind of say, here is how many nights on average that we are going to be traveling. The company sort of sums it up and says well okay here is what the cost of that is going to be so we either say that we are okay or we might add more nights or take away nights for some people- just depending on what the budget looks like. It is definitely a significant expense for the company but at the end of the day, we get so much out of it, that I think it is really worthwhile expense.

**12. What product category has been your favorite?**

It is a little tough to answer, but I would say that junior's has been my favorite so far because of the speed of the business. I have done men's, men's denim, children's and they tend to move at a slower pace- particularly in an area like men's where we are not that involved, so our tastes don't change much. So I think in junior's it is a lot of fun because the trends do change fast and that can be a double edged sword. It can be great and it can be a down side, if you are on the back end of a trend. For me the fast pace is what makes this probably the most fun and the most challenging because of that.

**13. What advice can you give to students who are looking to pursue a career as a retail buyer in the fashion industry?**

I would say the biggest thing is to focus and learn and absorb as much as you can while in school. I learned that I was well prepared even though you are never fully prepared

because every company is different. I think that what students have an opportunity to do is hone in on the things that are being taught, such as category management, receipt management, fundamentals of buying- that really gives you a leg up when you get into this business and I think that's the biggest thing, is to be a sponge and learn as much as you can. Read magazines, women's wear daily, read dnr, read vogue- get into stores and look at what they are doing- get online and really just think about it from the stand point of, if I were doing this job-what would I do. Learn as much as you can because it will prepare you for the future.

**14. How did you bridge the gap from being a student to becoming a buyer?**

It definitely was a challenge leaving school and going starting a professional job. The biggest struggle for me was learning how to really manage my time because there are so many competing demands on your time. Once you get into this business that you really have to be able to manage and multi-task. Today's students are probably really good at that, it wasn't something that I excelled at as a student, but if you can begin that preparation of time management now, that is one of the biggest things that people struggle with as they come in new to the organization. Spend time developing that skill now, it's not something that comes natural to everyone- for some people it is, but really learn how to manage your time and workload now.