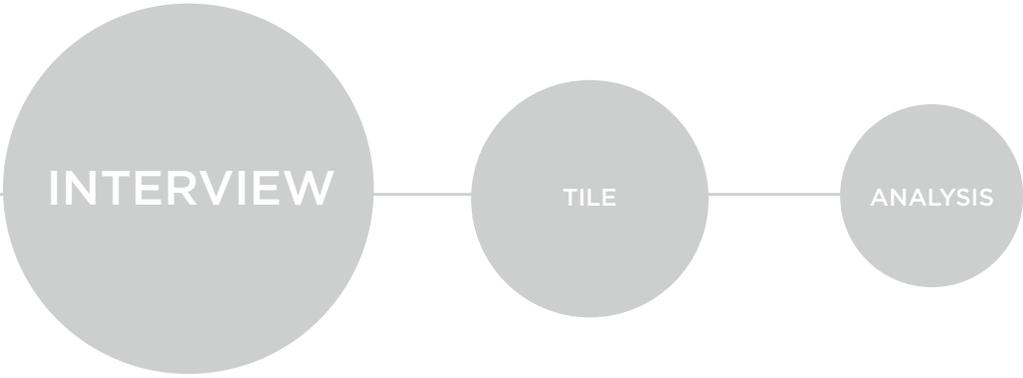


INTERVIEWS

Several interviews were conducted over the course of this exploration. The interviewees range from 19-21 years of age and all live in the New York City area. The survey size was kept narrow in order to more clearly understand similarities and differences within the results.

The interviews were taken in a semi-structured format, all beginning in a similar fashion, but allowing room for the interviewee to open up and explain their stories, rather than just regurgitating rote answers.

These interviews explore higher educational paths - all different, yet all connected in different ways. Each interview places a great emphasis on experiential or out-of-school learning, which leads to the next portion of the exploration.



INTERVIEW

TILE

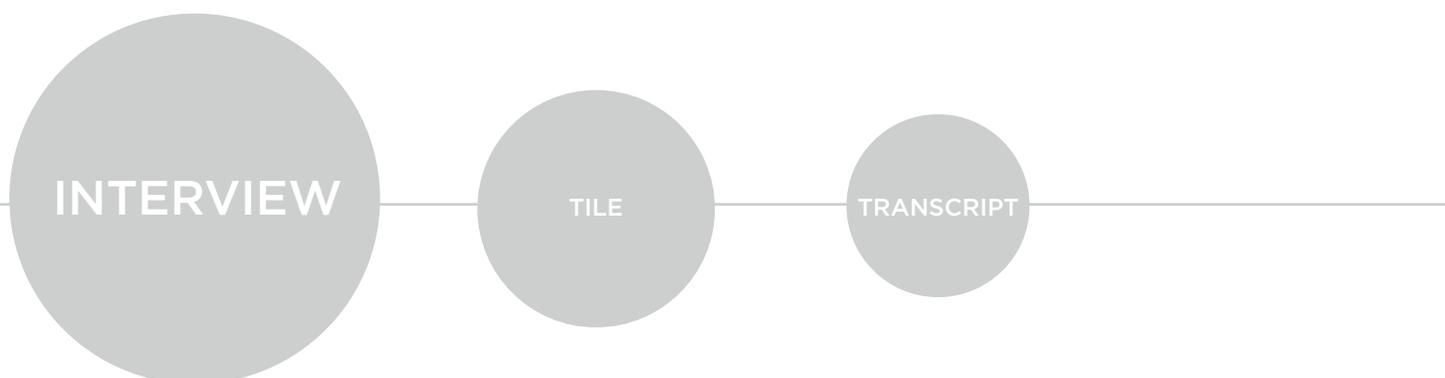
ANALYSIS

Tile, 18 years old, has the most unusual educational experiences of the interviewees. Feeling unstimulated and unchallenged by her high school and her peers, Tile left high school at the age of 16 and went to Bard College at Simon's Rock - the only early college in the country. It is clear that this is an educational environment entirely different from the one in which she had grown up. She says that at Simon's Rock "everyone was really involved, everyone was really brilliant, but it was also really intensive." She discusses her difficulties balancing a rigorous academic college life and an intensive, close-knit social environment with her young age and lack of independent experiences, understandably an issue for many students who attend this college. Tile notes, however, that at Simon's Rock she was able to create a very personalized education for herself. Her intended concentrations were in Theories of Sexuality and Photography, and had she stayed at Simon's Rock she would have received her Bachelor's Degree at the age of 20.

Instead, Tile decided that she needed a change. She explains that Simon's Rock is an extremely small school, and she had burnt herself out. She had intended to go abroad to another location or school and return to obtain her BA, but after receiving her Associate's Degree after two years, she decided to move to New York City, where she claims she has finally begun to apply the theories she learned in school to the real world. "New York City is like a giant class to me," she says. Tile has lived in the city for a little over half of a year, and is already an asset to both of the organizations where she is an intern. She says that her concentrations did help her bring focus and background knowledge to her internships, but it was only through interacting in this real-world environment that everything finally fit.

Tile says that she might go back to school to obtain a higher degree, but right now she is happy where she is and with what she is doing. She was recently offered a full-time position at one of her internships. Tile notes, "it's not that institutional education has failed me, but I kind of didn't fit, and I'm making a path for myself, which I'm happy about thus far."

It is clear how much of an impact real-world experience has had on Tile's educational path. If she had stayed at her small liberal arts school, she may never have learned anything beyond theories from books and lectures, no matter how stimulating or challenging the materials were. Tile needed the real-world experience of her internships to fully realize the potential and importance of her education. She was finally able to apply all of the information that she had been so engrossed in to actual situations that could benefit others.



INTERVIEW

TITLE

TRANSCRIPT

What school did you attend and what was your major?

I took kind of an alternative path. I dropped out of high school. I went to a college called Simon's Rock, and it was a little different than most, because it was an early college. It was, in fact, an actual institution, but it was full of students that were a lot younger than most college students are.

Around what age were these students?

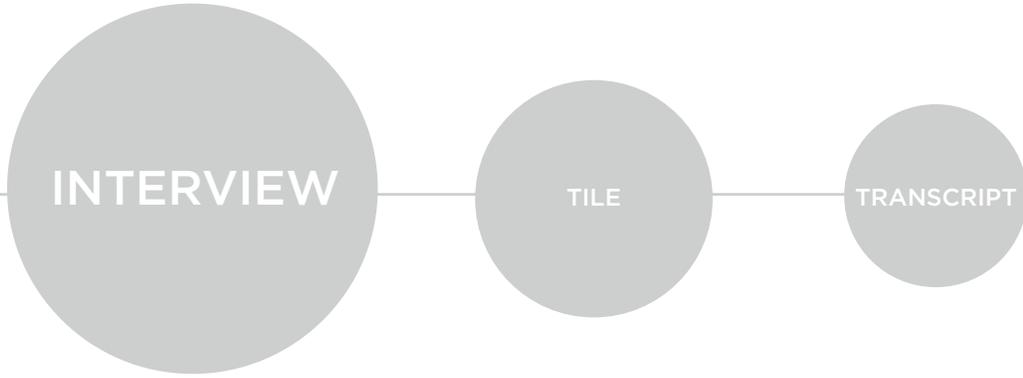
I was sixteen. People in their freshman year entered when they were anywhere from fifteen to seventeen. Simon's Rock was a really interesting choice for me because it was a very personalized education. So, in that vein, I created my own concentration. I actually got my Associate's Degree, not my Bachelor's Degree. I stayed there for two years, which is my highest level of education right now. My intended major was Theories of Sexuality and Photography.

Why did you decide to leave school and not pursue your BA?

When I went to Simon's Rock, obviously as a sixteen-year-old...child, it was certainly an experience. It wasn't like I was planning to go for four years necessarily; it was a path out of what I was experiencing in high school, which was a lack of interest in the curriculum, and total disinterest on behalf of my peers. But Simon's Rock was exactly the opposite; everyone was really involved, everyone was really brilliant, but it was also really intensive. I loved the work, I didn't find that it was necessarily too hard, but balancing being a young adult on a campus that was so small, as well as the immense workload, emotionally, was really difficult. I basically burnt myself out. It was such a small campus that I felt like I'd run my course there, for the time being. My intention was to leave Simon's Rock and maybe go back, maybe go somewhere else, but then I moved to New York City, and this is kind of an education in itself. So I'm here, pursuing my career, and I'm going to figure out what I'm going to do after that.

Could you expand on what you meant when you said that being in the city was "an education in itself?"

I didn't know that I was going to leave after my Associate's degree. I spent a couple of months intending to go back to Simon's Rock, figuring out other options for a year abroad, and then I realized that I had this impending sense of doom going back to a really intensive academic institution. I had a really strong desire to just be in the real world and have the time to myself to think and develop my sense of self because I lost it in the process of being a sixteen year old college student (laughs). New York City is my favorite place on Earth, and being completely independent in a place where I don't need a car, I can go out whenever I want, I have to impose guidelines on myself. I wanted to have real-world experience. So I have an internship, which is, in my opinion, a very academic internship because I'm learning about the world. It's kind of like a giant class; New York City is like a giant class to me.



INTERVIEW

TITLE

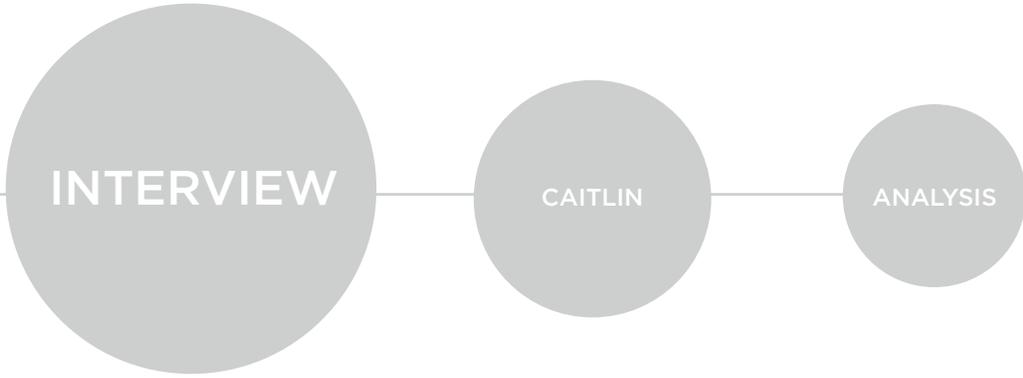
TRANSCRIPT

Do you think that your concentrations at Simon's Rock had any impact or helpful effect on your internships?

Yes. Absolutely. My concentration was Theories of Sexuality was centered around gender issues, art history, and public health, all in the realm of human sexuality. The public health realm has actually helped me more in my job right now, because I know a lot about the politics of gender and of our bodies and sex, and, living in the city, the personal part of sexuality has been hugely helpful because I've read a thousand books on gender binaries, and heteronormativity, and now I'm suddenly in the world, I'm in the real world, outside of the bubble, and I'm applying it to my life, and my sexuality, and people around me, and it's extremely informative.

Do you think that you're going to go back to school to attain a higher degree? Why or why not?

I don't know. Right now, I am so happy (laughs) where I am. I think that I probably will get antsy with the fact that I don't have the "highest degree" that I could. My two years were so concentrated that I feel like that was like my undergrad, so if I went back to get my BA I would probably get it in a totally different area. I'd probably get it in something that I wanted to specialize in in terms of public health. Right now one of my internships has to do with clinical health; I work at the AIDS Service Center. My other internship is more related to campaigning and politics, so I don't think I would get a degree in campaigning and politics, but if I had to I would, but it's not something that I really desire right now. Even though I'm young - I'm eighteen, and people my age are in their freshman year of college (laughs) which is crazy for me to believe, they're all gearing up for eventual majors, and then eventually grad school. I'm not so sure if I can fit right now into going back into school full time...maybe part time? But, at least for the next six months, I'm very happy where I am and I feel like I'm pretty educated and I'm educating myself daily. It's not that institutional education has failed me, but I kind of didn't fit, and I'm making a path for myself, which I'm happy about thus far.



INTERVIEW

CAITLIN

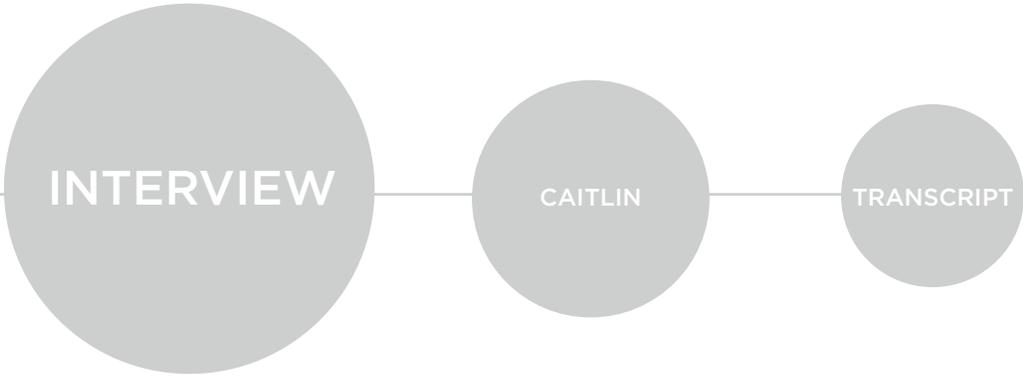
ANALYSIS

Caitlin, 21 years old, is a senior at Parsons the New School for Design, majoring in Design and Management. After three semesters she transferred from Whitman College, a small, liberal arts school in Walla Walla Washington in order to find a more design-oriented curriculum. She didn't apply to Parsons during high school, however, because she didn't want to close any doors or limit her interests or education by starting out at such a specialized school as Parsons.

Caitlin feels that her time spent at Whitman before Parsons was beneficial in many ways. She learned to read, write, and analyze in a way that she never would have if she had entered Parsons right after high school. She feels that this foundation helped her become more of an academic and instill and retain a deep interest in theories, which she was able to solidify while at Parsons. She feels very positive about her switch to Parsons as well; she claims that although Parsons's courses have a much more narrow frame of vision, by being in New York City and through connections at Parsons, she was able to find out about career choices that she didn't even know existed.

When Caitlin first came to Parsons she planned on pursuing the business side of fashion design, and attempted to combine it with art history and other design studies and theory-based courses. After interning at several fashion-related firms, however, she realized that she liked neither the people nor the mission behind the corporation as a whole. Caitlin now hopes to find a way to combine these theories with a more beneficial practice. She states, "I think that it's easier and even necessary for better projects where you are influencing the public and putting something into the public sphere to look back at history and, design theory, and integrate that into whatever you're doing."

Caitlin's experience in and out of school make a clear argument for real-world experience. Although Caitlin's interests are grounded in academics and theory, she understands the importance of applicable practice of this theory. She learned this after her move from a liberal arts school to a more applied school in New York City, where she was opened up to many more opportunities and experiences. Her educational path took another giant turn when she interned in an environment where she thought she wanted to work after graduation. Through this experience she realized that her theoretical idea of the environment was totally different from the practical experience. From there, she was able to reorient her studies and her interests.



INTERVIEW

CAITLIN

TRANSCRIPT

What school are you attending and what's your major?

Parsons School of Design, Design and Management.

You are a transfer student, right?

Yes. I transferred from a Liberal Arts college...Whitman College in Walla Walla Washington. It was this stereotypical, small, community oriented school. We actually did sit on the lawn and have class in circles sometimes. So, it was a big change.

After what year did you transfer?

I transferred halfway through my sophomore year, so I spent three semesters at Whitman.

Why did you transfer?

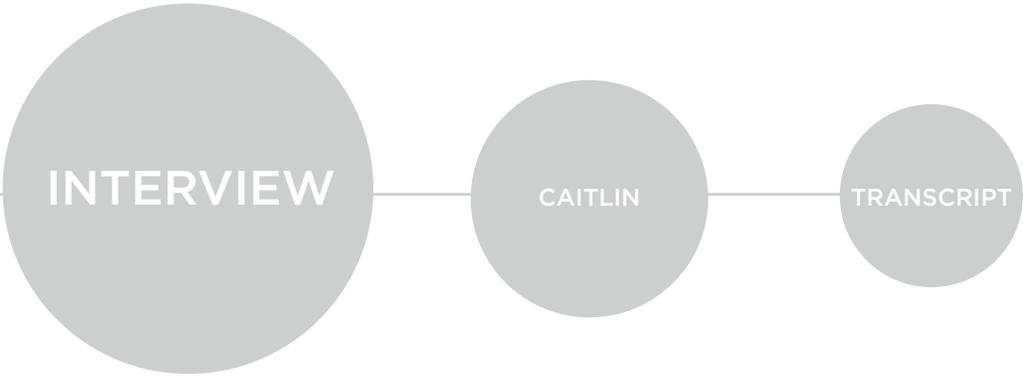
I wanted a more design-oriented curriculum, and had I stayed there it would have been maybe an Art History major, Studio minor, Economics minor.

Did you go into Whitman with the idea that you were going to pursue design-related studies and then you didn't have that available?

Parsons was a school that I was interested in in high school, and I also applied to the Savannah College of Art and Design...I didn't apply to Parsons in high school. The only design school I applied to in high school was SCAD, and got in, but I felt like I needed to go to a Liberal Arts college to feel things out first, I didn't want to close a bunch of doors right after high school, and I knew that it would be easier for me to decide to go to a more specific, design-oriented school, instead of going to a design-oriented school and going backwards to a more Liberal Arts education.

How was the transition for you?

It was great for me. I feel like I got the best parts from a Liberal Arts education and was able to bring them to Parsons with me. We always read a lot at Whitman and wrote a lot. Our writing was judged very harshly. Just knowing how to read and analyze something and write about it in a very academic way, and knowing how to format papers...this all sounds like very simple stuff, but I was amazed when I came to Parsons at the number of people who freaked out at a five page double spaced paper, or reading more than 10 pages for a class. There were a lot of classes where I felt like I had an advantage because I had learned how to write and to write well in an academic way.



INTERVIEW

CAITLIN

TRANSCRIPT

So that wasn't frustrating for you at all? To have people on a lower academic level than you?

One time we had to write a paper for a group, and we were each writing parts for the paper and we were going to combine it and make it clear and cohesive, but I ended up staying up until three that night fixing punctuation and citing things that people had not cited in a paper. So that was frustrating, but usually it's just been individual work, so it hasn't really bothered me. I don't really care if someone else is bitching about the paper, as long as it's not my paper.

So you feel it was important that you made the switch from Whitman? Do you feel like you could have just stayed there for four years and been just as happy?

No, I think it was really important for me to make that switch and I am definitely happy. I feel like I am in a much better place than I would be if I had stayed at Whitman. As far as the idea of what I've wanted or thought about wanting to do after school has changed. There are jobs and things I can go into that I didn't even know existed before I came to Parsons. It's like, when you go to a Liberal Arts school, are you going to be a professor, are you going to go into business, are you going to be a doctor, scientist, or researcher. For me, I didn't really know what I would do, and where my interests would lie in relation to jobs after school. And I still don't really know that, it's just narrowed it down and it's more focused.

So what are your plans for when you graduate in the Spring?

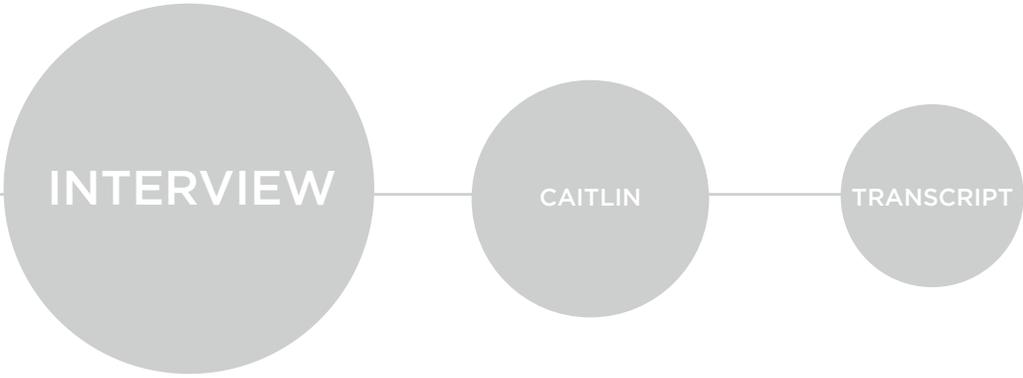
I applied to and got in to Columbia's summer architecture program. It's for five weeks and it starts in July, and that's something that I feel like I want to do because I'm interested or questioning if I want to get my Masters in architecture eventually, or go to grad school for something like urban planning or something in that field, and just kind of figuring out before applying to grad school and getting there and realizing that I actually don't want to go. So hopefully this program will give me some guidance. I may or may not do that, depending on, say, for instance, the world's best job in my mind fell into my lap in those couple months between graduation and when that program starts. Then, yeah, maybe I'd take it and not do the program.

What would you define as the world's best job?

I don't even know (laughs). I probably wouldn't know it if I saw it. Something relaxed, that paid really well, where everyone is great...

So basically, it doesn't exist.

Yeah. I don't think it exists. But, you know, something that I felt was really worth my time, and, if I felt like I was going to stay there for a while...I don't know. It's hard to describe. I don't even know what that would be until I found it.



INTERVIEW

CAITLIN

TRANSCRIPT

Do you think that being at Parsons has helped you to solidify anything that you want to do in the future?

Yes, definitely. When I first came to Parsons I actually wanted...and I'm almost embarrassed to say this now...no offence to anybody who wants to do this, but I wanted to go into the business side of fashion. I still am, to some degree, really academic in a way. I still love theory, and design theory. And I love integrating that into whatever I'm going to do. And I had this grand idea that fashion...some sorts of it are like art forms, and that I would be able to combine them with Art History and all of these big movements. I spent some time working in the fashion industry, interning, and going to school here and I realized, that's not going to be the case, unless I'm working at a museum or something. So, taking classes that more and more revolved around design theory, and design history, and those sorts of classes, and even Urban Practices where we're working more with the community and with space, I feel like that's more of the kind of thing where I can take everything that I'm interested in and tie it into one.

You said you did some internships. Real world vs academic world, was there like a really big difference there? Did that decide anything for you or make you see things differently?

Yeah, I mean the first internship I did when I came to the city was for Tracy Reese who is a fashion designer. And honestly, I didn't like the people and I didn't like what they did. I was working with the CEO and the head sales person at the top of the company. I didn't really want to do anybody's job there, I didn't really like anybody there and that lifestyle made me realize that that's not something that I wanted to do.

How do you hope to combine the more academic, theory side into the real-world?

I feel like Urban Practices is integrating the academic world and design, but that's up to you and how much you draw it into your projects, but I think that it's easier and even necessary for better projects where you are influencing the public and putting something into the public sphere to look back at history and design theory, and integrate that into whatever you're doing. Because otherwise what sort of context do you have? I mean there are other ways, less academic ways, like interviewing people, not looking to the past so much...contemporary theories, but I don't know, I think it's an interesting way, more than anything it helps me generate ideas and helps me give them more meaning in a way.



INTERVIEW

MEL

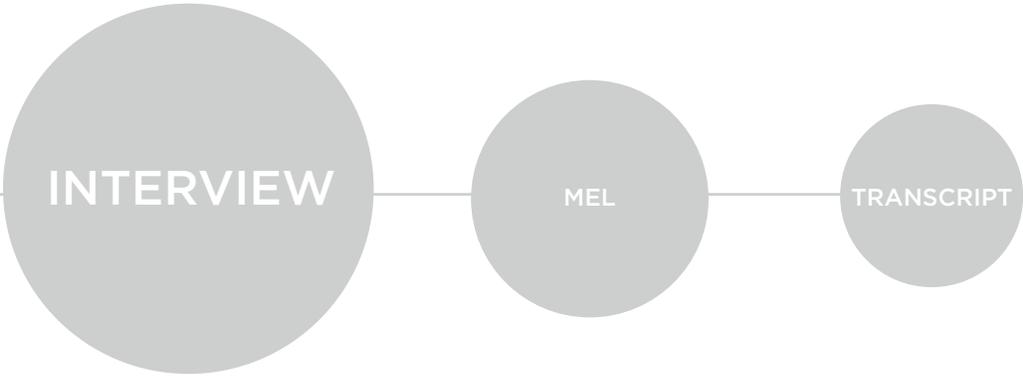
ANALYSIS

Mel, 20 years old, is in her last weeks as a student at the New School University where she will be obtaining her Bachelor's degree in Psychology. Mel always knew she wanted to work with children, and says that she might have considered majoring in Social Work or Sociology, or even more specifically in Child Psychology, but none of those majors are offered as options for undergraduate degrees at The New School.

When asked if she would attend graduate school, Mel did not seem extremely enthusiastic about the idea. "[Graduate school is] more experience. But you can get experience working," she believes. After graduation she hopes to find an entry-level job in her field, but notes that it won't be as practical and applied as she hopes. Since she will not have the Masters Degree, she will have to work in positions that are more office-based until she can build up to the equivalent experience of someone who has a Master's Degree. Her ideal degree would be a Child Life Master's, but she notes, "if I find happiness in what I'm doing before graduate school I won't do it. But it depends on where I am and how I feel."

Overall, when asked about her schooling experience, Mel expresses deep dissatisfaction with The New School in terms of career search assistance and the graduation process in general. "To do my thesis I basically had to pull teeth," she says.

Mel did not have any internships while in school. Her degree is entirely theory based, and thus she is resistant to jump into more years of schooling in graduate school and beyond. This is understandable - being so constantly immersed in the abstract world of academia, and in an environment that is not the most helpful or supportive, it's a wonder why she has even stuck it out this long. Perhaps if Mel had found some real-world experiences while in school, she would have been able to understand the importance of what she was learning in school. This may have motivated her to continue along her current path, or it may have even opened up several more doors and interests.



INTERVIEW

MEL

TRANSCRIPT

What school are you currently attending? What is your major?

I'm at senior at The New School University. I am a Psychology major.

Did you always want to pursue this major? Or were you inspired while you were in school?

I didn't always want to do Psychology, but I knew that I wanted to work with children, which is why I narrowed it down to Psychology.

Do you wish that you could have changed or expanded your major?

Yeah, sometimes I feel like deviating a little bit to Social Work or to Sociology, or, more specifically, Child Psychology, but, it's not really an option in undergrad.

Why is that?

Because the only major they offer is Psychology, which is an umbrella for anything else you want to do in graduate school.

So, that's not a limitation of the school, it's more just a limitation of the educational system?

Yeah, there are Psychology classes and there are Education Studies classes, but there are no classes specific to Child Psychology or anything related to something specific of that nature.

Do you think you will attend graduate school?

I think I will probably go to graduate school if I need it, but right now I think I'm going to start in an entry level job in where I can probably work up to the equivalent of someone who has a Masters Degree. That's what I'm hoping. That's obviously the most ideal thing, but it's a definite possibility that I'll go to graduate school in order to get a job with a higher paying salary.

Why are you resistant to go to graduate school?

It's very competitive, and I feel, especially for Psychology, it's not necessary to engage in all of the things that graduate school offers, because you really do learn them in undergrad. It's just an extension. It's not necessary. It's more experience. But you can get experience working.

INTERVIEW

MEL

TRANSCRIPT

So do you think the graduate school degree is just for the label?

Yeah, definitely. I think it's for the résumé purposes, I guess. To say, I went to graduate school so therefore I am more highly educated. Everyone's trying to reach that highest point.

What kind of entry-level job are you hoping to get once you graduate (from undergrad)?

It's a mental health worker position. The minimum requirement is a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology.

What would you be doing in that kind of job?

Well, I'm not really sure, it's a child Psychiatric institute, so, working with children, and doing minimal work, because you can't really be a therapist. You can't do any of the things that the children are there specifically for, so, it would probably be a lot of basic socialization and office work.

What is your ideal job?

I would be a Child Life major, which is not offered at many schools. It involves working with children in hospitals and preparing them for surgery through play therapy with dolls. It's really, really specific, and it's also really hard to get into.

Why is it so hard to get into?

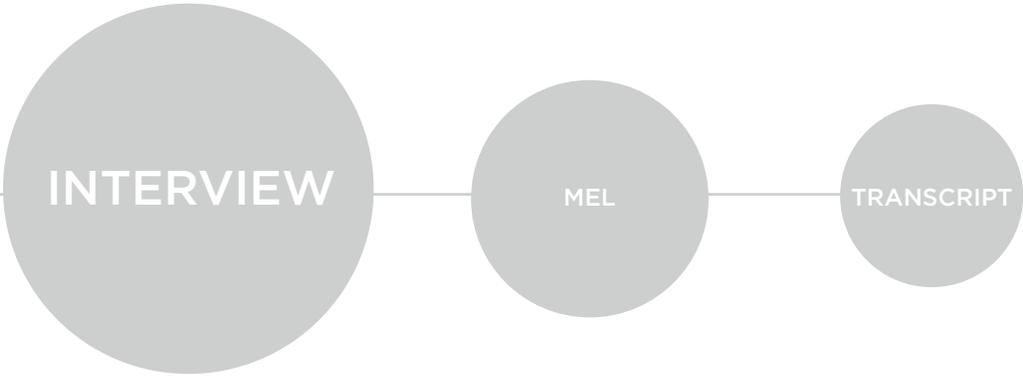
Because it's a new major.

So, it's sort of like a specialized therapist?

Yeah, it's definitely specialized. You start in Psychology and I think you go to Social Work and eventually Child Life. It's a graduate degree.

So you need the degree in order to do that job?

Yeah.



INTERVIEW

MEL

TRANSCRIPT

So do you feel that you will eventually have to go to graduate school in order to pursue your career?

If I find happiness in what I'm doing before graduate school I won't do it. But it depends on where I am and how I feel.

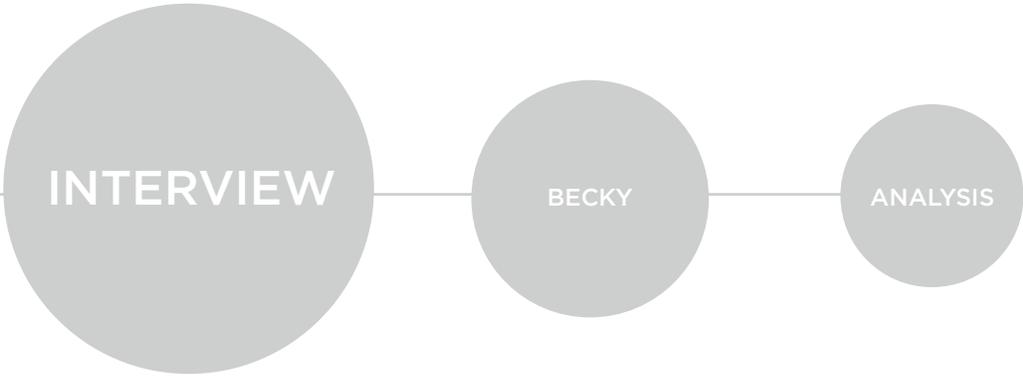
Do you feel that your school has provided you with any assistance in your career search? If it has, how? And if not, how could the school have helped to make that more successful?

The school is really, really terrible at helping. To do my thesis I basically had to pull teeth, and that's just for undergrad. And it's a very small department; Psychology undergrad at The New School does not have a lot of kids. The outline for what they were looking for for your senior work is on a page on the New School website, somewhere, but it's not specifically placed where anyone can see it. Honestly I have a very hard time speaking highly of The New School after experiencing that.

Do you feel that's a fault of The New School, or do you feel it's a fault of the students for not speaking up? Do you feel the students should just be entitled to that kind of help?

The students did speak up, that's why they're changing it next year (laughs). But I don't think they really have the students as their best interest, I don't think their minds are there.

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INTERVIEW

BECKY

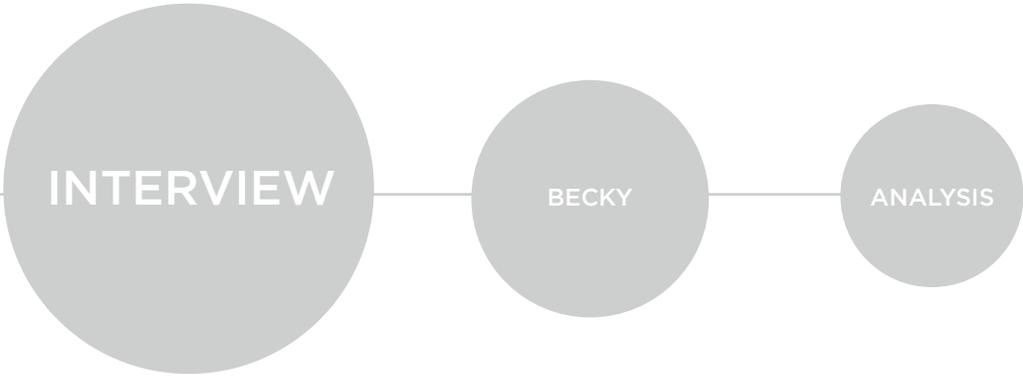
ANALYSIS

Becky, 21 years old, is a recent graduate of New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study where she concentrated in Political Influence, Activism, and Social Justice. In high school, Becky applied early to Georgetown University, but didn't get in. Becky notes, "the whole college process was the worst part of my life, so far." Instead of going to college right away, she wanted to join the Peace Corps, but was too young. She settled on Gallatin because it provided her with the most flexibility.

In retrospect, Becky is very happy with where she attended school because she got to learn at her own pace and pick the courses that she was interested in. She also had several internships while in school - for PR firms, designers, and government-related organizations. She now interns for the Manhattan Borough President as well as The White House Project, a women's political training and empowerment organization. The White House Project recently offered to hire her to launch and run a women's executive luncheon series.

Becky's next goal is Law School, but she is having a similar problem to the one she experienced during the college application process. She feels that she works hard in school, but her efforts aren't paying off because she isn't getting into the places she wants. She comments, "I think that's an institutional problem, though. It's systematic. As much as I could work hard in my one little spot, there's going to be those kids who did better and can afford more." She feels frustrated that she has to settle on a school, and that her lofty goals are seemingly unattainable.

When asked about the success of her internships and if she will hold off on law school to see where they progress, she says, "I'm accomplishing a lot at my internships, but at the end of the road I'm going to law school. So it's a weird in-between where I want to excel, but I can only excel to some point, because in the end it has to end - I have to go to school again." Law School is of the utmost importance to Becky. She feels that although she can excel through these internships, they will never take her to where she wants to be; she needs the next degree to move up in the world.

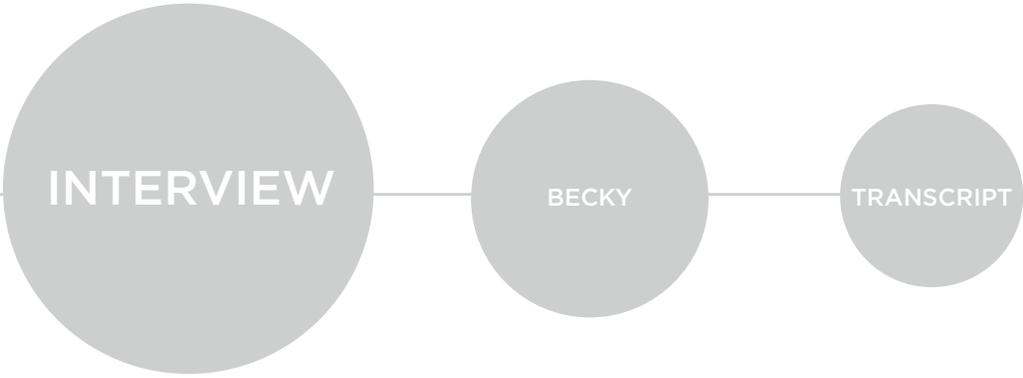


INTERVIEW

BECKY

ANALYSIS

Although Becky has had a lot of real-world experiences while in school, her main goals for the future are academic ones. She knows that even if she attains success within her internships she will be going back to school to receive her Law School degree. Becky discusses her dissatisfaction with having to settle for her education. Perhaps if she had had more resources or contacts that could have shared their experiences with her and shown her different educational paths to take, she would have felt less like she was settling and more like she was opening different doors that would flesh out her educational experience.



INTERVIEW

BECKY

TRANSCRIPT

Where did you go to school and what was your major?

I went to New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study. I had a concentration in Political Influence, Activism, and Social Justice.

Did you have any internships while you were in school?

When I was a freshman I was an intern at a PR firm called PMKBMC, a celebrity/talent PR firm. The next year I worked as a paid intern for a woman who started an international art production company. She commissioned a lot of art projects in South Korea. I also worked as an administrative assistant at a good government public policy non-profit.

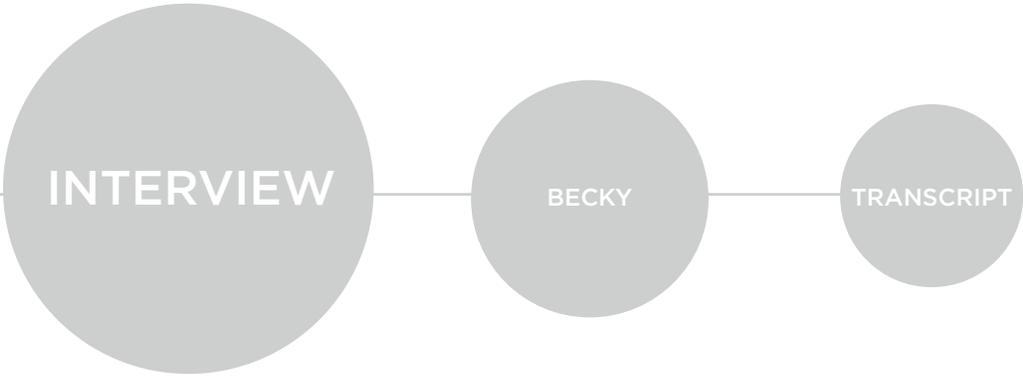
Before you went to school what did you think you wanted to do?

The whole college process was the worst part of my life, so far. I thought I wasn't going to go to college for a while, because I didn't get into Georgetown, and then I was going to do Peace Corps, but I was only 17. And so, the whole summer going into college was really rough.

I had no idea what I wanted to do. I didn't know between lawyer and doctor, and I decided that Gallatin was the best option for not having to pick a major. And I just thought maybe Gallatin would be cool. I never had to pick a major. And I got into the honors program, and they were going to take me to India, so I said okay.

What are you doing after school?

Now, I'm really happy that I went to Gallatin, because I got to go at my own pace, I got to pick what I wanted to do. Right now I work for the Manhattan Borough President, and I work for this women's political training and empowerment organization called the White House Project, and they actually just offered me kind of a job, to go from intern to be a consultant. I'm launching this women's executive luncheon series, and they want it to be this capsule/consulting gig, because they don't really have the manpower for a staff member currently to do it, so they needed me to do it, but they realize as an unpaid intern that shouldn't be my responsibility, so they're giving it to me as my thing to do.



INTERVIEW

BECKY

TRANSCRIPT

So, you obviously didn't see yourself being here four years ago...

No, I thought I would end up going to law school. Which I'm going to do, I just applied to law school, I'm getting in places, having to make that decision, going through that process all over again.

I feel like I work hard. And this whole law school process hasn't paid off. I think that's an institutional problem, though. It's systematic. As much as I could work hard in my one little spot, there are always going to be those kids who did better and can afford more. And, so, it's frustrating that I have to settle on a school instead of being able to achieve my highest potential.

So the issue is money?

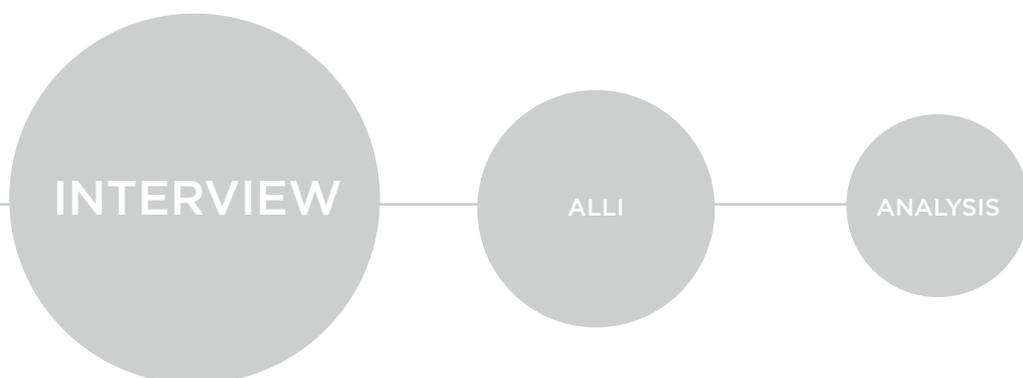
Yeah, finances. My grades were pretty good, I'm proud of where I got in. But the problem is getting accepted to one of the top schools. They don't offer as much scholarship, which obviously makes sense. Merit-wise, they're going to give it to someone who did better than me, but, in terms of financial aid...I have access to loans, but if I can't pay the loans, then I can't take out the loans. I'm accomplishing a lot at my internships, but at the end of the road I'm going to law school. So it's a weird in-between where I want to excel, but I can only excel to some point, because in the end it has to end - I have to go to school again.

Do you think you're definitely going to go to law school? Even if this job can get you a lot of money...?

Yeah, I'm definitely going to law school. This job isn't going to get me a lot of money. They're not going to like pay me big bucks to run a luncheon series just yet.

What if they offered you to become a full-time employee, or if another job came up?

Probably not, because what I want wouldn't be accessible right now. Even if they offered me a full time job, I want to be beyond that. So, I feel like I need to get this degree so at the end of that I could get an even better offer.



INTERVIEW

ALLI

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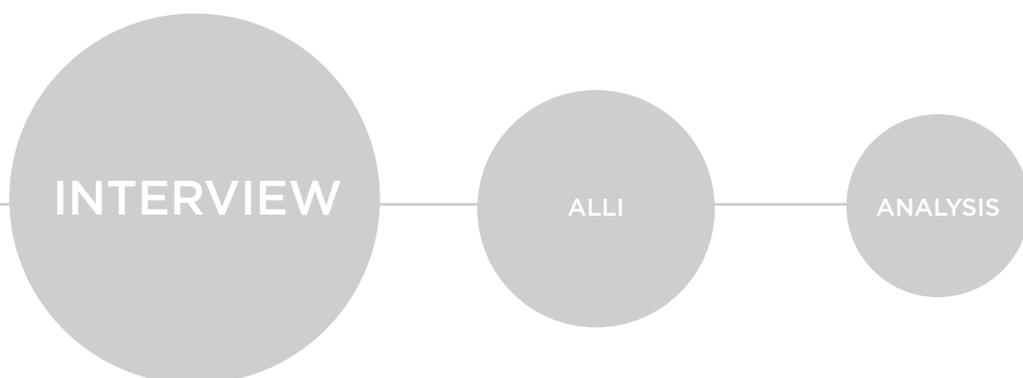
Alli, 19 years old, is currently enrolled at CUNY City College. She transferred there after spending a year and a half at Parsons the New School for Design, majoring in fashion. Before college, Alli attended a college preparatory high school. In ninth grade she picked what she wanted to focus on (fashion) and what school she wanted to attend (Parsons). The rest of her years in high school focused on attaining that goal - there was no room or time to explore different areas or change her mind.

After her first foundation year, which she found challenging as well as uninteresting, she entered into fashion hoping for a more focused curriculum based around a topic that she was passionate about. She found, however, that fashion was even more difficult than she could imagine, and it was difficult and frustrating to no longer be the best in the class.

Simultaneously, Alli was taking a feminism class at Lang College, the Liberal Arts College of The New School University. She explains, “through taking that class I guess that I realized that not only was feminism something that I really care about, but it was also something that completely contradicted everything I was learning in fashion” This was only the start of a larger struggle that Alli faced in deciding whether or not to remain at Parsons.

Eventually, after much debate, and worry that she would be disappointing others and letting go of her dream, she decided to leave Parsons. Alli was upset about leaving the culture that surrounds Parsons students, but she comments, “you cannot find it within yourself [to pursue fashion at Parsons] unless you really, really love it. It’ll kill you. It’s just too grueling.”

She discussed that her first few weeks at City College seemed like “fake college” because she wasn’t connected (and remained disconnected) to the school community due to the long commute, and because City College is only a temporary fix to Alli’s long-term solution. She has applied to NYU and Hunter College for the fall where she will pursue Gender and Sexuality studies. Although she isn’t entirely sure where her schooling is taking her (which is a scary thought), she hopes to pursue a career in feminism in writing, or perhaps involvement in activist organizations.



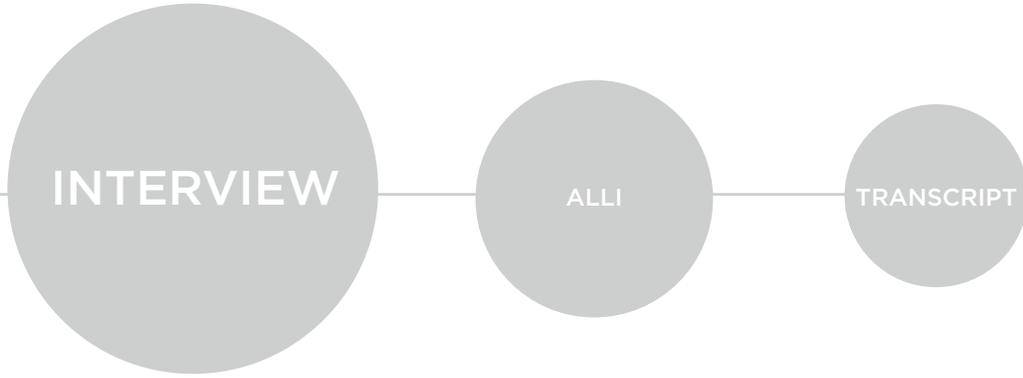
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Although, in retrospect, she wishes that she had taken a year off between high school and college in order to reorient her goals and interests, Alli still feels that school is and will remain beneficial to her future. She has already made significant connections just through her one feminism course at Lang, and feels that in order to fully appreciate feminist theories she needs a class and a community with whom to share the ideas and concepts. She feels much better about her new education path. She states, “I’m doing things that I feel will benefit me in the future and will benefit other people in the future.”

Although Alli did not intern while she was in school, she recognizes the importance of real-world experience in other ways. Her regret of not taking a year off between high school and college is a clear indicator of the power of time out of the educational factory line. If she had taken some time off, perhaps she would have reevaluated her goals, and not have attended Parsons at all. Alli also emphasizes the importance of creating and maintaining contacts – professors and other experts in her field of interest who could help to direct her learning as well as provide her with opportunities after her time in school.



INTERVIEW

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What school are you currently attending and what's your major?

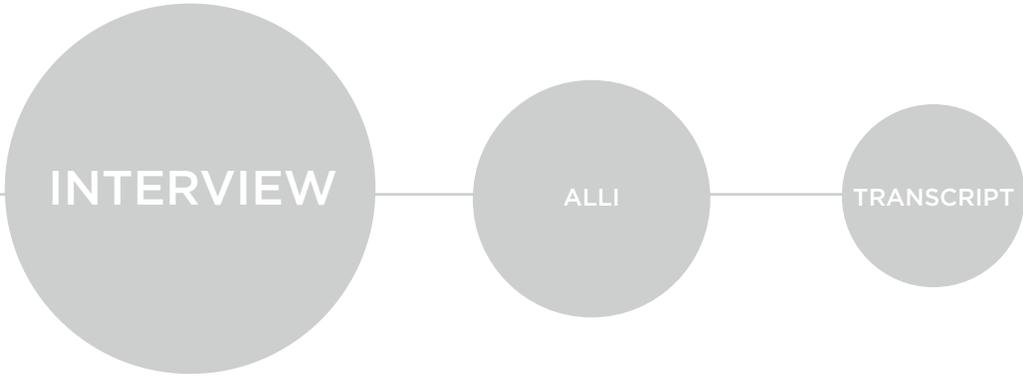
Right now, for the next month, I go to CUNY's City College up on 145th St. My eventual major will be gender studies.

You transferred there recently, right?

Yeah. After high school I went to Parsons as a Fashion Design major. So I came to New York from California not knowing anyone. I went to Parsons for a year and a half, and then halfway through my first semester of fashion I realized that wasn't what I wanted to do so I left Parsons, and now, in Spring 2011, I started going to City College just as a transition period, to try to get applications from where I actually want to graduate from submitted, and now I'm waiting to hear from...still waiting...to hear from Hunter College and NYU about acceptances in the fall, so in the fall I'll be going to one of those schools and then I'll actually graduate from one of those schools.

Can you talk more about Parsons? Why you wanted to go there and why it didn't work?

My high school was a college prep school. In ninth grade you take a class that's about picking what college you want to go to and what career you want. So basically in ninth grade I decided that I wanted to go to Parsons because it was the most well known fashion school, and go for fashion. And so after ninth grade you don't really talk about it again, you just know where you want to go, and you just move towards that. So I never actually reevaluated what I wanted to do, basically from ninth grade on, I just went with it. And I got to Parsons and I went through Foundation year and during the whole year I thought, wow, this is not what I'm good at and this is not really bringing me any fulfillment, but I thought that once I started fashion and it got more specific then I'd be like yeah, this is what I want to do. Then I started fashion and it kicked my ass. It was really, really, really hard. I wasn't the best in my class, which was frustrating, and I could never be the best in my class because there were so many other people who were so talented, just naturally. I also started taking a feminism class at Lang which I was already interested in but hadn't really explored very much. Through taking that class I realized that not only was feminism something that I really cared about, but it was also something that completely contradicted everything I was learning in fashion. So I was going to feminism, really loving it, being really excited about it, and then going to fashion where I already wasn't excited about going to class, and we would spend the whole day talking about things that basically hurt women, which sounds extremist (laughs), but if you're in the fashion program you'd understand. At Parsons, especially Parsons fashion, if you're not extremely in love with it, then there's just no way for you to do it. There's just no way. You can't, you cannot find it within yourself unless you really, really love it. It'll kill you. It's just too grueling. So, I left. That was it for me.



INTERVIEW

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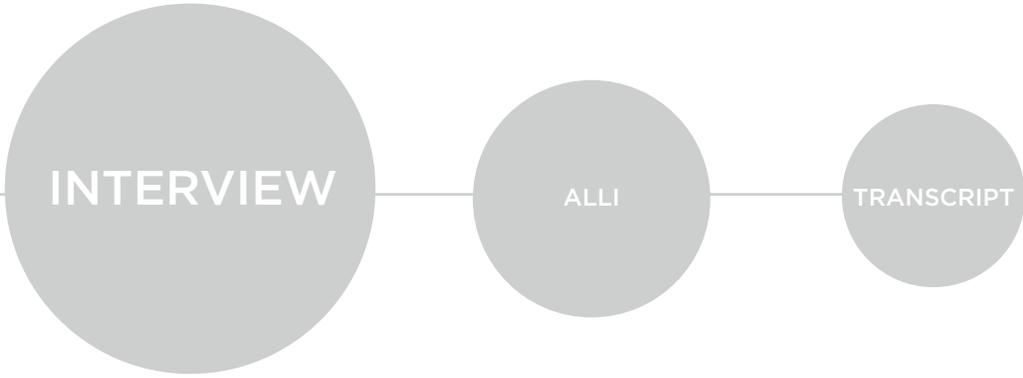
TRANSCRIPT

Were you confident in your decision to leave Parsons, because it's such a big commitment? How did you feel about that?

For my whole freshman year I stuck with it because I felt like I was going to be disappointing a lot of people, especially myself, if I did leave, because it was sort of a big deal at my high school that I was the only person going to art school, and especially that I was going to Parsons which was pretty well known. I was really afraid of disappointing people and letting go of what had been my dream for five years at that point. But it also got to the point where I was so broken down that I knew I couldn't do it anymore, and I just didn't care anymore. I didn't care enough about disappointing anyone anymore. The only thing that was really hard was knowing that I was going to have to lose the culture that goes along with Parsons and the New School in general, and knowing that I wasn't going to be an art school kid anymore. There's a community and a culture built around the fact that you go to art school, and it was sort of disappointing to know I had to leave that because it was something that I actually enjoyed being a part of, but I was so broken down at that point, and so completely exhausted by the entire process, and so turned off to the fashion industry that I just knew I couldn't do it anymore. And as soon as I realized that there were other opportunities for me I was like ok, done, I got it, I'm out.

How has this semester been, doing something totally different?

Totally, totally different (laughs). At first, I would say the first couple of weeks, maybe even the first month and a half, it felt like I was going to fake school, which was really similar to during high school when I would go to high school all day and then go to community college at night, and I was really just going to community college for fun, because I really liked school. At community college grades didn't really matter to me, and it wasn't my real school, so I didn't feel a part of it very much, and I really felt that way when I started to go to City College because I felt like I was still an art school kid, and that taking these classes wasn't real life (laughs). And they were also so much easier and less time consuming than what I was used to. The classes at City College are all an hour and fifteen minutes. When you're coming from an environment where you're doing studio classes for six hours every single day (laughs), it's a shock that you can go to class for an hour and fifteen minutes and be done with it...it's kind of amazing. But now it's at the point where it feels like real school to me, and some of the classes I actually care about, and I realize I actually have to do work for them and not just sit there and be smart. It's finally starting to feel like real school, but I'm also not entirely involved there because it's a really long commute so I don't really want to get involved in anything, and I also know that I'm leaving, so I still don't feel that strong of a connection to it, but it does feel like real school to me now as opposed to something that I'm doing just to fill time.



INTERVIEW

ALLI

TRANSCRIPT

When you transfer, to Hunter or NYU, you want to major in Feminism?

Yeah, at Hunter it's Women's Studies and at NYU it's Gender and Sexuality Studies. So it's following gender threads either way.

What do you think you want to do when you're done, now that you know you don't want to do fashion?

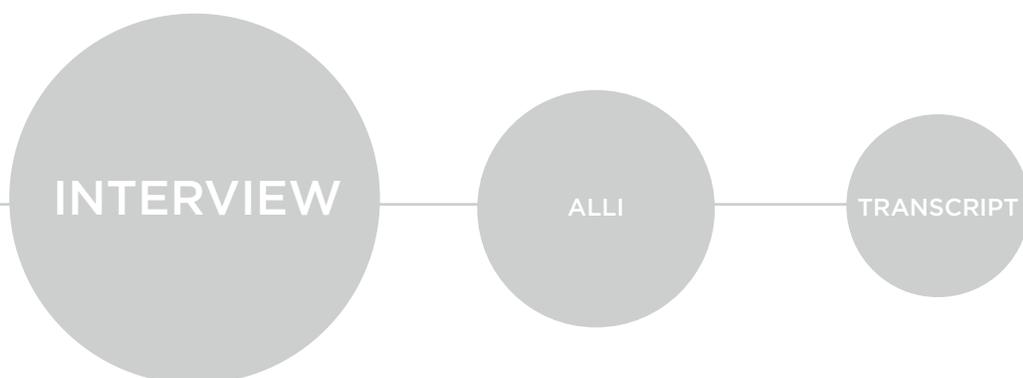
It's so scary. Other than being in New York, which now is the only thing I know that I definitely want for myself in the future...when I was eighteen I was really unprepared to choose a life for myself. I didn't really know what I wanted to do then, and I still don't really feel like I know what I want to do now, but I also can't imagine doing anything else, but I guess I want to either be involved in feminism in writing or working for activist organizations. I haven't really figured it out yet because I don't really know what's even available to me, which is really scary (laughs). If you go to art school, if your major is fashion design you're going to be a fashion designer, if your major is graphic design, you're going to be a graphic designer, and at regular college it's not necessarily like that, which is really scary.

Do you think that school is going to help you find that?

I feel like I already have so many connections just by taking one class in feminism. I feel like I met so many people that were in that class. My professor was really, really incredible and brought in so many amazing guest speakers who later I've actually seen at feminist conferences. One of them was at the Planned Parenthood rally a couple of weeks ago, and she spoke in front of all of these people and I was like, oh my god, I've heard her speak in a lecture hall of 70 people and she's really is such a badass. I actually do feel like school's going to help me with it. I think that you can definitely teach yourself a lot about feminism by just reading, but I think it's really hard to be your own guide. You can't just sit there and take in theory and just suddenly understand everything. Feminism is one of those things where you really need people around you to talk about it with.

So you feel like wherever you go, whatever you do, school will help you?

Yeah, I think it's going to help me, not to find my own way into understanding the world and what I can bring to it from a feminist angle. I feel like a lot of professors who teach classes on gender and sexuality are people who are very, very involved in the community. Those are the people who I need to be connected with in order to find my way to do what I want to be doing.



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ALLI

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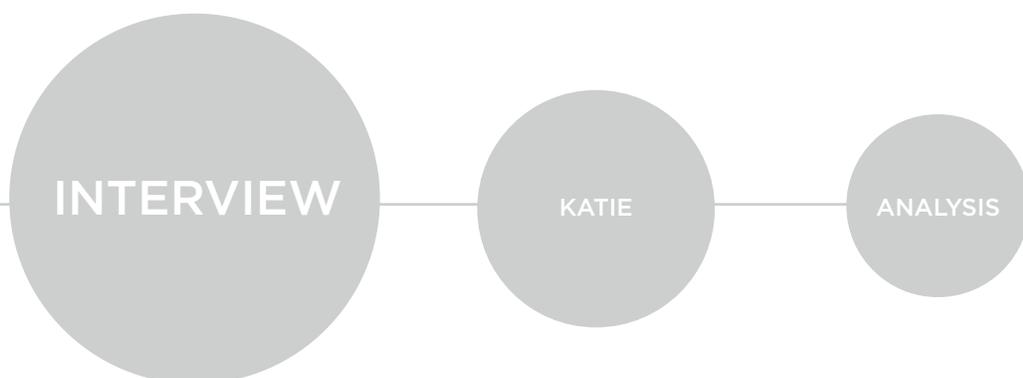
So do you still feel like you have that same passion for school, even though it's taken so many turns?

I think I wouldn't have gone to school this semester if it wasn't required of me by my parents. I also very strongly wish I had taken a year off before I started school, but that wasn't even an option for me. I went to a college prep school where that wasn't an option for anyone. No one ever mentioned taking time off, and also my parents wouldn't have supported me.

Why do you wish you had taken a year off?

I think it would have given me more time to look at what I wanted to be doing. A lot of people don't need to take a year off because they've given themselves the chance to think about it during high school, and I didn't give myself that chance in high school, so maybe I wouldn't have actually benefited from it, but in retrospect I feel like I might have. I know people who have taken time off and felt like it helped them a lot.

In terms of passion for school, it differs from class to class (laughs). I still really love my Liberal Arts classes, and I still really love any class where I can bring a radical twist to it that really pisses people off and rubs people the wrong way, and challenges people to think about what in our lives is actually innate in what we have created, what we've built up ourselves. I like school in general, I've always liked school. I like school a lot more now than I did when I went to Parsons, because I'm doing things that I'm good at now, and I'm doing things that I feel like will benefit me in the future and will benefit other people in the future, as opposed to drawing croquis, all day, every day (laughs).



INTERVIEW

KATIE

ANALYSIS

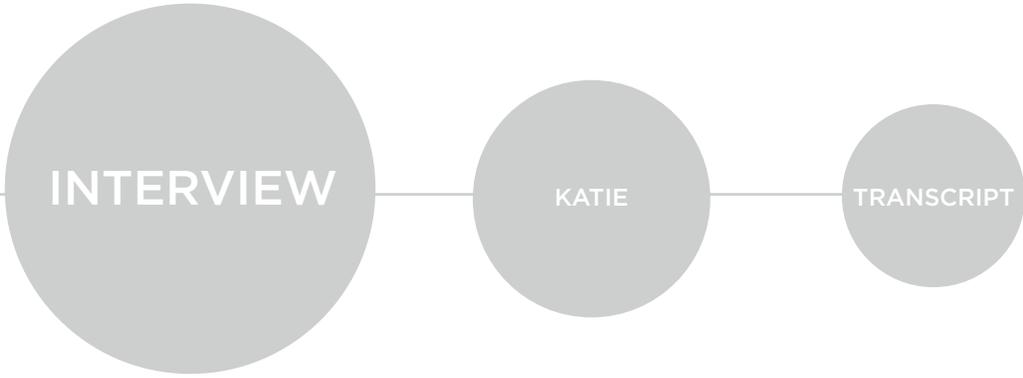
Katie, 21 years old, is a recent graduate of Eugene Lang College, The New School for Liberal Arts. She obtained her BA in Literature in December of 2010. While she was in school, Katie interned at several different places, including Time Out Magazine and Bust Magazine, where she wrote blogs and worked in the Marketing Department. Katie emphasized her engagement with a team, as well as being completely immersed in a real-world, writing-centric environment. She notes, “being thrown into the writing world made me want to be a part of it even more.”

Although Katie expresses that the real-world application of her interests was important, she also appreciates her in-school education. She explains that it was important for her to have a community with whom she could discuss the readings, and that it was especially important to receive feedback from professors and peers on her writing.

When asked what she was doing now that she has graduated, Katie first claimed, with a laugh, “nothing.” Although Katie interned at several fairly well-known corporations and displayed much promise while in school, she is finding it extremely hard to find a job. Her ideal job would be an editor position, but after attempting to reconnect with Time Out by reaching out to her old boss (and current friend), she became disheartened. She was told, with the most heartfelt of apologies, “...you’re not going to be successful, you’re not going to make money, you’re not going to be someone important in the world.”

Katie notes, “It’s scary, to not have a job and to not know what you’re doing, to know what you want to do, but not be able to find it.” She says that she would never settle for a job that she hates, but she may end up taking a job that makes money and allows her to pursue her passions on the side. When asked if this process has been frustrating – being successful in school and having that utopian idea broken down the moment after graduation, Katie did not seem too perturbed. “I still feel like it’s going to pay off.” She says, “I don’t regret going [to school].”

Katie’s real-life experiences may seem to counteract previous arguments for the importance of real-world experiences while in school. Although Katie notes that her internships made her more passionate about her major, she also emphasizes the importance of a classroom setting in which she could bounce ideas off of peers and teachers. Katie’s internships don’t seem to be helping her to find a career, however. This is clearly discouraging. But perhaps if Katie had a better way to network with others who had gone through the same major as she did, she would be able to find a job that suits her interests.



INTERVIEW

KATIE

TRANSCRIPT

What school did you attend, and what was your major?

Eugene Lang, at the New School University, and my major was Literature.

Did you have any internships while you were in school? If so, did they help to justify your major and what you were doing in school?

Yeah. When I first moved to New York I interned at Time Out [Magazine] in the Marketing Department, but it was about writing, and working with the team. My other internships were both really writing intensive, at FleshBot, writing about porn (laughs), and at Bust Magazine, writing blogs, about feminist things. Being thrown into the writing world made me want to be a part of it even more. And at the New School I had a lot of professors that were writers or in some sort of literary profession.

Did you enjoy those real-world experiences better than what you were doing in school, or do you just feel that it was different?

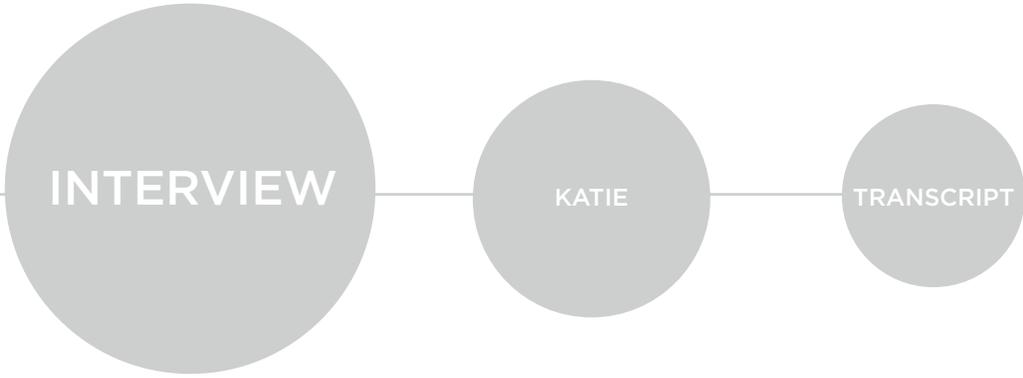
It was different, because every semester that I was here I had an internship, and it would always be two days of classes, and then two or three days of an internship, and so it was completely different because one day I would be reading, discussing, seminar-type things. And then the next day I would be a real person, going to work in the morning, and doing what I love doing. But they're both really different. I wouldn't say I liked one over the other, but it was nice having that academic experience and then utilizing it in the real world.

So you still felt that the academic experience was important?

Yeah, it was nice. In a lot of my classes we'd read books, and then talk about it, or write about it, or both (laughs). As a person who loves reading and loves literature and loves writing, it's nice to have a group of people that you can do that with, as opposed to doing it on your own. If I was working, and just reading on my own, I don't think I'd get the same experience as I did at The New School where I was able to discuss my findings in the readings, and have someone read my writing and give me feedback.

You just graduated in December, so what are you doing now?

Nothing (laughs). I'm looking for a job, a real job, a good old nine-to-five job. I would love to find one right now. I'm also kind of doing freelance writing... kind of.



INTERVIEW

KATIE

TRANSCRIPT

What did you envision doing after school (before you graduated)?

I have no idea. I made a lot of good connections at The New School and with my internships. I got to know some pretty important people. And so I thought, oh, everything's going to be fine, I'll find a job, it's going to be fine. I think I just thought something was going to fall into my lap, which it didn't. I guess I thought I would find a job right away. And I've given myself some leeway, not looking as hard as I probably should (laughs), but I think it's time. It's scary, to not have a job and to not know what you're doing, to know what you want to do, but not be able to find it. It's really hard to find a job right now.

What do you want to do (in terms of a career)?

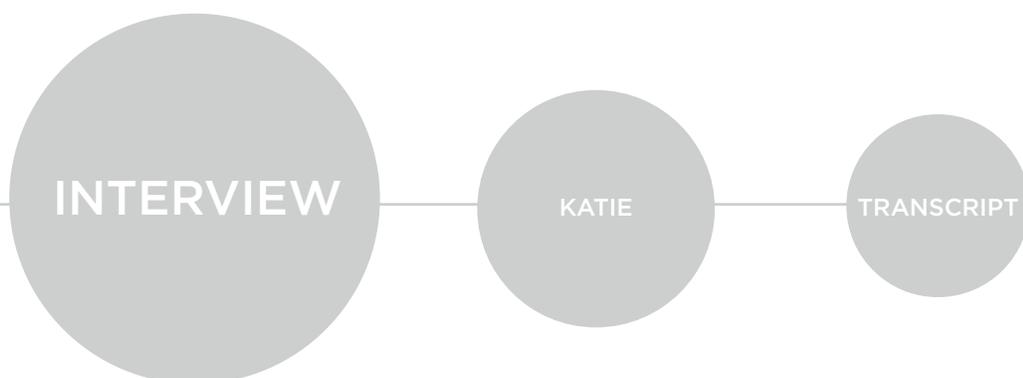
I like the idea of being in an office (laughs), every day and working with other people. I think working in publishing would be a good fit for me because I would be working with people, and working with the kinds of things I like to work with, like literature.

Do you think you know that because of your internships?

All of my internships were at magazines. That's always what I dreamed, to work for a magazine - to be an editor. I would love to be an editor of a magazine, or of some sort of publishing company, or some literary journal. I would really love that. I work well writing on a deadline, and I work well with people, and I see myself as an editor. That's what I want to do.

Have you tried going back to your internships and making connections there, or do you find that now that you're a no longer student it's harder for you?

My boss [at one of my old internships] is really well known in the marketing world, and the social media world now. She's really up there. And I'm friends with her, we've kept in touch. So I went to her and told her that I want to find a job. I told her everything - that I was freaking out about not being able to find anything. I told her what I wanted to do, what I thought I was good at, blah blah blah, and she responded saying (laughs) if you really want to stick to writing stuff, stick to freelance, and find yourself a day job.



INTERVIEW

KATIE

TRANSCRIPT

She wasn't really supportive [about a career in writing]?

No, she was like it's so hard right now, and everything's falling apart in that world, and you're not really going to find anything. She was like you're not going to be successful, you're not going to make money, and you're not going to be someone important in that world. It was really discouraging. And she was sorry, because she is a very strong writer, and now she's huge in social media stuff, but that's not what she wants to do.

Do you think if you can't find a job in something you want to do you're going to find one that makes money?

I don't see myself finding a shitty job where I'm going to make money and be hating what I'm doing. I can see myself working somewhere that's kind of like...eh, it's okay, and I do make money and it's kind of something that I want to do, and on the side I would work on my other writing projects.

Do you find it disappointing that you went through four years of school with that utopian attitude towards writing, and now you're out of school and that mindset is gone?

It is discouraging, especially now, but in the back of my mind, I feel like I am destined for success. I still feel like it's going to pay off. I still feel like I'm going to be someone (laughs). I don't know, I've always had that feeling since I was a kid, and all through college. Professors always told me that I have something special. I still feel like I'm special (laughs), I still feel like I'm going to find something. It's going to happen.

So you still feel that college was useful?

Yeah. I don't regret going.